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2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Israel — West Bank and Gaza

Executive Summary

West Bank and Gaza Strip residents are subject to the jurisdiction of separate authorities, with different implications for the fabric of life. Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to Jordanian and Mandatory statutes in effect before 1967, military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander in the West Bank, and, in the relevant areas, Palestinian Authority (PA) law. Israelis living in the West Bank are subject to military ordinances enacted by the military commander and to Israeli law and Israeli legislation. The PA exercises varying degrees of authority in the small portions of the West Bank where it has some measure of control. Although PA laws theoretically apply in the Gaza Strip, the PA does not have authority there, and Hamas continues to exercise de facto control over security and other matters. The PA Basic Law, which serves as an interim constitution, establishes Islam as the official religion and states the principles of sharia shall be the main source of legislation, but provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites unless they violate public order or morality. It also proscribes discrimination based on religion, calls for respect of “all other divine religions,” and stipulates all citizens are equal before the law. The Israeli government continued to allow controlled access to religious sites in Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount (the site containing the foundation of the First and Second Jewish temples and the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque). Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site. On September 10, Israeli police temporarily closed off all entrances to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount after a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem attempted to stab an Israeli Border Police officer. Police shot the suspect, who later died of his wounds. Later in September, a Palestinian woman attempted to stab police officers outside the Chain Gate to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and police shot and killed her. On November 17, a Palestinian youth stabbed two Israeli Border Police officers in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, and a civilian shot and killed him. On November 21, a Palestinian teacher shot and killed an Israeli tour guide and wounded four others with an automatic weapon near the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem. Security officials shot and killed the attacker immediately after the assault. In April and May, clashes occurred in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between Israeli security forces and Palestinian protesters at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The Palestinian National and Islamic Factions in the West Bank called on Palestinians across West Bank cities, villages, and refugee camps to participate in a “Day of Rage” on May 11 to protest Israeli Security Force and Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound and in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. On April 13, at the start of Ramadan, media and Waqf officials reported that Israeli National Police (INP) entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and disconnected loudspeakers used for the call to prayer without coordinating with Waqf officials, to avoid disrupting an official Memorial Day service attended by then Israeli President Reuven Rivlin in the adjacent Western Wall Plaza. During the last Friday of Ramadan on May 7, Israeli police entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and al-Aqsa Mosque using teargas, stun grenades, and rubber-tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians who were throwing rocks. Media reported that in the aftermath, Palestinians stockpiled stones on the compound in anticipation of confrontations with police and far-right Israeli nationalists planning to march through the Old City. On May 10, Israeli police entered the compound again and used stun grenades, teargas, and rubber-tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians. The Palestinian Red Crescent stated that more than 300 individuals were injured. In an attempt to ease tensions and reduce the potential for clashes, Israeli police temporarily barred non-Muslims from visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Palestinians at times violently protested when Jewish groups visited the site of Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus, throwing rocks and bottles at Israeli Defense Force (IDF) personnel providing security, who responded by firing tear gas and rubber bullets. On September 26, Palestinian protesters attacked buses carrying approximately 500 Jewish worshippers traveling to the site and injured two Israeli soldiers escorting the convoy. According to police, the protestors used live fire, stones, and homemade explosive devices. On November 4, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected an appeal submitted by the PA Hebron Municipality against the establishment of an elevator at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs. Some official PA media channels, as well as social media accounts affiliated with the ruling Fatah political movement, featured content praising or condoning acts of violence against Jews, often referring to assailants as “martyrs.” Both Palestinians and Israelis evoked ethnoreligious language to deny the historical self-identity of the other community in the region or to emphasize an exclusive claim to the land. The PA and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) continued to provide “martyr payments” to the families of Palestinians killed while engaged in violence against Israelis or of those killed by Israeli military actions, including victims of air strikes in Gaza, and also continued to provide separate stipends to Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including those convicted of acts of terrorism involving Jewish targets. In June, the German

nongovernmental organization (NGO) Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research released the findings from its European Union-commissioned review of PA curriculum assessing the extent of inciteful content. The report found the curriculum had eliminated some prior inciteful content and included promotion of UNESCO standards such as respect for human rights and pluralism, but the report also highlighted the enduring presence of problematic content, including “antisemitic references” that contain negative stereotypes of the Jewish people and some content that delegitimized the State of Israel.

Hamas, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization with de facto control of Gaza, the U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other extremist groups disseminated antisemitic materials and advocated violence through traditional and social media channels as well as during rallies and other events. Hamas also continued to enforce restrictions on Gaza’s population based on its interpretation of Islam and sharia. According to the Israeli government, Hamas and other groups launched more than 4,360 unguided rockets and mortars toward Israeli population centers, killing 13 between May 10 and 21 during the “Days of Rage.” The United Nations reported that during the May fighting, attacks by the Israeli military killed 260 Palestinians in Gaza.

During the year, there were incidents of violence that perpetrators justified at least partly on religious grounds. Actions included individual killings, physical attacks and verbal harassment of worshippers and clergy, and vandalism of religious sites. There was also harassment by members of one religious group of another, social pressure to stay within one’s religious group, and antisemitic content in media. Amid tensions in Jerusalem and conflict in Gaza, ethnic-based violence and civil unrest broke out during a one-week period in May in a number of mixed Jewish-Arab cities in Israel, including Jerusalem. The INP reported it made approximately 1,550 arrests during that time, with the overwhelming majority of the arrestees being Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel. Security officials characterized the arrested Jewish citizens as predominately middle-aged nationalist extremists. On December 16, gunmen killed yeshiva student Yehuda Dimentman near Jenin in the West Bank. On March 1, unknown assailants set fire to the entrance of a Romanian Orthodox Church monastery in Jerusalem near the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea Shearim. According to local press and social media, some settlers in the West Bank continued to justify “price tag” attacks on Palestinian property, such as the uprooting of Palestinian olive trees, vandalism of cars and buildings, arson, and slashing of tires as necessary for the defense of Judaism. (“Price tag” attacks refer to violence by Jewish individuals and groups against individuals, particularly Palestinians and Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel, and property with the stated purpose of exacting a “price” for actions taken by the government contrary to the attackers’ interests.) According to the Times of Israel, on October 13, vandals sprayed nationalist slogans and damaged cars in the Palestinian village of Marda in the West Bank. Slogans painted on walls included “price tag” and “demolish enemy [property], not Jewish.” According to media reports, on November 9, unidentified individuals vandalized nearly two dozen vehicles and a building in the Palestinian town of al-Bireh with slogans such as “enemies live here” and “price tag.” On April 28, arsonists set three Palestinian cars ablaze in Beit Iksa, a village outside Jerusalem. According to media reports, dozens of Jewish residents of a nearby neighborhood chanted, “May your village burn,” until police arrived and dispersed the crowd.

Senior U.S. officials worked to harness normalization between Israel and predominantly Muslim countries, which would improve access for Muslim worshippers to Islamic sites. Senior U.S. officials publicly raised concerns about antisemitism among PA officials and more broadly in Palestinian society throughout the year. Senior White House officials and other U.S. officials repeatedly pointed out that Palestinian leaders did not consistently condemn individual terrorist attacks, including the November Hamas attack at Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount, nor speak out publicly against members of their institutions, including Fatah, who advocated violence. U.S. embassy officials met with Palestinian religious leaders to discuss religious tolerance and a broad range of issues affecting Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities. They met with political, religious, and civil society leaders to promote interreligious tolerance and cooperation. U.S. representatives met with representatives of religious groups to monitor their concerns about access to religious sites, respect for clergy, and attacks on religious sites and houses of worship. They also met with local Christian leaders to discuss their concerns about threats to the presence of Christian communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as ongoing Christian emigration.

This section of the report covers the West Bank and Gaza and East Jerusalem territories that Israel occupied during the June 1967 war. In 2017, the United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Language in this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status issues to be negotiated between the parties to the conflict, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the borders between Israel and any future Palestinian state.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total Palestinian population at 2.9 million in the West Bank and 2 million in the Gaza Strip (midyear 2021). According to the U.S. government and other sources, Palestinian residents of these territories are predominantly Sunni Muslims, with small Shia and Ahmadi Muslim communities. The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics reports an estimated 441,600 Jewish Israelis reside in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Israeli statistics do not count settlements in East Jerusalem as part of the West Bank. Palestinian officials use the figure of 751,000 Jewish residents in the West Bank which includes settlements in the suburbs of Jerusalem. According to various estimates, 50,000 Christian Palestinians reside in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and according to media reports and religious communities, there are approximately 1,300 Christians residing in Gaza. Local Christian leaders state Palestinian Christian emigration has continued at rapid rates. A majority of Christians are

Greek Orthodox; the remainder includes Roman Catholics, Melkite Greek Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Coptic Orthodox, Maronites, Ethiopian Orthodox, Syrian Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, other Protestant denominations, including evangelical Christians, and small numbers of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Christians are concentrated primarily in Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus; smaller communities exist elsewhere. Approximately 360 Samaritans (practitioners of Samaritanism, which is related to but distinct from Judaism) reside in the West Bank, primarily in the Nablus area.

The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics estimates 569,900 Jews, 349,600 Muslims, and 12,900 Christians live in Jerusalem, accounting for the vast majority of the city’s total population of 952,000, as of 2020.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Residents of the occupied territories are subject to the jurisdiction of different authorities. Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to Jordanian and Mandatory statutes in effect before 1967, military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander in the West Bank in accordance with its authorities under international law, and, in the relevant areas, PA law. Israelis living in the West Bank are subject to military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander and Israeli law and legislation. West Bank Palestinian population centers mostly fall into Areas A and B, as defined by the Oslo-era agreements. Under those agreements, the PA has formal responsibility for civil administration and security in Area A, but Israeli security forces frequently conduct security operations there. The PA maintains civil administration in Area B in the West Bank while Israel maintains security control in this area. Israel retains full security and administrative control of Area C (which constitutes approximately 60 percent of the West Bank) and has designated most Area C land as either closed military zones or settlement zoning areas.

Palestinians living in the portion of the West Bank designated as Area C in the Oslo II Accord are subject to military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander. PA civil and criminal law applies to Palestinians who live in Area B, while Israel retains the overriding responsibility for security. Although per the Oslo II Accord, only PA civil and security law applies to Palestinians living in Area A of the West Bank, Israel applies military ordinances enacted by its military commander whenever the Israeli military enters Area A, as part of its overriding responsibility for security. The city of Hebron in the West Bank – an important city for Jews, Muslims, and Christians as the site of the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs – is divided into two separate areas: area H1 under PA control and area H2, where approximately 800 Israeli settlers live and where internal security, public order, and civil authorities relating to Israelis and their property are under Israeli military control.

The Oslo Accords stipulate that protection of 12 listed Jewish holy sites and visitors in Area A is the responsibility of Palestinian police, and the accords created a joint security coordination mechanism to ensure “free, unimpeded and secure access to the relevant Jewish holy site” and “the peaceful use of such site, to prevent any potential instances of disorder and to respond to any incident.” Both sides agreed to “respect and protect the listed below religious rights of Jews, Christians, Muslims and Samaritans” including “protection of the Holy Sites; free access to the Holy Sites; and freedom of worship and practice.”

Israeli government regulations recognize 16 sites as holy places for Jews, while various other budgetary and governmental authorities recognize an additional 160 places as holy for Jews.

The Israeli Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled since 1993 that Jews have the right to pray on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, but police may restrict this right in the name of public order and safety. The court reiterated in 2019 that its precedent on this issue is nonintervention in government decisions, “except in highly unusual cases when the decision constitutes a major distortion of justice or is extremely unreasonable.”

The Jordanian Waqf in Jerusalem administers the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, while the Jordanian Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Holy Places supports maintenance and salary of the Waqf staff in Jerusalem.

The Israeli “Nakba Law” prohibits institutions that receive Israeli government funding from engaging in commemoration of the Nakba (“catastrophe”), the term used by Palestinians to refer to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence. Activities forbidden by the law include rejection of the existence of Israel as a “Jewish and democratic state” or commemorating “Israel’s Independence Day or the day on which the State was established as a day of mourning.”

In 2007, Hamas staged a violent takeover of PA government installations in the Gaza Strip and has since maintained a de facto government in the territory, although the area nominally falls under PA jurisdiction.

