

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014 - Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territory

Publisher [Minority Rights Group International](#)

Publication Date 3 July 2014

Cite as Minority Rights Group International, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014 - Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 3 July 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53ba8de8f.html> [accessed 19 August 2014]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

The legislative elections held in January led to the formation of a coalition government in March, under the renewed leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This new government promoted a number of initiatives that have had a negative impact on the rights of the Arab and Bedouin minorities living in Israel and in the territories under its control.

First, the new government accelerated the settlement process in the West Bank, the eviction of non-Jewish communities from their lands and the destruction of their houses. During the first six months of 2013, Peace Now documented a 70 per cent surge in new constructions in settlements compared to the same period in 2012, and a boom in the issuing of tenders for new settlements. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 600 demolitions were carried out in 2013 by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank, resulting in 1,100 persons displaced – a 24 per cent increase in comparison with 2012.

Herding communities living around East Jerusalem and in the Jordan Valley have been particularly targeted by 'relocation plans' on the grounds that they do not hold titles over the land. These plans were designed without consultation with the affected communities, amounting to forced displacement, and failed to offer relocation solutions compatible with their traditional way of life. Israeli NGO B'Tselem reported that about 60 Bedouin were evicted in August from the Tal 'Adasa area of Jerusalem; they were given ten days to leave their homes and were reportedly told they could face a fine or arrest if they did not clear the demolition debris themselves. In early 2013, the Israeli government also reactivated a previously frozen proposal, the E1 Plan, allocating land occupied by herding communities near East Jerusalem to the expansion of settlements. In February 2014, Bedouin community leaders said that 2,300 Bedouin are at risk of displacement on account of the E1 Plan.

Furthermore, in June the Knesset approved the Prawer-Begin Plan on first reading. If voted into law, the Plan, denounced by rights groups and politicians from across the political spectrum, would have resulted in the forced displacement of up to 70,000 Bedouin living in unrecognized villages in the Negev desert (*Naqab* in Arabic) in the south of Israel. The Plan had been drawn up without adequate consultation with affected Bedouin communities. It would have been the largest displacement of Palestinians by the Israeli authorities in decades. However, the proposal was shelved by the government after it lost parliamentary support.

Two initiatives advanced in 2013 threatened to diminish the ability of minorities to voice their concerns and defend their rights. A bill introduced in May and finally adopted in March 2014 raises the electoral threshold for representation at the Knesset from 2 per cent to 3.25 per cent, a development that could jeopardize the political participation of minority Arab and Ultra-Orthodox parties in parliament. Another bill, which received the government's support in December, provides for a 45 per cent tax charged on certain NGOs receiving foreign funding who campaign for the boycott of Israel, call for the prosecution of Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers before international jurisdictions, or deny 'the Jewish and democratic' nature of the state of Israel. This bill is part of a wider trend in government policies towards Israeli NGOs, limiting their access to foreign funding and imposing administrative burdens in order to restrict their activities.

The state of Israel has developed a strong legislative arsenal to combat hate speech and hate crimes. Israel's Penal Code prohibits and imposes heavy sentences for acts of sedition, including *inter alia* 'the promotion of conflict and enmity between different parts of the population'. More precisely, since 2002 the law has stipulated a five-year prison term for 'a call to commit an act of violence or terror, or praise, words of approval, encouragement, support or identification with an act of violence or terror'. The Penal Code furthermore provides that a sentence should be doubled when a crime is committed 'out of a racist motive ... or out of enmity toward a public because of their religion'. The application of the Israeli legislation has been extended to settlers, while the Palestinian population living in the occupied territory are subject to Military Order No. 101, which prohibits in broader terms 'attempts to influence public opinion in the region in a manner that is liable to harm public safety or public order'. The Palestinian Authority also issued a presidential decree on 'incitement' in 1998, applicable to territories under its jurisdiction in Gaza and in the West Bank.

However, there is an important gap between law and practice. This was evidenced in early 2013 by the much publicized outburst of racist and violent anti-Muslim slogans during football matches by Beitar Jerusalem fans protesting against the integration of Muslim players from Chechnya. Nevertheless, these incidents were widely condemned by Israeli civil society, with fans appearing at matches with anti-racism banners, and initiatives such as the 'Football for All' and 'Kick Racism and Violence out of Football' campaigns.

Hate crimes by ultra-nationalist Jewish settlers targeting Christian and Muslim Arabs in the West Bank also reached unprecedented levels in 2013, through the practice of so-called 'price tags'. This consists of acts of random violence and harassment against Christian and Muslim communities, carried out by young settlers. The name 'price tag' refers to the price that should allegedly be paid by Palestinians – and also Israelis – who hinder the growth of settlements in the West Bank. In 2013, it translated into attacks carried out almost daily against Muslim and Christian Arabs. Offences included slashed tyres, torched cars, vandalized homes, houses set on fire, attacks on a Palestinian school by masked settlers, defacement of Muslim and Christian cemeteries and attacks against mosques and a Catholic monastery, as well as the burning of entire fields of olive trees. The

symbolism of the targets and the intent to send a message is reinforced by the threatening graffiti that was almost systematically left behind by the offenders, promising war, forced eviction and death to Arabs, and signing with 'price tag' and Stars of David. The practice dates back to 2006 but it has nearly quadrupled over the years to peak at almost 400 documented incidents in 2013, making 'price tags' an increasingly routine occurrence.

Though these incidents are illegal and the Israeli authorities have issued public condemnations, numerous voices in civil society have raised concerns over the increase of these hate crimes and the inadequate official response to address them. 'Price tag' perpetrators were classified as members of an illegal organization in 2013, but critics wondered whether this designation goes sufficiently far. A special police unit was created in the West Bank, but it has been criticized for lacking effectiveness. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories denounced 'the almost non-existent efforts of the IDF to protect Palestinians or to investigate settler abuses'. While some offenders have been arrested, they were very often released without charges. According to human rights organization Yesh Din, from 2005 to 2013, only 8.5 per cent of investigations against suspected incidents by Israelis against Palestinians in the West Bank resulted in the filing of an indictment.

Anti-Jewish language has also been an issue of concern. In 2013, in the context of US Secretary of State John Kerry's diplomatic offensive to bring about a peace agreement, allegations of Palestinian 'incitement' were raised repeatedly in Israeli political discourse. In the autumn of 2013, Hamas introduced new textbooks in the schools of Gaza containing questionable treatment of Jews and Israel, as well as a number of historical inaccuracies and omissions. Nevertheless, a recent report from Arab and Israeli academics, after a review of both Israeli and Palestinian textbooks, concluded that 'dehumanizing and demonizing characterizations of the other are rare in both Israeli and Palestinian schoolbooks', even if schoolbooks in both sides 'present exclusive unilateral national narratives' tending to portray 'the other as the enemy'.

Copyright notice: © Minority Rights Group International. All rights reserved.