An interim Basic Law applies in the areas under PA jurisdiction. The Basic Law states Islam is the official religion but calls for respect of “all other divine religions.” It provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites unless they violate public order or morality. It criminalizes the publishing of writings, pictures, drawings, or symbols of anything that insults the religious feelings or beliefs of other persons. The Basic Law also proscribes discrimination based on religion and stipulates all citizens are equal before the law. The law states the principles of sharia shall be the main sources of legislation. It contains language adopted from the pre-1967 criminal

code of Jordanian rule that criminalizes “defaming religion,” with a maximum penalty of life in prison. Since 2007, the elected Palestinian Legislative Council, controlled by Hamas, has not convened. The Palestinian Constitutional Court dissolved the Palestinian Legislative Council in December 2018 and called for new elections. The President of the PA promulgates executive decrees that have legal authority.

There is no specified process by which religious groups gain official recognition; each religious group must negotiate its own bilateral relationship with the PA. The PA observes 19th-century status quo arrangements reached with Ottoman authorities, which recognize the presence and rights of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholic, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Armenian Catholic Churches. The PA also observes subsequent agreements that recognize the rights of the Episcopal (Anglican) Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Council of Local Evangelical Churches (a coalition of evangelical Protestant churches present in the West Bank and Gaza). The PA recognizes the legal authority of these religious groups to adjudicate personal status matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Recognized religious groups may establish ecclesiastical courts to issue legally binding rulings on personal status and some property matters for members of their religious communities. The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs is administratively responsible for these family law issues.

Islamic or Christian religious courts handle legal matters relating to personal status, including inheritance, marriage, dowry, divorce, and child support. For Muslims, sharia determines personal status law, while various ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status matters for Christians. By law, members of one religious group may submit a personal status dispute to a different religious group for adjudication if the disputants agree it is appropriate to do so.

The PA maintains some unwritten understandings with churches that are not officially recognized, based on the basic principles of the status quo agreements, including with the Assemblies of God, Nazarene Church, and some evangelical Christian churches, which may operate freely. Some of these groups may perform some official functions, such as issuing marriage licenses. Churches not recognized by the PA generally must obtain special one-time permission from the PA to perform marriages or adjudicate personal status matters if these groups want the actions to be recognized by and registered with the PA. These churches may not proselytize.

By law, the PA provides financial support to Islamic institutions and places of worship. A PA religious committee also provides some financial support for Christian cultural activities.

In Jerusalem, the Israeli government provides separate public schools for Jewish and Arab children with instruction conducted in Hebrew and Arabic, respectively. For Jewish children, there are separate public schools available for religious and secular families. Individual families may choose a public school system for their children regardless of ethnicity or religious observance. Minors have the right to choose a public secular school instead of a religious school regardless of parental preference. By law, Israel provides the equivalent of public school funding to two systems of “recognized but not official” (a form of semiprivate) ultra-Orthodox religious schools affiliated with ultra-Orthodox political parties: the United Torah Judaism-affiliated Independent Education System and the Shas-affiliated Fountain of Torah Education System. Churches, however, receive only partial government funding to operate “recognized but not official” schools. Palestinian residents in Jerusalem may send their children to one of these church schools or a private school operated by the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf; both include religious instruction. Some Israeli-funded public schools in Jerusalem use the PA curriculum.

Religious education is part of the curriculum for students in grades one through six in public schools the PA operates as well as in some Palestinian schools in Jerusalem that use the PA curriculum. There are separate courses on religion for Muslims and Christians. Students may choose which class to take but may not opt out of religion courses. Recognized churches operate private schools in the West Bank that include religious instruction. Private Islamic schools also operate in the West Bank.

Palestinian law provides that in the defunct Palestinian Legislative Council, six seats be allocated to Christian candidates, who also have the right to contest other seats. There are no seats reserved for members of any other religious group. A 2017 presidential decree requires that Christians head nine municipal councils in the West Bank (including Ramallah, Bethlehem, Birzeit, and Beit Jala) and establishes a Christian quota for representation on these councils and one additional municipal council.

PA land laws prohibit Palestinians from selling Palestinian-owned lands to “any man or judicial body corporation of Israeli citizenship, living in Israel or acting on its behalf.” While Israeli law does not authorize the Israel Land Authority, which administers the 93 percent of Israeli land in the public domain, to lease land to foreigners, in practice, foreigners have been allowed to lease if they could show they qualify as Jewish under the Law of Return.

Although the PA removed the religious affiliation category from Palestinian identity cards issued in 2014, older identity cards continue to circulate, listing the holder as either Muslim or Christian.

Israel’s Law of Citizenship and Entry, first passed in 2003 and renewed annually, explicitly prohibited residence status for non-Jewish Iranians, Iraqis, Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, including those who are spouses of Israeli residents or citizens, unless the Israeli Ministry of Interior (MOI) makes a special determination, usually on humanitarian grounds.

The Jordanian Waqf administers Islamic courts in Jerusalem for Muslim residents, with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in Jordan having appellate authority.

There is no Israeli legal requirement regarding personal observance or nonobservance of the Jewish Sabbath (Shabbat) from sunset on Fridays until sunset on Saturdays and on Jewish holidays. The law, however, declares in the context of labor rights that Shabbat and Jewish holidays are national days of rest, while permitting non-Jewish workers alternate days of rest. The law criminalizes (up to one month imprisonment) employers who open their businesses and employ Jews on Shabbat, except those who are self-employed. There are exceptions for essential infrastructure and the hospitality, culture, and recreation industries. The law instructs the Israeli Minister of Labor and Welfare to take into account “Israel’s tradition,” among other factors, when considering whether to approve permits to work on Shabbat. The law prohibits discrimination against workers who refuse, based on their religion and regardless of whether they are religiously observant, to work on their day of rest.

Israeli law states public transportation operated and funded by the national government may not operate on Shabbat, with exceptions for vehicles bringing passengers to hospitals, remote localities, and non-Jewish localities and for vehicles essential to public security or maintaining public transportation services.

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

Because religion and ethnicity or nationality are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

On September 10, Israeli police temporarily closed off all entrances to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount after a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem attempted to stab an Israeli Border Police officer. Police shot the suspect, who later died of his wounds.

Later in September, a Palestinian woman attempted to stab police officers outside the Chain Gate to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and police shot and killed her.

On November 17, a 16-year-old Palestinian stabbed two Israeli Border Police officers in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, and a civilian shot and killed him.

On December 19, a 20-year-old Palestinian attempted to stab two ultra-Orthodox Jews in a parking lot near the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem and fled the scene. Israeli police later arrested the attacker, and no injuries were reported.

On November 21, a Palestinian teacher shot and killed an Israeli tour guide and wounded four others with an automatic weapon near the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem. The U.S.-designated terrorist group Hamas said the gunman was a senior member of its movement in East Jerusalem. Security officials shot and killed the attacker immediately after the assault.

On December 4, Israeli police shot and killed a Palestinian after he stabbed and wounded an ultra-Orthodox Jew near the Damascus Gate just outside Jerusalem’s Old City. Israeli police released surveillance video in which the attacker could be seen stabbing the Jewish man and then trying to stab a Border Police officer before being shot and falling to the ground. The *Religion News Service* reported that a widely circulated video filmed by a bystander appeared to show an officer from Israel’s paramilitary Border Police shooting the attacker when he was already lying on the ground, and another appeared to show police with guns drawn preventing medics from reaching him. The United Nations’ Human Rights Office, PA officials, some Joint List and Meretz members of the Knesset (MKs), and Israeli and Palestinian human rights groups such as B’Tselem and Al-Haq described the police shooting as an extrajudicial execution. Israeli investigators cleared the officers of any wrongdoing. Magen David Adom, the Israeli emergency medical service, said it treated an ultra-Orthodox man in his 20s who was stabbed. Police identified the attacker as a 25-year-old from Salfit in the West Bank.

On December 18, Israeli Border Police arrested a 65-year-old Palestinian woman for the stabbing of an Israeli man near a checkpoint close to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron.

On October 20, the trial of an Israeli Jewish minor, accused in the 2018 killing of a Palestinian woman, Aysha al-Rabi, a resident of Bidya village, began at the Central District Court in Lod. Prosecutors accused the minor, then 17, of throwing a two-kilogram (4.4 pound) stone through al-Rabi’s car windshield “with the intent of using it to harm Arab passengers out of an ideological motive of racism and hostility toward Arabs.” In 2019, authorities arrested and later released four other suspects who, like the defendant, were yeshiva students from the settlement of Rehelim. According to press reporting, the prosecution linked the defendant’s DNA to the stone that caused al-Rabi’s death and also linked him to Kahanism, which *Haaretz* described as a “far-right anti-Arab ideology inspired by Rabbi Meir Kahane.” In January, authorities stated that the stone throwing that killed al-Rabi, a mother of eight, was a terror attack but declined to recognize her as a victim of terrorism. Press reports said that authorities said the decision was reached because al-Rabi was not an Israeli citizen and the killing occurred outside Israel’s recognized borders. At year’s end, the trial was continuing and the accused remained under supervised house arrest.

Clashes broke out in April and May with “Day of Rage” demonstrations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem against Israeli actions at Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The Palestinian National and Islamic Factions in the West Bank called on Palestinians across West Bank cities, villages, and refugee camps to participate in a “Day of Rage” on May 11 to protest actions by Israeli security forces, and Israelis living in East Jerusalem against Palestinians at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound and in Sheikh Jarrah.

According to press and NGO monitors, multiple events related to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount contributed, along with other factors, to escalations resulting in unrest and conflict across Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. On April 13 on the evening of the first day of Ramadan, media and Waqf officials reported that Israeli National Police entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and disconnected loudspeakers used for the call to prayer to avoid disrupting an official Memorial Day service for fallen soldiers attended by then Israeli President Rivlin in the adjacent Western Wall square. The incident was condemned by PA officials as a “hate crime.”

On June 17, the *New York Times* reported that the government charged a police officer, whose name was not released, with manslaughter in the 2020 killing of Iyad Halak, an autistic Palestinian man, in Jerusalem’s Old City. Following an investigation, the Ministry of Justice said that Halak had not posed any danger to police. At Halak’s funeral, the press reported that mourners chanted, “Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews, the army of [the Prophet] Mohammed will return,” a taunt referring to the seventh century Muslim massacre and expulsion of the Jews of Khaybar.

During the last Friday of Ramadan on May 7, Israeli police entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and al-Aqsa Mosque using teargas, stun grenades, and rubber tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians who were throwing rocks. Media reported that in the aftermath, Palestinians stockpiled stones in the compound in anticipation of confrontations with police and far-right Israeli nationalists planning to march through the Old City. On May 10, Israeli police entered the compound again and used stun grenades, teargas, and rubber tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians. The Palestinian Red Crescent stated that more than 300 individuals were injured. In an attempt to ease tensions and reduce potential for clashes, Israeli police temporarily barred non-Muslims from visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

According to the *Jerusalem Post*, on December 24, PA security forces used tear gas and batons to disperse more than 50 Palestinians, some armed with Molotov cocktails, who were attempting to march to Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus, in Area A of the West Bank, a site of religious significance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. On December 26, more than 200 Palestinians tried to march on the shrine, but PA authorities had cordoned off the area and prevented the demonstrators from reaching the site. Individuals that the newspaper identified as “activists” said that these attempts to set fire to the building were intended as a response to “settler crimes” against Palestinians. The PA security forces stated that they received “clear and firm” instructions to protect the tomb.

On January 10, Israeli Border Police arrested a Palestinian teenager after he threw a Molotov cocktail at Rachel’s Tomb, a Bethlehem shrine of religious significance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims under Israeli Jurisdiction in Area C. During unrest in April, police and media reported that dozens of youths threw stones and Molotov cocktails at the shrine. The shrine remained separated from the West Bank by a barrier built during the 2000-2005 Second Intifada, and Palestinians were able to access it only if permitted by Israeli authorities. Residents and citizens of Israel continued to have relatively unimpeded access. Israeli police closed the site to all visitors on Saturdays for the Jewish Sabbath (Shabbat). In October, Palestinian demonstrators sporadically clashed over several days with the INP after the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority began landscaping work on public land adjacent to the Islamic al-Yusufiya Cemetery in East Jerusalem and unearthed human remains in a shallow grave. During demonstrations against the construction work, Palestinian protestors reportedly chanted, “Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews, the army of [the Prophet] Mohammed will return.” The cemetery, which is hundreds of years old, is affiliated with the Jordanian Waqf. Multiple graves and headstones are located in the disputed area adjacent to the cemetery, some dating from Jordanian control of Jerusalem and others allegedly used more recently and without authorization.

According to an October 11 report in *Haaretz*, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority said, “This territory [adjacent to the al-Yusufiya Cemetery] is a national park and open public space, outside the Muslim cemetery. The Muslim Waqf, unlawfully and in violation of court orders, placed several graves there. During works with the Jerusalem Development Authority to develop the open public space, a shallow dig was uncovered with several bones in it. The matter is being investigated. The works at the site are ongoing under court orders.” On October 17, the Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court rejected requests submitted by the Committee for the Care of Islamic Cemeteries in Jerusalem to suspend bulldozing and exhuming graves. However, the court restricted construction activity to only include light work, such as covering ground, placing grids, and gardening, and prohibited demolition, excavation, casting, or drilling. Authorities did not allow construction that would affect any graves at the site. On October 28, Israeli authorities fenced the walls surrounding area and installed surveillance cameras. On October 29, the PA President’s advisor for religious and Islamic affairs described the bulldozing as an ongoing crime against the cemetery, while the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem stated, “No tomb was damaged during the works, and there is no intention to displace any grave, even if built illegally.”

In general, NGOs, religious institutions, and media continued to state that arrests of Israelis in religiously motivated crimes against Palestinians rarely led to indictments and convictions. Palestinians stated that they faced procedural difficulties in filing complaints with Israeli police, who are located at stations within settlements or at military-run liaison offices outside those settlements. Data from the NGO Tag Meir, which tracks hate crimes, and media reports indicated in recent years Israeli authorities had indicted few suspects in attacks on religious sites.

Israeli government officials made public statements against “Israeli extremists’ attacks” on Palestinians and made efforts to enhance law enforcement in the West Bank, including through task forces, increased funding, and hiring additional staff members. According to *Haaretz*, on December 13, Minister of Public Security Omer Bar-Lev said the government viewed settler violence “severely” and it was taking steps to address the issue, including increasing police in the West Bank and providing clearer instructions to the IDF on how to deal with attacks by Jews on Palestinians. The report stated that Minister of Defense Benjamin Gantz had promised to increase enforcement against such attacks, which the newspaper said had increased 150 percent from 2019. Other political leaders criticized Bar-Lev. Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked said, “The settlers are the salt of the earth. The violence that is shocking is the dozens of cases of stone-throwing and beatings of the Jews that happen daily... with the encouragement and support of the Palestinian Authority.” Minister of Religious Affairs Matan Kahana said, “It is sad to see a security man rich in experience and years get such a false and distorted narrative.”

According to a December 15 report by the *Times of Israel*, security officials said that the year saw a drastic spike in violence by what they termed Jewish extremists in the West Bank. According to the *Times of Israel*, in 2020, the Shin Bet internal security service registered 272 violent incidents in the West Bank; through the middle of December, the agency recorded 397. On the same day, *Haaretz* reported that, according to government figures, there were 135 stone-throwing incidents targeting Palestinians during the year, up from 90 in 2019, and 250 other violent incidents, up from 100 in 2019. The newspaper also reported that violence against the Israeli security services also rose, from 50 incidents in 2019 to 60 in 2021.

In a fact sheet reviewing the years 2005-2021 released in December, the Israeli NGO Yesh Din stated, “The State of Israel is evading its duty to protect Palestinians in the West Bank from Israelis who seek to harm them. Long-term monitoring of the outcomes of investigations into ideological offenses committed by Israelis shows that Israeli law enforcement agencies leave Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories defenseless to attacks and harassment perpetrated by Israeli settlers.” According to Yesh Din statistics, Israeli police failed to make arrests in the investigation of 81 percent of the files opened between 2005 and 2021, and 92 percent of all investigation files were closed without an indictment.

Attacks in the West Bank on Palestinians by Israeli citizens, some of whom asserted their right to settle in what they stated was the historic Jewish homeland of Judea and Samaria, continued, as well as Palestinian attacks on settlers. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported 496 attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem during the year, including 370 attacks that resulted in property damage and 126 attacks that resulted in casualties, three of which were fatal. According to UN monitors, this was the highest reported level of settler-related violence since UNOCHA began recording incidents in 2005 and represented a 40 percent increase in the number of incidents, compared with 2020. Comparable to the UN, the IDF recorded 446 incidents of settler violence during the year. UNOCHA updated its metrics to incorporate more information from civil society about violence against Israelis. During the year, “in the context of the occupation and conflict,” UNOCHA estimated that there were 82 Palestinian fatalities and 16,421 Palestinians injured and three Israeli fatalities and 146 Israelis injured in West Bank violence, including in East Jerusalem. The Israeli government said that UNOCHA did not provide information about actions by Hamas in its public statistics and did not fully cover attacks targeting Israelis.

The Israeli government said it thwarted 270 “significant attacks” in the West Bank. During the year, according to the Israeli government, there were 7,153 cases of “hostile destructive activity” in the West Bank and Gaza which included stone-throwing, Molotov cocktails, shootings, stabbings, and assaults with vehicles. Of these activities, 4,417 were missiles fired from the Gaza Strip during May. The Israeli police recorded more than 2,400 cases of Molotov cocktails and stone-throwing in Jerusalem. The Israeli government said that during the year, 19 Israeli citizens and residents in Israel lost their lives following these attacks, and more than 3,000 were injured.

The government of Israel continued to discourage Israeli citizens in unofficial capacities from traveling to the parts of the West Bank under the civil and security control of the PA (Area A), with large road signs warning Israelis against entering these areas and stating it was dangerous for Israelis and against Israeli law to do so. Significant numbers of Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel, and some Jewish and other Israelis, chose to privately visit Area A without repercussions, according to media and individuals who visited. Media reported that while these restrictions in general prevented Jewish Israelis from visiting numerous Jewish religious sites, the IDF provided special security escorts for Jews to visit religious sites in Area A under Palestinian control, particularly Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus and the Shalom al Israel Synagogue in Jericho. Some Jewish religious leaders said the Israeli government policy limiting travel to parts of the West Bank prevented Jewish Israelis from freely visiting several religious sites in the West Bank including Joseph’s Tomb, because they were denied the opportunity to visit the site on unscheduled occasions or in larger numbers than permitted through IDF coordination. IDF officials said requirements to coordinate Jewish visits to Joseph’s Tomb were necessary to ensure Jewish-Israelis’ safety. The Israeli government said that Jewish worshippers could only visit Areas A and B of the West Bank with the protection of the IDF and that the PA was not fulfilling its commitments under the Oslo Accords to ensure freedom of religion for Jewish worshippers in these areas. Palestinian and Israeli security forces coordinated some visits by Jewish groups to PA-controlled areas within the West Bank, which generally took place at night to limit the chance of confrontations with Palestinians who opposed the visit.

Palestinians at times violently protested when Jewish groups visited holy sites in areas in the West Bank under Palestinian control, where freedom of access was guaranteed by the PA in the Oslo Accords, particularly Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus (located in Area A). On September 26, Palestinian protesters attacked buses carrying approximately 500 Jewish worshippers traveling to the site, resulting in minor injuries to two Israeli soldiers escorting

the convoy. According to police, the protestors used live fire, stones, and homemade explosive devices. The Israeli government said the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) facilitated seven visits to the site during the year.

On November 2, according to the *Jerusalem Post*, which cited Palestinian media, Palestinians and Israeli security forces clashed in the vicinity of Joseph’s Tomb. The violence involved gunfire from both sides. Palestinian rioters placed burning tires in the middle of streets in the city to impede Israeli forces and Jewish visitors who were set to visit Joseph’s Tomb later that night.

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs previously stated that Israeli officials, including high-ranking politicians and senior officials from law enforcement bodies, had declared an unequivocal zero-tolerance policy towards the phenomenon of “price tag” offenses committed by Israeli settlers against Palestinians. The Nationalistic Motivated Crimes Unit of the Judea and Samaria Police District of the INP was tasked with preventing and investigating ideologically based offenses in the West Bank and with supporting other police districts in the investigation of such crimes. The Israeli government maintained an interagency team overseeing law enforcement efforts in the West Bank related to incitement, “violent uprisings,” and “ideological crimes.”

The Israeli government continued to allow controlled access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and said freedom of worship at the site was a supreme value. The government expressed continued support for the post-1967 status quo pertaining to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount to allow non-Muslim visitors but prohibit non-Islamic worship on the compound, while stating that Israel respected Jordan’s “special role” at the site, as reflected in the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty. The Waqf said that Israeli authorities continued to interfere in the Waqf’s administration of the site, including delaying longstanding maintenance and restoration work. Israeli officials and activists again stated the Waqf sometimes attempted to conduct repairs without coordinating with Israeli authorities. In addition to the police banning individual Waqf staff members from the site, the Waqf said that it had a reduced capacity to administer the site because Israeli authorities refused to grant permits to new staff hired to work there, leaving the Waqf seriously understaffed.

Israeli police continued to be responsible for security at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, with police officers stationed both inside the site and at entrances. Police conducted routine patrols on the outdoor plaza and inside buildings on the site and regulated pedestrian traffic exiting and entering the site. Israeli police continued to maintain exclusive control of the Mughrabi Gate entrance, through which non-Muslims may enter the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site, and allowed visitors through the gate during set hours. Police sometimes restricted this access, citing security concerns.

In April at the beginning of Ramadan, Israeli authorities restricted the number of persons allowed to enter al-Aqsa Mosque to 10,000 vaccinated Palestinians entering from the West Bank because of “high morbidity rates” from coronavirus in the West Bank. Israeli military authorities said the measures were being taken to allow freedom of worship and religion, and also to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the area.

According to local media, some Jewish groups performed religious acts such as prayers and prostration on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount despite the ban on non-Islamic prayer. The Israeli government reiterated that overt non-Islamic prayer was not allowed on the grounds of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. NGOs, media, and Jewish Temple Mount advocacy groups continued to report that in practice, police generally allowed discreet non-Muslim prayer on the site. The news website Al-Monitor reported in October that although the country’s two chief rabbis repeatedly said Jews were not to set foot in the Temple Mount out of concern they could inadvertently step into an area which, in Jewish law, it was forbidden to enter unless one was ritually pure. In recent years, some Jews had entered the mosque and tried to offer prayers. In August, the *New York Times* reported that Rabbi Yehuda Glick, whom the newspaper described as a “right-wing former lawmaker,” led “efforts to change the status quo for years” and said that Glick livestreamed his prayers from the site. The report said that although the government officially allowed non-Muslims to visit the site each morning on the condition that they did not pray there, “In reality, dozens of Jews now openly pray every day [at the site]... and their Israeli police escorts no longer attempt stop them.” The *New York Times* reported that Glick and activists ultimately sought to build a third Jewish Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock, an idea that Azzam Khatib, the deputy chairman of the Waqf council, said “will lead to a civil war.” According to the Religion News Service, one group known as the Temple Institute hoped to build a third temple where one of the al-Aqsa complex’s three mosques now stands and to reinstate ritual animal sacrifices. The group’s website reported that it was working with an architect on a design. In September, al-Monitor reported, “In the past, doing so [praying out loud or making movements of genuflection], could lead to the person being detained and ejected from the site, as Jews are not allowed to pray there. But more recently, a warning is reportedly more common. Last July Israel’s Channel 12 filmed Jews praying silently at the site while police officers watched.” Police continued to screen non-Muslims for religious articles. Police allowed Jewish male visitors who were visibly wearing a kippah and *tzitzit* (fringes), and those who wished to enter the site barefoot (in accordance with interpretations of *halacha*, Jewish religious law) to enter with a police escort.

On October 5, the Jerusalem Magistrate Court ruled that “silent Jewish prayer” on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount did not violate existing police rules on the site. The ruling was in response to a case involving a 15-day administrative restraining order against a man whom police had removed from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount on September 29 on grounds that he disturbed public order by engaging in Jewish prayer. The judge ruled that silent prayer “does not in itself violate police instructions” that prohibit “external and overt” non-Muslim prayer on the site. Al-Monitor said the Magistrate’s Court’s ruling was “unprecedented” and “seem[ed] to question the status quo that has prevailed over the site.” The Jerusalem District Court overturned the lower court’s ruling on October 8,

ruling that the INP had acted “within reason,” and “the fact that there was someone who observed [him] pray is evidence that his prayer was overt.” Minister of Public Security Bar-Lev supported the appeal, saying “a change in the status quo will endanger public security and could cause a flare-up.” The Waqf said the lower court’s ruling was “a flagrant violation” of the complex’s sanctity and a “clear provocation” for Muslims.

On July 17, during the Jewish holiday of Tisha B’Av, a day of fasting when Jews commemorate the destruction of the temples, activists of Liba Yehudit, a national-ultra-Orthodox NGO described by Haaretz as “ultra-extreme,” put up a makeshift partition in the middle of the egalitarian prayer area of the Western Wall Plaza, intended to divide those praying by gender, and yelled and cursed to disrupt those praying there for the holiday. According to Haaretz, “hundreds of right-wing, Orthodox Jews, mostly teenagers” disrupted the reading of the Book of Lamentations by a female member of the Conservative movement, that organized the annual event. Haaretz described Liba as “an extreme right-wing group, which has been trying to prevent the non-Orthodox from having access to a new and revamped prayer plaza at the southern end of the site.”

On July 18, on Tisha B’Av, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett tweeted thanks to the Public Security Minister and the Israel Police Inspector General for “maintaining freedom of worship for Jews on the Mount.” On November 19, the Prime Minister’s Office said that the government’s policy regarding the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, which prohibits non-Islamic worship, had not changed and what Bennett actually meant was that both Jews and Muslims had “freedom of visitation rights.”

The Waqf continued to restrict non-Muslims who visited the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount from entering the Dome of the Rock and other buildings dedicated for Islamic worship, including the al-Aqsa Mosque, unless they were participating in a Waqf-sponsored visit. It also lodged objections with Israeli police concerning non-Muslim visitors wearing religious symbols or religious clothing. Israeli police sometimes acted upon these objections.

Waqf officials repeated previous years’ complaints concerning their lack of control of access to the site. The Waqf objected to non-Muslims praying or performing religious acts on the site and to individuals whom they perceived to be dressed immodestly or who caused disturbances, but they lacked authority to remove such persons from the site. Waqf officials stated Israeli police did not coordinate with the Waqf on decisions regarding entry and barring of Muslim and non-Muslim visitors to the site. Waqf employees remained stationed inside each gate and on the plaza, but Waqf officials exercised only limited oversight. Throughout the year, the government extended visiting hours in the afternoon by 30 minutes to prevent large groups forming at the entrance for non-Muslims, in accordance with COVID-19 health restrictions.

The PA Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Muhammad Ahmad Hussein, issued a fatwa denying access to the site to Muslims from countries that established diplomatic relations with Israel, but the Jordanian Waqf rejected the fatwa. The Waqf stated that Muslim visitors from those countries were brought by Israeli officials without coordination with the Waqf. The government welcomed these visits as a positive outcome of normalization and as demonstrating freedom of religion.

Many Jewish religious leaders, including Shmuel Rabinovitch, the government-appointed Rabbi of the Western Wall and the Holy Sites of Israel, continued to say Jewish law prohibited Jews from entering the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for reasons of ritual purity. Some Jewish religious leaders, Knesset members, and activists called for reversing the policy of banning non-Islamic prayer at the site to provide equal religious freedom for all visitors.

The government continued to allow Knesset members and ministers to visit the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site. Members of the Knesset were required to inform the Knesset guard at least 24 hours prior to the visit to allow for coordination with the police.

At the main Western Wall Plaza, the place of worship nearest the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and Judaism’s holiest site, the government continued to prohibit the performance of any “religious ceremony that is not in accordance with the customs of the place, [or] which harms the feelings of the public towards the place.” Authorities interpreted this prohibition to include mixed-gender Jewish prayer services, over the objections of the Jewish Conservative and Reform movements. The organization Women of the Wall, whose membership is composed of mostly Reform and Conservative Jewish women and whose goal is to secure the official right for women to pray at the Western Wall, stated that their monthly presence at the wall for more than 30 years had established them as part of the “customs of the place.”

Authorities continued to prohibit visitors from bringing private Torah scrolls to the main Western Wall Plaza and women from accessing the public Torah scrolls or giving priestly blessings at the site. Authorities, however, permitted women to pray with *tefillin* and prayer shawls pursuant to a 2013 Jerusalem District Court ruling stating it was illegal to arrest or fine them for such actions. On several occasions, MK Gilad Kariv (Labor) used his parliamentary immunity to bring Torah scrolls for the use of Women of the Wall and referred to the prohibition as illegal.

Within COVID-19 limitations, authorities allowed Women of the Wall to hold its monthly service in a barricaded portion of the women’s area of the main Western Wall Plaza. Ultra-Orthodox protesters harassed and attacked Women of the Wall members repeatedly during their monthly services by throwing coffee or bottles at them, screaming, cursing, blowing whistles, or pushing them.

Representatives of Women of the Wall complained of a lack of effort by police or ushers from the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, which administers the main Western Wall Plaza and which is ultra-Orthodox-run, to intervene when ultra-Orthodox women and men disrupted their monthly prayer service with screaming, whistling, and pushing. Ahead of a November service held by Women of the Wall, tension rose when former Shas MK Aryeh Deri called MKs and the public to attend the service and prevent MK Kariv from bringing Torah scrolls to the women's section, which Deri said would be a “desecration of the Western Wall.” The Western Wall Heritage Fund announced it would not take responsibility for maintaining public order at the plaza, leading to increased INP presence on November 5. With President Isaac Herzog's intervention, and his promise to hold a meeting on pluralistic prayer at the Western Wall, most MKs refrained from attending the service at the Western Wall on November 5. MK Ben Gvir of the Religious Zionist Party still attended to protest against the Women of the Wall, expressing outrage that police confronted protesters who attempted to reach the women who were conducting services at the site. According to the NGO Israel Religion and Action Center (IRAC), INP and the Western Wall Heritage Fund guards confronted Women of the Wall during the service. The President held a meeting on pluralistic prayer at the Western Wall on December 1.

A 2017 petition to the Supreme Court by Women of the Wall asking that ushers and police prevent disruption of their services was pending at year's end.

Authorities continued to allow use of a temporary platform south of the Mughrabi Bridge and adjacent to the Western Wall, but not visible from the main Western Wall Plaza, for non-Orthodox “egalitarian” (mixed gender) Jewish prayers. Authorities designated the platform for members of the Conservative and Reform movements of Judaism, including for religious ceremonies such as bar and bat mitzvahs. On November 4, the Supreme Court criticized the government for its lack of progress upgrading the area to a more permanent egalitarian prayer space. On December 7, the government told the Supreme Court it intended to continue to upgrade the egalitarian plaza but did not mention steps towards further equality and recognition included in the 2016 Western Wall Agreement. The 2016 agreement was a compromise between Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities, which the government “froze” in 2017, that included the construction of a permanent plaza for mixed-gender prayer managed by non-Orthodox groups, and a merged entry to all prayer spaces adjacent to the Western Wall. The government requested to update the court on developments within six months.

The Supreme Court case was a combination of lawsuits against the government, some dating back to 2013, that would allow prayer for all religious streams of Judaism at the Western Wall. It resulted in the 2016 Western Wall Agreement. In 2018, a special government committee approved expansion of the temporary platform for members of the Conservative and Reform movements. The non-Orthodox Jewish movements stated that upgrading the prayer space alone would not fulfill their 2016 agreement with the government. In addition, observers stated that scaffolding prevented visitors from touching the sacred wall in the egalitarian prayer space since a rock fell there in 2018. Over the same period, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation managed large construction projects in the main plaza, making routine inspections for loose rocks at the main plaza without blocking access to the wall.

On September 2, the Supreme Court rejected a petition by female rabbis demanding structural improvements to prevent collapse of the Mughrabi Bridge (the only entrance for non-Muslims to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, that crosses over the women's section of the main Western Wall Plaza); the court accepted the state's argument that it was taking action to restore the wooden beams on metal bases which support the bridge. The court added, “in a place like the Temple Mount, where any change could lead to political or security turbulence, the decision of state institutions to not change the existing situation on the ground is a practical and reasonable decision in which there is no room to intervene.”

In November and December, press reported that despite the government's declared intention to create an egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall, the proposal appeared to be losing support within the ruling coalition. Minister of Religious Affairs Kahana said the vast majority of Jews in Israel were Orthodox and that it would not be right to give control of parts of the space to the Conservative and Reform streams. Kahana said the issue “must be studied, to see how we resolve the [religious] wars.” Other members of the cabinet continued to publicly support the plan. According to *Haaretz*, the two key components of the proposal were creating a new and enhanced space on the southern side of the Western Wall for egalitarian prayer and providing official recognition to the Conservative and Reform movements at the site. The newspaper reported that “the disagreements [were] about that second component.” Under the government's original plan, a new authority would have been created to govern the egalitarian space and representatives of the Reform and Conservative movements would sit on its board. However, *Haaretz* reported that two Orthodox members of the cabinet, Kahana and Housing Minister Ze'ev Elkin, found this unacceptable and suggested that the egalitarian prayer space continue to operate under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office or, alternatively, be handed over for supervision to the Jewish Agency. Leaders of the non-Orthodox movements rejected that plan. At year's end, the government had taken no action to move the proposed changes forward.

The Jordanian Waqf in Jerusalem administered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, while the Jordanian Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Holy Places supported maintenance and salary of the Waqf staff in Jerusalem. The issue of the use of the Gate of Mercy (Bab al-Rahma), a building within the Haram al-Sharif/Temple that was reopened by the Waqf in 2019 after it had been closed since 2003, remained unresolved. The Israeli government stated it regarded the reopening as a violation of the status quo. An Israeli court extended a court order issued in July 2020 to close the site, but by year's end the INP had not enforced the order. The Waqf said it did not recognize the authority of Israeli courts over the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Throughout the year, Muslim worshippers could generally enter the site, although Israeli police sometimes conducted security searches there.

Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site, including Jewish activists believed to have violated the status quo understanding prohibiting non-Islamic prayer, Muslims believed to have verbally harassed or acted violently against non-Muslim visitors to the site or incited others to violence, and public figures whose presence authorities feared would inflame tensions. Banned individuals included Waqf guards and administrative and maintenance staff and imams delivering sermons at the site, as well as prominent activists. The Israeli government said that some individuals – including both Muslims and Jews – were prevented access to the site during the year because they could have caused disturbances and riots. The government said Israeli security prevented access to the site for 389 Muslims and 99 Jews during 2021 due to previous incidents of public disorder at the site, including assaulting or interfering with police, or based on intelligence information. The Wadi Hilweh Information Center reported that Israeli authorities banned 357 individuals from the site during the year.

While the government stated it was rare for any individual to be barred entry to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, human rights and civil society organizations said Israeli authorities banned some Palestinian residents in the occupied territories, and Arab/Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel from the site. Palestinian civil society organizations said that, in a practice that began in 2020, police continued to check the identify cards of individuals entering the Old City to visit the site for Friday prayers and would bar from entry those with West Bank identity cards and return them to the West Bank. In May, media reported that Israeli police blocked several buses of Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel outside of Jerusalem from visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Police said they stopped the buses because they had intelligence indicating some of the passengers were planning to riot at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

Media reported that Israeli authorities barred Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, former imam of al-Aqsa Mosque, former Palestinian Grand Mufti, and current head of the private Higher Islamic Council in Jerusalem, from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for several months due to charges of incitement. In March, government security officials briefly detained Sabri before releasing him. Sabri said that police arrested him for planning to take part in the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad’s night journey to Jerusalem and ascension to heaven. He said authorities accused him of violating a court decision that closed the Bab al-Rahma/Gate of Mercy. On October 10, police again summoned Sabri for questioning; before his interrogation, he told media outlets that he expected to be asked about decisions by Israeli courts allowing Jewish prayer at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Palestinian media reported Israel banned Sabri for a week after the interrogation. In November, Israeli authorities detained Sheikh Najeh Bakirat, Deputy Director-General of the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, for four days and subsequently banned him from entering the site for 20 days and from entering the West Bank for 30 days.

Human rights and civil society organizations said Israeli authorities at times also restricted some Muslims from entering the site based on gender and age. Israeli authorities have not issued permits for Gazans to visit the site during Islamic holidays since 2017, when it issued several hundred permits for Gazans during Ramadan, according to UN reports. Muslims who were Israeli citizens, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, or foreigners already present in Israel did not need permits to visit the site.

The Waqf also said that Israeli authorities continued to interfere in the Waqf’s administration of the site, including delaying longstanding maintenance and restoration work. Israeli officials and activists again stated the Waqf sometimes attempted to conduct repairs without coordinating with Israeli authorities. In addition to the police banning of individual Waqf staff members, the Waqf said that it had a reduced capacity to administer the site because Israeli authorities refused to grant permits to new staff hired to work at the site, leaving the Waqf seriously understaffed.

Israel only allowed Palestinians who had obtained certification of their COVID-19 vaccination or a certificate of COVID-19 recovery to enter Israel, a restriction which applied also to Palestinian Muslims or Christians coming from the West Bank for religious purposes.

The IDF continued periodically to limit access to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, a site of significance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims as the tomb of Abraham. The Israeli government said there were longstanding entry arrangements which should not be considered as restricting access. Palestinian leaders continued in statements to local media to oppose the IDF’s control of access, citing Oslo Accords-era agreements that gave Israel and the PA shared responsibilities for the site, although Israel retained full security responsibility for it; the Oslo Accords and 1997 Hebron Accords gave “civil powers and responsibilities” including “planning authority” for the site to the Hebron Municipality. Some Muslim leaders publicly rejected a Jewish connection to the site.

The IDF again restricted Muslim access to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs during 10 days corresponding to Jewish holidays and Jewish access during 10 days corresponding to Islamic holidays. The IDF restricted Muslims to one entry point, which was staffed by soldiers with metal detectors, while granting Jews access via several entry points. Citing security concerns, the IDF periodically closed roads approaching the site and, since 2001, had permanently closed Shuhada Street, the former main Hebron market and one of the main streets leading to the holy site, to Palestinian-owned vehicles. The government said the closure was done to prevent confrontations. Both Muslims and Jews were able to pray at the site simultaneously in separate spaces, a physical separation that was instituted by the IDF in November 1994 following an attack earlier in the year by an Israeli that killed 29 Palestinians. Israeli authorities continued to implement frequent bans on the Islamic call to prayer from the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs, stating the government acted upon requests by Jewish religious leaders in Hebron in response to requests of Jewish worshippers at the site. The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs reported

that Israel prevented calls to prayer at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs 525 times during the first 10 months of the year, including 59 times in March and 44 times in April, per Palestinian media. Passover was celebrated from March 27 to April 3.

In 2020, then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit approved a 2019 decision by Israel’s then Minister of Defense Naftali Bennett, shortly before Bennett left office, to bypass the Hebron municipality and expropriate land at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of Patriarchs in Hebron. The Israeli government stated it intended to renovate the site and establish elevators to make it accessible to persons with disabilities to “promote the rights of people with disabilities and allow access to religious sites for every population.” The Israeli government said it proceeded with the plan after multiple attempts to gain PA, Hebron municipality, and Waqf support for increased access to the site for persons with disabilities. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, “Hebron’s Jewish community and right-wing politicians and activists have long lobbied to make the site wheelchair accessible.” The paper stated that the only way that Jewish sanctuaries within the site could be reached is by climbing a long staircase.

On November 4, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected an appeal submitted by the PA Hebron municipality against the establishment of an elevator at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs. On June 10, Defense Minister Gantz approved the implementation of the elevator project as well as the building of a road to facilitate access to the site. On August 12, after some site preparation for the project had begun, the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs announced the closure of all other mosques in Hebron for Friday prayers on August 13 and asked Muslims to gather at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs to “denounce” the Israeli occupation. On August 13, Israeli security forces used stun grenades to disperse a large crowd of Muslim worshippers who gathered outside the mosque for Friday prayers in the protest. Jamal Abu Aram, director of the Hebron Waqf, told the Palestinian news agency *Ma’an* that the Waqf estimated the crowd to number from 15,000 to 20,000 persons.

On November 28, the first day of Hanukkah, President Herzog lit a menorah candle in the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs, and said, “The historical affinity of the Jewish people to Hebron, to the Cave of the Patriarchs, [and] to the heritage of our matriarchs and patriarchs is not in doubt. Recognition of this attachment must be beyond all controversy.” Herzog said, “In this holy space dedicated to all the sons of Abraham, we have to continue dreaming of peace, between all faiths and creeds in this land, and to condemn any hatred and violence.” The PA and the Hebron municipality said they viewed the shrine as exclusively Muslim. The PA Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Herzog’s visit was “a dangerous attempt to Judaize the site.” Palestinian and Israeli demonstrators protested in the center of Hebron during Herzog’s visit.

Israeli authorities and settlers, who were often armed, prevented access by Palestinians to several mosques in the West Bank located within Israeli settlements. Israeli authorities declared all legal settlements as restricted Israeli military zones. Palestinians were unable to visit them without Israeli government approval.

In December, Israeli Minister of Religious Affairs Kahana announced that the government would build seven of the 30 new synagogues included in his ministry’s budget in the West Bank. He also decided to earmark 25 percent of the ministry’s budget for the construction of *mikvehs* (Jewish ritual baths) to building mikvehs in the West Bank.

In March, the NGO Emek Shaveh and the Arab Culture Association petitioned the Supreme Court to end what they said was the discriminatory policy of the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage in allocating budgetary outlays for work on heritage sites. The petition cited calls by the ministry that included criteria that excluded non-Jewish historical sites from qualifying for funding. In response, the ministry’s legal advisor said that “the ministry was established with the aim of conserving the country’s national and Zionist heritage.” In August, the ministry formally responded to the pending petition, reiterated its view of its role, and stated that “other government ministries invest budgets also in minority heritage sites.” The Attorney General supported this argument. At year’s end, the Supreme Court had not ruled on the petition.

The Israeli NGO Machsom (“Checkpoint”) Watch’s website compared “freedom of worship and ritual at sites of heritage and religion” for Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank. According to Machsom Watch, Israeli Jews had “free access...at any site that [was] considered a heritage or sanctified site.” The NGO said some of these sites were Palestinian and had “undergone ‘Judaization’” while Palestinians were “denied access to numerous heritage and ritual sites” and “some such sites [were] appropriated by Jews or neglected and vandalized.” In a 2020 report, Machsom Watch stated that the Israeli government had used three strategies to “erase” Muslim religious sites in the West Bank: enclosing sites within closed military zones, including sites in nature reserves; divesting shrines of their Islamic religious identity by opening them to the general public; and declining to recognize the site as having any religious significance in Islam. The NGO said Israeli authorities gave more weight to sites associated with Biblical prophets than to sites significant only to Muslims. Machsom Watch said Israeli authorities denied Palestinians any access to 13 sites in the West Bank that were of traditional Muslim heritage, worship, or prayer or that were important to multiple faiths. The NGO said some of these sites were dilapidated and frequently the object of vandalism by Israeli settlers.

The Israeli government said it coordinated access to the Prophet Samuel’s Mosque during the year for 1,500 Palestinian residents of the Nebi Samuel and al-Khalaila villages. The site has both a mosque and synagogue and, with the villages, is located in the West Bank, but inside the Israeli barrier.

In August, Emek Shaveh reported that the government approved a plan for the development of the archaeological and holy site of the Prophet Samuel’s Mosque, a site held sacred by Jews as the tomb of the Biblical prophet Samuel, which is inside an Israeli national park in the West Bank. The NGO said that the plan ignored the adjacent village of Nabi Samuel, which experienced a lack of new construction since its proposed master plans had not been approved and building permits therefore could not be issued. Emek Shaveh said that the government had previously rejected a similar plan, following objections from residents of Nabi Samuel and from Emek Shaveh and another NGO, Bimkom. According to Emek Shaveh, although the site is considered holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, most visitors were Jewish worshippers. The Israeli government said the site had more than 270,000 visitors during the year, including Jews, Muslims, and tourists of other religions.

According to press reports, on November 24, shortly before the start of Hanukkah, Israel Nature and Parks Authority officials erected a large electric menorah on the roof of the Mosque of the Prophet Samuel. Israeli officials repositioned the menorah to the entrance of the synagogue after the local Palestinian population protested the installation. A local Palestinian leader said the Muslim community previously asked Israeli authorities for permission to light up a crescent on top of the mosque, but the request was denied. A senior official in the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs condemned the erection of the menorah as an “infringement upon the sanctity” of the site.

On February 24, the Supreme Court ordered the government to answer a series of questions by April 22 regarding its proposal to build an aerial cable car over a Karaite cemetery in Jerusalem’s Old City. This order was in response to three petitions which were filed by the Karaite community, the Emek Shaveh, and the NGO Israel Union for Environmental Defense, which the court considered in several sessions over the last three years. The court suspended work on the cable car project to examine why the project was approved through the National Infrastructure Committee, unlike other projects, which went through Jerusalem’s District and Planning Committee, a distinction that the court said deprived citizens of the opportunity to offer their opinions and submit reservations and objections. The justices also questioned the government’s designation of the cable car as a transportation rather than tourism project, and why the route could not be modified to avoid the Karaite community. During the year, the government continued to promote the establishment of a cable car route from the First Station cultural complex in Jerusalem to the Dung Gate of the Old City that would pass over the cemetery. According to the Karaite community, the cable car would desecrate the cemetery, thus preventing its further use. The government stated the cable car was meant to solve accessibility problems to holy sites such as the Western Wall, but some NGOs said the project was meant to specifically promote Jewish tourism in East Jerusalem and to reinforce Israel’s claims of sovereignty over the area. Despite a November 26 statement by Israeli Transportation Minister Merav Michaeli and a December 13 statement by Israeli Environmental Protection Minister Tamar Zandberg against the project, the government told the Supreme Court at the end of December that it supported the construction of the gondola line.

The barrier that divided the majority of the West Bank from Israel also divided some communities in Jerusalem, affecting residents’ access to places of worship, employment, agricultural lands, schools, and hospitals as well as the conduct of journalistic, humanitarian, and NGO activities. The government stated that the barrier was needed for security reasons.

In May, the Jerusalem municipality opened a parking lot on property it had leased from the Armenian Church in 2020. In July, the Church signed a new contract with the Jerusalem municipality extending the lease for 99 years, and the municipality announced that a Jewish-Australian developer would construct a new hotel on the property. Palestinians widely criticized the Church for leasing the property to the municipality, including public statements by PA figures. PA Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Riyad Malki raised the transaction with his Armenian counterpart and asked for Armenian Foreign Ministry assistance in pressuring the Church to cancel the lease. Minister Malki characterized the deal as opening the door for “the gradual encroachment of Israel’s settler-colonialism into the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem,” and said it “risks accelerating the obliteration of the Palestinian, Muslim, and Christian character of Jerusalem.”

The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs continued to provide imams with themes they were required to use in weekly Friday sermons in West Bank mosques and to prohibit them from broadcasting Quranic recitations from minarets prior to the call to prayer.

Unrecognized religious groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses faced a continued PA ban on proselytizing but stated they were able to conduct most other functions unhindered. Palestinian authorities generally recognized on a case-by-case basis personal status documents issued by unrecognized churches. The PA, however, continued to refuse to recognize personal status legal documents (e.g., marriage certificates) issued by some of these unrecognized churches, which the groups said made it difficult for them to register newborn children under their fathers’ names or as children of married couples. Many unrecognized churches advised members with dual citizenship to marry or divorce abroad and to register the action officially in that location. Some converts to unrecognized Christian faiths had recognized churches with which they were previously affiliated perform their marriages and divorces. Members of some faith communities and faith-based organizations stated they viewed their need to do so as conflicting with their religious beliefs.

Religious organizations providing education, health care, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians in and around East Jerusalem continued to state that the physical barrier begun by Israel during the Second Intifada in 2003 impeded their work, particularly south of Jerusalem in West Bank Christian communities around Bethlehem. Clergy members stated the barrier and additional checkpoints restricted their movements between Jerusalem and West Bank churches and monasteries as well as the movement of congregants between their

homes and places of worship. Christian leaders continued to state the barrier hindered Bethlehem-area Christians from reaching the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. They also said it made visits to Christian sites in Bethlehem difficult for Palestinian Christians who lived on the west side of the barrier. Foreign pilgrims and religious aid workers also reported difficulty or delays accessing Christian religious sites in the West Bank because of the barrier. The Israeli government previously stated it constructed the barrier as an act of self-defense and that it was highly effective in preventing terrorist attacks in Israel.

Christian expatriate workers in Israeli settlements complained that lack of public transportation on Saturdays prevented them from participating in religious activities and worship in Jerusalem.

The Israeli Ministry of Religious Services (MRS) listed 21 dedicated cemeteries in Israel and West Bank settlements for burial of persons the government defined as “lacking religion,” and 33 cemeteries for civil burial, but only three were available for use to the general public regardless of residence, and one had been full for several years. The state permitted other cemeteries located in agricultural localities to bury only “residents of the area.” This, according to the religious freedom and equal rights advocacy NGO Hiddush, left the majority of Israel’s population unable to exercise its right, as mandated by law, to be buried in accordance with secular or non-Orthodox religious views. The two MRS-administered cemeteries in West Bank settlements were available only for the burial of Israeli citizens. On September 12, the Supreme Court rejected a 2019 petition by Hiddush that demanded civil burial in agricultural localities for individuals who were not local residents and who did not have another alternative. According to the Israeli government, the existing issues regarding civil burial could not justify burial outside of place of residence. The court invited Hiddush to submit a new petition regarding a specific locality, rather than a general petition.

According to Brigham Young University’s Jerusalem Center, the Israeli government maintained an agreement with the Church of Jesus Christ stating that no member of the Church would “engage in proselytizing of any kind” within Israel, the West Bank, or Gaza as a condition of its lease of land for its campus on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

In June, German NGO Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (GEI) released the findings from its European Union-commissioned review of PA curricula from 2017 and 2019 assessing the extent of inciteful content. The report found the curriculum included promotion of UNESCO standards for peace, tolerance, and nonviolence in educational material, but the report also highlighted the enduring presence of problematic content, including instances of antagonism toward Israel and the glorification of violence. The review praised the curriculum’s focus on human rights and pluralism and elimination of some prior inciteful content, while noting other content still veered beyond a “narrative of [political] resistance” and including antisemitic references and language delegitimizing the State of Israel. It found “ambivalent – sometimes hostile – attitudes towards Jews and the characteristics they attribute to the Jewish people,” noting “frequent use of negative attributions in relation to the Jewish people in, for example, textbook exercises [that] suggest[ed] a conscious perpetuation of anti-Jewish prejudice, especially when embedded within the current political context.” The report also noted that GEI’s overview of 18 textbooks released online for the academic year 2020/2021 included increased representation of female and Christian positions as well as “reduction in the text and images that have escalatory potential: including the alteration of a specific teaching unit that included antisemitic content by several significant changes of the narrative.”

The Israeli curriculum monitoring NGO IMPACT-se stated the GEI report contained “omissions, obfuscations, and even apologetics for Jew-hate and violence.” In a May update of its previous reviews of the curriculum used by Palestinian schools, IMPACT-se stated that the PA curriculum moved further from meeting UNESCO standards and that the newly published textbooks were found to be “more radical” than those previously published. According to the NGO, there is “a systematic insertion of violence, martyrdom and jihad across all grades and subjects.” IMPACT-se’s analysis cited examples of antisemitic tropes and the inclusion of violent wording in otherwise neutral subjects.

Consistent with UN practices globally, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA) used the same curriculum and textbooks as used by PA schools in the occupied territories. In recent years, UNRWA conducted reviews of new textbooks introduced by the PA to ensure they align with UN values.

While Israeli law does not authorize the Israel Land Authority (ILA), which administers the 93 percent of Israel in the public domain, to lease land to foreigners, in practice foreigners were allowed to lease if they could show they would qualify as Jewish under the Law of Return. This public land includes approximately 12.5 percent owned by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose statutes prohibit sale or lease of land to non-Jews. The application of ILA restrictions historically limited the ability of Muslim and Christian residents of Jerusalem who were not Israeli citizens to purchase property built on state land, including in parts of Jerusalem. In recent years, however, an increasing number of Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel in Jerusalem acquired property built on ILA-owned land. Arab/Palestinian citizens could participate in bids for JNF land, but sources stated that the ILA granted the JNF another parcel of land whenever an Arab/Palestinian citizen of Israel won a bid. Despite a 2018 Supreme Court ruling that the ILA Executive Council must have representation of an Arab, Druze, or Circassian member to prevent discrimination against non-Jews, there were no members from these groups on the council at year’s end.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate continued its legal efforts to block the transfer of properties in Jerusalem’s Old City to Ateret Cohanim, a Jewish organization that signed a 99-year lease for the properties in 2004. Courts previously ruled in favor of Ateret Cohanim, and in 2020, the district court ruled against reopening the case to hear new evidence brought forward by the Church. A Supreme Court hearing was set for 2022 to determine if the case should be reopened based upon the new evidence.

On December 12, 13 heads of Christian communities in Jerusalem issued a joint statement entitled, “The Current Threat to the Christian Presence in the Holy Land,” that said, “Christians have become the target of frequent and sustained attacks by fringe radical groups. Since 2012 there have been countless incidents of physical and verbal assaults against priests and other clergy, attacks on Christian churches, with holy sites regularly vandalized and desecrated, and ongoing intimidation of local Christians who simply seek to worship freely and go about their daily lives. These tactics are being used by such radical groups in a systematic attempt to drive the Christian community out of Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land.” The statement said, “The declared commitment of the Israeli government to uphold a safe and secure home for Christians in the Holy Land,” but it added, “It is therefore a matter of grave concern when this national commitment is betrayed by the failure of local politicians, officials, and law enforcement agencies to curb the activities of radical groups who regularly intimidate local Christians, assault priests and clergy, and desecrate Holy Sites and church properties.” The statement continued, “The principle that the spiritual and cultural character of Jerusalem’s distinct and historic quarters should be protected is already recognized in Israeli law with respect to the Jewish Quarter. Yet radical groups continue to acquire strategic property in the Christian Quarter, with the aim of diminishing the Christian presence, often using underhanded dealings and intimidation tactics to evict residents from their homes, dramatically decreasing the Christian presence, and further disrupting the historic pilgrim routes between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.”

Haaretz reported that the statement marked the beginning of a campaign that included a dedicated website and articles in the media. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the statements made by the Christian leaders were “baseless and distort the reality of the Christian community in Israel” and that the Christians’ joint statement “could lead to violence and bring harm to innocent people.” In an editorial, *Haaretz* stated, “The Christian leadership in Jerusalem may be exaggerating the sense of threat against them, to draft support from communities throughout the world... However, this does not justify the government’s irresponsible behavior toward the Christian public. The government must recognize that the Christian congregations have an important place in Jerusalem’s human mosaic. The government must pay attention to the needs and problems of Christian communities.”

On December 29, at an annual New Year’s reception for spiritual and lay leaders of Christian churches and communities, President Herzog affirmed his commitment to freedom of worship and religion in the country. Herzog said that each of the Christian groups was “a blessing and an integral part” of the country’s “mosaic.” He explicitly rejected all forms of racism, discrimination, and extremism as well as any threat to Christian communities in the country. Interior Minister Shaked also made remarks, saying that the new year offered an opportunity to build new bonds of friendship and cooperation among all religions.

In December, a ministerial-level team approved a proposal by Minister of Interior Shaked to exempt tourist groups that fell into the category of “Jewish tourism” from entry restrictions associated with the omicron variant of COVID-19. According to press, Christian organizations said the decision was unfair, especially given the impending Christmas holidays. According to a lead editorial in *Haaretz*, “This is a discriminatory exception, not to say a bigoted one.” In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said, “These unfounded allegations of discriminatory conduct are outrageous, false, and dangerous.”

In April, Al-Monitor reported that then Israeli Minister of Tourism Orit Farkash-Hacohen said that after the signing of the Abraham Accords normalizing relations between Israel and four Arab states, “Israel’s tourist branch began preparing for Muslim tourism. Senior ministry officials said the ministry was expecting tens of thousands of Muslim tourists in the upcoming months and that the ministry was mapping religious Muslim sites throughout the country.”

In a March 17 interview on Palestine TV, PA presidential advisor Mahmoud al-Habbash said, “When Theodor Herzl, the so-called ‘father of political Zionism,’ visited Palestine at the beginning of the twentieth century and saw that Palestine is [sic] inhabited, teeming with life, and brimming with a culture that has strong historical roots, he said, ‘Where will we establish our projected [state]? We must turn Palestine into a land with no people, by depopulating it.’” Al-Habbash said Herzl’s “purpose was to depopulate Palestine and bring in the Jews from all over the world... The Jews have no connection to the [Middle] East, to Palestine, or to the Semite race.”

Palestinian leaders, media, and social media regularly used the word “martyr” to refer to individuals killed during confrontations with Israeli security forces, whether those individuals were involved in confrontations or were innocent bystanders. Some official PA media channels, social media sites affiliated with the Fatah political movement, and terrorist organizations glorified terrorist attacks on Jewish Israelis, referring to the assailants as “martyrs.” Several local Fatah chapters posted memorials, including photographs, of suicide bombers. On several occasions on PA television, senior PA and Fatah official Jibril Rajoub extolled “martyrs” and prisoners serving sentences in Israeli prisons for conducting terrorist attacks. According to the Israeli NGO Palestinian Media Watch, beginning in 2020, the PA transferred funds to the PLO to allow the continuation of “martyr payments” to families of Palestinians killed during terrorist acts or of those killed in Israeli military actions, including victims of air strikes in Gaza, as well as stipends to Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including those awaiting charges and those convicted of acts of terrorism.

The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs continued to pay for construction of new mosques, maintenance of approximately 1,800 existing mosques, and salaries of most Palestinian imams in the West Bank. The ministry also continued to provide limited financial support to some Christian clergy and Christian charitable organizations.

The PA’s Palestinian Broadcasting Company’s code of conduct states it does not allow programming that encourages “violence against any person or institution on the basis of race, religion, political beliefs, or sex.” Some official PA media channels as well as social media accounts affiliated with the ruling political movement Fatah, however, featured content praising or condoning acts of violence against Jews. On October 21, on official PA television, Fatah Deputy Chairman Mahmoud al-Aloul, appearing with Latifa Abu Hmeid, whose sons were convicted of the killing of Israelis, said, “I’m completely happy that next to me is sitting a giant of endurance... I don’t at all think there is anyone who exceeds her endurance and stamina: the mother of five prisoners and also the mother of martyrs... We can’t speak about all the prisoners, but we are proud of them all... They live in the heart, conscience, and awareness of every Palestinian.”

Both Palestinians and Israelis evoked ethnoreligious language to deny the historical self-identity of the other community in the region or to emphasize an exclusive claim to the land. On October 1, on official PA television, PA Grand Mufti Hussein said, “The injustice will certainly pass and the occupation will pass... If we turn to the history of Palestine, it has been occupied by many peoples and many invaders have entered it, but in the end the occupation left and the invaders left... Jerusalem will certainly be liberated and return to the embrace of Islam, noble and strong, with its holy sites and its people, and the evil will pass, Almighty Allah willing.” On April 25, MK Itamar Ben Gvir said in his inaugural speech before the Knesset, “I will act, with God’s help, to restore sovereignty to Jerusalem in general and to the Temple Mount in particular, so that images such as those we saw last night, of groups of thugs beating police officers, shouting ‘Hamas, Hamas’ and informing us that they are the bosses of Jerusalem and mainly of the Temple Mount – will not be seen or heard.”

Antisemitic material continued to appear in official PA media. In a June 29 recorded speech opening a conference on Zionism at al-Quds University in Gaza that was posted on the PA official media website Wafa and on Palestine TV, President Abbas said, “I salute the efforts made to hold this conference, which refutes the Zionist narrative that falsifies the truth and history, and which all documents and research confirm that it is a product of colonialism. They planned and worked to implant Israel as a foreign body in this region to fragment it and keep it weak.” In a June 8 Fatah Movement-Nablus Branch Facebook post, a picture of a wounded baby and an image of a Star of David with red drops of blood appeared in an advertisement encouraging Palestinians to boycott Israeli products.

Palestinian residents of Jerusalem and Muslim leaders continued to protest archaeological excavations and construction work done at the City of David National Park in the Silwan neighborhood outside the Old City and in the Old City near the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Some NGOs monitoring archaeological practices in Jerusalem continued to state the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) emphasized archaeological finds that bolstered Jewish claims in Jerusalem while minimizing historically significant archaeological finds of other religions. Emek Shaveh said that Israeli authorities were “using archaeological sites as a pretext for barring Palestinians from sites in Area C.” The government stated that IAA researchers “have greatly intensified their research on ‘non-Jewish’ periods in the history of the land of Israel, [including] the Prehistoric, Early Bronze, Byzantine, Muslim, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods.” Archeologists from Emek Shaveh continued to dispute the government’s representation of the “Pilgrim’s Road,” a tunnel dug by the IAA and inaugurated in Silwan in 2019, as being historically part of the pilgrimage route to the Jewish Second Temple. Emek Shaveh said IAA’s excavation method did not establish with certainty the date and purpose of the road. NGOs such as the City of David Foundation and the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies continued to support the government’s position.

In February, a Palestinian contractor damaged part of a wall while doing road work near the Iron Age site of Mount Ebal/al-Burnat, a West Bank archeological site in Area B near Nablus, where some believe a biblical altar erected by Joshua sits. The contractor said he was unaware that the wall was part of the antiquities site. The *Jerusalem Post* reported one “right-wing [Israeli] politician” said, “There are relentless attempts to weaken our hold on our homeland and to obscure the Jewish people’s glorious past in the land of Israel, both through terrorist acts and destruction of archaeology.”

In August, Elad, which the *Times of Israel* described as a “right-wing organization,” and the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) opened a Center for Ancient Agriculture in the Valley of Hinnom in East Jerusalem where tourists were invited to learn about Biblical-era agriculture traditions. The center was located in olive tree groves tended in the past by Palestinian residents of the surrounding areas who stated that they were the landowners responsible for maintenance of the grove. Emek Shaveh said that the center was part of a series of projects advocated by Elad to expand Jewish Israeli presence in East Jerusalem. The INPA responded that the center was “open to all.”

During the year, the Israeli government retained its previous regulations regarding visa issuance for foreigners to work in the West Bank, regulations Christian institutions said impeded their work by preventing many foreign clergy and other religious workers from entering and working. Christian leaders said Israel’s visa and permit policy also adversely affected schoolteachers and volunteers affiliated with faith-based charities working in the West Bank. Clergy, nuns, and other religious workers from Arab countries said they continued to face long delays in receiving visas and reported periodic denials of their visa applications. Officials from multiple churches expressed concern that non-Arab visa applicants and visa-renewal applicants also faced long delays. The Israeli government said that the large number of requests resulted in delays in process times. During the year, 1,404 foreign clergy entered Israel, and 2,230 visas were granted (including new issuances and extending visas for those already present).

According to church officials, Israel continued to prohibit some Arab Christian clergy, including bishops and other senior clergy seeking to visit congregations or ministries under their pastoral authority, from entering Gaza. Some clergy complained of body searches by Israeli security when entering or exiting Gaza, including a nun subjected to a body search and requested to remove her religious habit, and a priest who was asked to disrobe for examination of

his chemotherapy pump despite possessing medical documentation from an Israeli doctor. Additionally, some Arab clergy reported Israel denied permission for them to leave Gaza for more than a year, and thus they were unable to renew visas or permits, preventing them from returning once they were permitted to leave.

In recent years, Israeli authorities issued permits for some Christians to exit Gaza to attend religious services in Jerusalem or the West Bank and for Muslims from the West Bank to enter Jerusalem for Ramadan. On November 25, COGAT announced a quota of 500 permits for Christian Gazans to visit family in East Jerusalem or the West Bank, 200 permits for Gazans wishing to travel abroad via the Allenby Bridge Crossing, and 15,000 permits for Christian Palestinians in the West Bank to enter Israel. *Haaretz* reported that Israel made approximately 1,000 permits available to Gaza Christians to enter Israel and the West Bank for Christmas celebrations. The Israeli government said that COGAT issued 24,016 permits during the year for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to travel to Jerusalem for major religious holidays such as Easter, Ramadan, or Christmas. Of that number, 245 were issued for Christian residents of Gaza.

The Israeli NGO Gisha stated that while Israeli authorities did not issue permits to Palestinians from Gaza due to COVID-19 until December, thereby essentially restricting them from being able to go to Israel or the West Bank except in urgent humanitarian cases, it permitted foreigners to enter Israel for much of the year to study religion and to attend religious events, such as weddings, funerals, and bat or bar mitzvahs. Furthermore, Israelis were able to move to and from settlements in the West Bank, including for religious worship and gatherings. Gisha said that even in previous years, religious travel from Gaza was extremely limited, and announcements for “holiday permits” – if available – often came with little time for individuals to prepare for travel, file applications on time, and appeal permit denials; no Muslims were issued permits for religious travel since 2018, according to Gisha.

On July 6, the coalition government failed to renew the Law on Citizenship and Entry resulting in its expiration and paving the way for family reunification of some 3,000 Palestinians and their Israeli citizen spouses. Under the law, non-Jewish spouses of Israelis from certain countries and the West Bank and Gaza had been denied residency without a special determination from the Israeli MOI. Although the law lapsed, Interior Minister Shaked ordered the ministry to continue functioning as though the law were in place. On September 14, three NGOs, including HaMoked, petitioned the Court for Administrative Affairs demanding that the MOI respect the consequences brought about by the expiration of the law. On November 11, the government responded, supporting Shaked’s continued handling of Palestinians’ requests in accordance with the now-expired regulations, stating that Shaked could implement “interim procedures and regulations” until a new law was passed. No new procedures were published by year’s end, however. On November 15, the court rejected the three NGOs’ request for an injunction prohibiting the handling of requests based on the expired law. As a result, the petitioners appealed to the Supreme Court on November 17. At year’s end, both the petition and new legislation remained pending.

According to the NGO HaMoked, there were approximately 10,000 Palestinians living in the country, including in Jerusalem, on temporary stay permits because of the citizenship and entry law, with no legal guarantee they could continue living with their families. When the previous citizenship and entry law was not renewed and expired in July, HaMoked petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court to direct the MOI to adjudicate reunification applications. HaMoked and Israeli media reported that the ministry refused to deal with these applications, and as of December, there were 1,680 such applications waiting to be reviewed. There were also cases of Palestinian spouses of Palestinian residents living in East Jerusalem without legal status. Some Palestinian residents moved to Jerusalem neighborhoods outside the security barrier to live with their nonresident spouse and children while maintaining Jerusalem residency. According to Christian religious leaders, this situation remained an especially acute problem for Christians because of their small population and consequent tendency to marry Christians from the West Bank or elsewhere (i.e., Christians who held neither citizenship nor residency). A Christian religious leader expressed concern that this was a significant element in the continuing decline of the Christian population, including in Jerusalem, which negatively affected the long-term viability of Christian communities.

According to NGOs, community members, and media commentators, factors contributing to Christian emigration included political instability, the inability to obtain residency permits for spouses due to the 2003 Law of Citizenship and Entry, limited ability of Christian communities in the Jerusalem area to expand due to building restrictions, difficulties Christian clergy experienced in obtaining Israeli visas and residency permits, loss of confidence in the peace process, and economic hardships created by the establishment of the barrier and the imposition of travel restrictions. The Israeli government stated such difficulties stemmed from the “complex political and security reality” and not from any restrictions on the Christian community.

ACTIONS OF FOREIGN FORCES AND NONSTATE ACTORS

Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other militant and terrorist groups continued to be active in Gaza. Hamas remained in de facto political control of Gaza.

On May 10, following Israeli-Palestinian violence at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, Palestinian armed groups in Gaza started to launch rockets toward Israeli population centers. In response, the Israeli military carried out attacks in Gaza with missiles, rockets, and artillery. A ceasefire between the warring parties went into effect on May 21. The NGO Human Rights Watch released reports on July 27 and August 12 that stated Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza carried out attacks during the May fighting that violated the laws of war and that appeared to amount to war crimes. According to the Israeli government, Hamas and other groups launched more than 4,360 unguided rockets and mortars toward Israeli population centers between May 10 and 21, during the “Days

of Rage.” These attacks resulted in 13 deaths and several hundred injuries. The United Nations reported that during the May fighting, attacks by the Israeli military killed 260 Palestinians, including at least 129 civilians, of whom 66 were children.

On August 5, a group of masked men bombed the Bianco Resort, a seafront tourist resort in Gaza City, causing the collapse of a perimeter wall. According to press reports, the attackers wanted to prevent the resort from hosting a mixed gender concert. Al-Monitor said that Issa Miqdad, a Salafist preacher, asked the resort’s owner to cancel the concert in an August 4 meeting. The resort’s owner, Suhail al-Saqqā, refused to cancel the concert, saying he had a permit from the Hamas Ministry of Interior. In an August 5 Facebook post, Miqdad said, “I call on all preachers and sheikhs and zealous people to denounce this evil through their [social media] pages and to mention the name of the resort and to warn against it because the center’s owner is spreading evil and we must fight it after he rejected our request.” Miqdad also described the concert as “organized corruption on the land of jihad.” According to Al-Monitor, al-Saqqā said the hotel was the subject of an incitement campaign launched by fundamentalists on social media because of the concert.

Hamas leaders and other militant groups continued to call for the elimination of the State of Israel, and some called for killing “Zionist Jews” and advocated violence through traditional and social media channels, as well as during rallies and other events.

Hamas also continued to enforce restrictions on Gaza’s population based on its interpretation of Islam and sharia, including a judicial system separate from the PA courts. Hamas courts occasionally prohibited women from departing Gaza due to ongoing divorce or family court proceedings, despite the women having Israeli authorization to travel. Media outlets reported the Hamas-affiliated Islamic University of Gaza required hijabs for all females. Gazan civil society leaders said Hamas in recent years had moderated its restrictions on dress and gender segregation in public.

On May 11, according to press, the Ministry of Interior and National Security in Gaza issued an apology after a complaint by reporter Riwa Murshid stating that two members of a Hamas military unit attacked her for not wearing a hijab in a border area. The ministry said Murshid had failed to notify authorities that she would be entering the area and had not shown any press credential to the security forces, but that the security officials had violated policy by arguing with Murshid and beating her with a tree branch. In response, Murshid said she had the permission of the property owner to be where she was, was accompanied by a photographer and a colleague, and identified herself as a journalist to the Hamas members. She said that one of the men accused her of being an apostate, said it was a dishonorable act for him to talk to her, and that he used a tree branch to hit her several times.

Palestinians in Gaza reported interference by Hamas in public schools at the primary, secondary, and university levels. Hamas reportedly interfered in teaching methodologies or curriculum it deemed to violate Islamic identity, the religion of Islam, or “traditions,” as defined by Hamas. Hamas also interfered when there were reports of classes or activities that mixed genders. UNRWA, however, reported no Hamas interference in the administration of its Gaza schools.

According to Al-Monitor, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip criticized the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and Hamas after a contractor announced on Facebook that it had won a bid of more than one million dollars to replace the Khalil al-Wazir Mosque, which had been destroyed in 2014 Israeli-Palestinian violence. One critic said that given Gaza’s economic situation, feeding the poor should have taken precedence over building “luxurious mosques,” noting that 80 percent of the population relied on food aid. An official in the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Gaza said that the mosque would include a medical dispensary to serve its neighborhood.

Christian groups reported Hamas generally tolerated the small Christian presence in Gaza and did not force Christians to abide by Islamic law. According to media accounts, Hamas continued neither to investigate nor prosecute Gaza-based cases of religious discrimination, including reported anti-Christian bias in private sector hiring and in police investigations of anti-Christian harassment. On April 13, Manuel Musallem, a Roman Catholic priest living in Jerusalem who previously lived in Gaza, publicly called on Hamas to establish a Christian media center to defend itself from claims in the press that it mistreats Christians. On March 30, he told the Hamas-affiliated, Gaza-based newspaper *al-Resalah*, that “Hamas has been targeted by a smear campaign.” Hamas continued not to celebrate Christmas as a public holiday in Gaza, unlike in the West Bank.

Hamas Chairman of the Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh routinely called for Arab states to terminate normalization agreements with Israel. After the May escalation of conflict, Haniyeh said, “This battle has destroyed the project of ‘coexistence’ with the Israeli occupation, the project of ‘normalization’ with Israel.” In a speech on October 31, Haniyeh called for Arab states to terminate normalization agreements with Israel and stated, “Normalization does not serve the Palestinian cause.”

In a political rally covered on May 30 by *al-Jazeera* honoring “martyrs” killed in recent Israeli-Palestinian violence, Hamas Political Bureau member Fathi Hammad said, “The Jews are a treacherous people. There can be no peace with the Jews. There can be no peace with the Zionists. The only thing we have for the Zionists is the sword.”

The Anti-Defamation League reported that *al-Resalah* ran an editorial cartoon on May 10 depicting Israeli soldiers as monkeys fleeing the “lion of al-Aqsa.” The NGO said the image appeared to be a reference “to the fundamentalist derogatory slur that Jews are descendants from apes.”

Some Muslim students in Gaza continued to attend schools run by Christian institutions and NGOs.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Because religion and ethnicity or nationality are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

During the year, there were incidents of deadly violence that perpetrators justified at least partly on religious grounds. Actions included individual killings, physical attacks and verbal harassment of worshippers and clergy, and vandalism of religious sites. There was also harassment by members of one religious group of another, social pressure to stay within one’s religious group, and antisemitic content in media.

Amid tensions in Jerusalem and conflict in Gaza, ethnic-based violence and civil unrest broke out during a one-week period in May in a number of mixed Jewish-Arab cities in Israel, including Jerusalem. Armed Jewish Israelis clashed with Palestinians in East Jerusalem neighborhoods. Responding to the violence, the government reassigned additional security personnel, including border police from the West Bank, to augment INP personnel. The INP reported it made approximately 1,550 arrests in cities across Israel and in Jerusalem, with the overwhelming majority of the arrestees being Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel. Security officials characterized the arrested Jewish citizens as predominately middle-aged nationalist extremists.

According to the press, on December 16, unknown gunmen killed Yehuda Dimentman near Jenin in the West Bank. Dimentman was a student at a yeshiva near where the attack took place. The attackers fired on a car carrying Dimentman as it was leaving the closed settlement of Homesh. Authorities said that two other individuals traveling with Dimentman were injured in the attack.

Israeli media reported that on December 1, two Israeli ultra-Orthodox Jews drove into downtown Ramallah, an Area A city in the West Bank and seat of the PA. Israeli media described the men as wearing clothing and hairstyles preferred by an ultra-Orthodox group and by ultra-nationalist settler youth and driving a vehicle with speaker mounts and painting that matched other vehicles some member of the ultra-Orthodox group drive while playing Jewish techno music. One of the passengers told reporters afterwards that they were lost and had been given bad directions by an Arab gas station attendant. A Palestinian crowd attacked the vehicle with cinderblocks and stones, and after the passengers left the vehicle, set it ablaze. PA security forces escorted the Israeli men to safety and turned them over to Israeli police, who subsequently held the two for interrogation and potential charges. Israelis are banned by an Israeli military order from entering Area A, as noted by large signs on all roads entering Area A. Hamas praised the assault as an “act of resistance” and criticized the PA security forces for safeguarding the two Israelis.

On March 1, unknown assailants set fire to the entrance of a Romanian Orthodox Church monastery in Jerusalem near the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea Shearim. The local priest put out the fire quickly. According to Church officials, this was the fourth act of vandalism during the year that targeted the same monastery. Christian representatives said they believed religious Orthodox Jews were the probable assailants. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem said the arson was “a sign of hatred for the Christian religion” among some Israelis.

According to local press and social media, some settlers in the West Bank continued to justify their attacks on Palestinian property, or “price tag” attacks, such as the uprooting of Palestinian olive trees, vandalism of cars and buildings, arson, and slashing of tires as necessary for the defense of Judaism. According to the *Times of Israel*, on October 13, vandals sprayed nationalist slogans and damaged cars in the Palestinian village of Marda in the West Bank. Slogans painted on walls included “price tag” and “demolish enemy [property], not Jewish.”

Media reported that on April 28, arsonists set three Palestinian cars ablaze in Beit Ikka, a village outside Jerusalem in the West Bank and wrote, “Jews, let’s win” on the road, along with “Tiktok” and a Star of David, possibly referencing a series of videos posted on the social media app appearing to show Palestinians attacking random ultra-Orthodox Jews without provocation. According to media reports, dozens of Jewish residents of a nearby neighborhood chanted, “May your village burn,” until police arrived and dispersed the crowd. Some Palestinian residents stated to media outlets that an Israeli fire truck came but did not put the fire out, and they had to wait for a Palestinian fire truck, which took longer to arrive.

On November 9, unidentified individuals vandalized nearly two dozen vehicles and a building in the Palestinian town of al-Bireh, in the West Bank, with slogans such as “enemies live here” and “price tag.” According to an AP report, Palestinian eyewitnesses said a group of Israeli settlers was responsible for the vandalism.

The Israeli government said that several times during the year, unknown persons sprayed graffiti on Joshua’s Tomb in the Palestinian village of Kifl Hares in the West Bank.

According to members of more recently arrived faith communities in the West Bank, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, established Christian groups opposed the efforts of the recent arrivals to obtain official PA recognition because of the newcomers’ proselytizing.

Political and religious groups in the West Bank and Gaza continued to call on members to “defend” al-Aqsa Mosque.

Following the announcement of the normalization agreements establishing relations between Israel and four Arab countries (the Abraham Accords), Muslims from the Gulf were at times harassed in person and vilified on social media by Palestinian Muslims for visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount as part of visits to Israel.

Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to state that burial of its members remained challenging since most cemeteries belonged to churches. Jehovah’s Witnesses said the challenge was greatest in Bethlehem, where churches from the main traditions control most graveyards and refused access to them.

According to Palestinian sources, some Christian and Muslim families in the occupied territories pressured their children, especially daughters, to marry within their respective religious groups. Couples who challenged this societal norm, particularly Palestinian Christians or Muslims who sought to marry Jews, encountered considerable societal and family opposition. Families sometimes reportedly disowned Muslim and Christian women who married outside their faith. Various Israeli and Palestinian groups continued to protest against interfaith social and romantic relationships and other forms of cooperation.

Christian clergy and pilgrims continued to report instances of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem harassing or spitting on them. In May, Armenian media reported that “Jewish youths” attacked an Armenian priest, sending him to the hospital with injuries. Police reportedly arrested three of the attackers.

The Israeli government said that only one complaint was filed during the year regarding an assault on Christian clergy in Jerusalem, and that the suspect was questioned but not indicted. In addition, it reported there was one complaint filed by church officials in Jerusalem for “blasphemy of a holy place;” no suspects were found in that case. Church officials reported that despite presenting video evidence to Israeli police in these attacks, police took insufficient action.

The *Times of Israel* reported that Palestinian protestors hung a Nazi flag bearing the swastika symbol in the West Bank village of Beit Ummar near Hebron on September 25. In October, the *Times of Israel* reported that Palestinian vandals drew the swastika symbol during several protests in the West Bank against Israeli settlements and outposts. On October 23, Israeli police arrested a Palestinian man suspected of spray-painting swastikas along a road used by settlers in the West Bank village of Hawara, near Nablus. During protests in August against the Israeli Evyatar settler outpost, Palestinians from the nearby town of Beita erected a flaming star of David with a swastika in the center.

In a December sermon at al-Aqsa Mosque, Issam Amira stated that COVID-19 spread because of the conduct of Muslim rulers. He said that this happened because of “infidel and licentious media” had spread immorality, and rulers had “permitted and promoted homosexuality” and had followed “feminist organizations.”

In a December 8 interview on Palestine TV, Jihad al-Harazin, a professor of law and political science at al-Quds University, asked why the world “weeps” over the “so-called Holocaust” committed by the Nazis when it appears to ignore “the crimes that are being committed daily,” including the death of 12-year-old Mohammed Durrah, who was killed in Gaza in 2000.

Palestinian historian Ashraf al-Qasas during a November 2 interview with Gaza-based Alkofiya TV, said, “Jews constitute surplus, and could not integrate into society.” He also said, “The Jews were a pile of garbage that you wanted to get rid of... and you do this by dumping them on the neighbors you hate: the Muslims.”

Although the Chief Rabbinate and rabbis of many ultra-Orthodox Jewish denominations continued to discourage Jewish visits to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site due to the ongoing *halakhic* (having to do with Jewish law and jurisprudence) debate about whether it was permissible or forbidden for Jews to enter the Temple Mount, some Orthodox rabbis continued to say entering the site was permissible. Many among the self-identified “national religious” Zionist community stated they found meaning in visiting the site. Groups such as the Temple Institute and Yaraeh continued to call for increased Jewish access and prayer there as well as for the construction of a third Jewish temple on the site.

According to the Wadi Hilweh Information Center, visits to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site during the year by activists associated with the Temple Mount movement decreased to 18,500 from 30,000 in 2019, the most recent year for which numbers are available, largely due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Despite Israeli labor law mandating workers were entitled to take a weekly day off for worship, some foreign domestic workers in Jerusalem stated that some employers did not allow them to do so.

The research and consulting firm PSB took a June poll of youth between the ages of 17 and 24 in 17 Arab states and the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and reported 17 percent of respondents in the occupied territories said that their religion was the most important factor in their personal identity, compared with 34 percent regionwide. Other choices offered by the poll as possible responses included family/tribe, nationality, Arabic heritage, political beliefs, language, and gender.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Senior White House, embassy, and other U.S. officials raised concerns about PA officials’ statements or social media postings that promoted antisemitism or encouraged or glorified violence and used public diplomacy programming and messaging aimed to combat antisemitism and promote nonviolence more broadly in Palestinian society throughout the year. U.S. government officials repeatedly and publicly pointed out that Palestinian officials and party leaders did not consistently condemn individual terrorist attacks nor speak out publicly against members of their institutions, including Fatah, who advocated violence.

U.S. government representatives met with political and civil society leaders to promote tolerance and cooperation to combat religious prejudice. These meetings included discussions of the groups’ concerns about religious tolerance, access to religious sites, respect for clergy, attacks on religious sites and houses of worship, and local Christian leaders’ concerns about ongoing Christian emigration from the occupied territories.

U.S. government representatives met with representatives of a range of religious groups from Jerusalem, the West Bank, and when possible, the Gaza Strip. Engagement included meetings with Orthodox, ultra-Orthodox, and Reform rabbis, as well as representatives of various Jewish institutions, regular contacts with the Greek Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), and Armenian Orthodox patriarchates, and meetings with the Holy See’s Custodian of the Holy Land, leaders of the Anglican and Lutheran Churches, the Syrian Orthodox Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and leaders of evangelical Christian groups, as well as Muslim community leaders.

Senior U.S. officials spoke publicly about the importance of maintaining the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Throughout the year, embassy officials used social media platforms to express U.S. support for tolerance and the importance of openness to members of other religious groups. The embassy also issued public statements condemning attacks on places of worship.

The Department of State and UNRWA in July entered into a Framework for Cooperation on “shared goals and priorities; continued support; monitoring and reporting; and communication and partnership” in the UN agency’s delivery of education, primary health care, relief and social services, and other humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees. The framework noted, “The United States and UNRWA condemn without reserve [sic] all manifestations of religious or racial intolerance, incitement to violence, harassment or violence against persons or communities based on ethnic origin or religious belief, including antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Catholicism, anti-Arabism, or other forms of discrimination or racism against Palestinians, Israelis, or other individuals or communities based on ethnic origin or religious belief.”

Embassy-supported initiatives focused on interreligious dialogue and community development and advocated constructive relationships among Palestinian and Israeli populations. Initiatives included support for the Jerusalem Intercultural Center’s interreligious community economic development program in the Old City, and for the Interfaith Encounter Association’s efforts to bring together three interfaith groups in Jerusalem’s Israeli and Palestinian neighborhoods to meet with U.S. experts, coordinators, and fellow interfaith groups with the aim of transforming attitudes through constructive conversations on each religion’s similarities and differences. Embassy officials advocated for the right of persons from all faiths to practice their religion peacefully while also respecting the beliefs and customs of their neighbors.

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