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State of Israel

Head of state: **Reuven Rivlin**

Head of government: **Benjamin Netanyahu**

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli forces committed unlawful killings of Palestinian civilians, including children, and detained thousands of Palestinians who protested against or otherwise opposed Israel's continuing military occupation, holding hundreds in administrative detention. Torture and other ill-treatment remained rife and were committed with impunity. The authorities continued to promote illegal settlements in the West Bank, and severely restricted Palestinians' freedom of movement, further tightening restrictions amid an escalation of violence from October, which included attacks on Israeli civilians by Palestinians and apparent extrajudicial executions by Israeli forces. Israeli settlers in the West Bank attacked Palestinians and their property with virtual impunity. The Gaza Strip remained under an Israeli military blockade that imposed collective punishment on its inhabitants. The authorities continued to demolish Palestinian homes in the West Bank and inside Israel, particularly in Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab region, forcibly evicting their residents. They also detained and deported thousands of African asylum-seekers, and imprisoned Israeli conscientious objectors.

BACKGROUND

Israeli-Palestinian relations remained tense throughout the year. In January, after Palestine applied to join the ICC and accepted its jurisdiction over crimes committed in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) since June 2014, Israel temporarily ceased paying monthly tax revenues due to the Palestinian authorities. Later in January, the ICC Prosecutor opened a preliminary examination into alleged crimes under international law by Israel and by Palestinian armed groups; Israel condemned the move, but began limited engagement with the ICC Prosecutor in July.

International efforts failed to restart Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The Israeli government continued to support the promotion and expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank,

including East Jerusalem, and took steps to authorize several West Bank settlement outposts that had been established without government permission.

From October there was a significant upsurge in violence in which Palestinians, mostly individuals not affiliated with armed groups, carried out stabbings, shootings, car-ramming and other attacks against Israeli forces and civilians in both Israel and the West Bank, and increased protests against Israel's military occupation. Israeli forces responded to attacks and protests with lethal force. Twenty-one Israeli civilians and one US national were killed by Palestinians during the year, all but four between October and December. Israeli forces killed more than 130 Palestinians between October and December.

Palestinian armed groups in Gaza sporadically fired indiscriminate rockets into southern Israel; no deaths were reported. Israel responded with air strikes on Gaza; one strike in October killed two civilians. Israel also carried out several air strikes and other attacks on sites in Syria.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT – GAZA BLOCKADE AND WEST BANK RESTRICTIONS

Israeli forces maintained their land, sea and air blockade of Gaza, in force since 2007, imposing collective punishment on the territory's 1.8 million inhabitants. Israeli controls on the movement of people and goods into and from Gaza, particularly on essential construction materials, combined with Egypt's closure of the Rafah border crossing and destruction of cross-border tunnels, severely hindered post-conflict reconstruction and essential services and exacerbated poverty and unemployment.

Israeli forces continued to impose a "buffer zone" inside Gaza's border with Israel and used live fire against Palestinians who entered or approached it. They also fired at Palestinian fishermen within or near an "exclusion zone" that Israel maintained along Gaza's coast, killing one and injuring others.

In the West Bank, Israel severely restricted the movement of Palestinians, who were excluded from large areas that had either been designated as military firing zones, or were near the fence/wall constructed by Israel or within illegal settlements, and maintained an array of military checkpoints and bypass roads that restricted Palestinian travel while allowing free movement for Israeli settlers. Israeli forces established new checkpoints and barriers, particularly in East Jerusalem and the Hebron governorate, amid the upsurge in violence from October, subjecting hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to restrictions amounting to collective punishment.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

The authorities detained thousands of Palestinians from the OPT; most were held in prisons inside Israel, in violation of international law. Hundreds were held without charge or trial under renewable administrative detention orders, based on information withheld from them and their lawyers; some engaged in prolonged hunger strikes in protest. Mohammed Allan, a lawyer, went on hunger strike for 65 days to protest against his administrative detention; he was released in November without charge.

The Israeli authorities launched a new clampdown on protests by Palestinians in the OPT amid the escalation in violence from October, arresting more than 2,500 Palestinians, including hundreds of children, and significantly increasing their use of administrative detention. More than 580 Palestinian administrative detainees were held by the end of the year, including at least five children. In addition, several Israeli Jews suspected of planning attacks on Palestinians were held in administrative detention.

Palestinians from the OPT who were charged faced unfair trials in military courts. In December, Palestinian parliamentarian Khalida Jarrar was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment and a fine following a plea bargain made after months of unfair military court proceedings.[1]

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Israeli military and police forces, as well as Israel Security Agency (ISA) personnel, tortured and otherwise ill-treated Palestinian detainees, including children, particularly during arrest and interrogation. Reports of torture increased amid the mass arrests of Palestinians that began in October. Methods included beating with batons, slapping, throttling, prolonged shackling, stress positions, sleep deprivation and threats. Jewish suspects detained in connection with attacks on Palestinians also alleged torture. Impunity for torture was rife. The authorities had received almost 1,000 complaints of torture at the hands of ISA since 2001 but had yet to open any criminal investigations.

In July, Israel's parliament, the Knesset, extended legislation exempting the police and ISA from recording interrogations of Palestinian "security suspects", with government endorsement, contravening a 2013 recommendation of the Turkel Commission (see below). The same month the Knesset approved legislation allowing the authorities to subject detainees on hunger strike to forced feeding, despite opposition from human rights groups and the UN.

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS

Israeli soldiers and police killed at least 124 Palestinians from the OPT in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 22 in the Gaza Strip, and 10 inside Israel during the year. Many of those killed, including children, appeared to be victims of unlawful killings. They included Muhammad Kasba, aged 17, and 15-year-old Laith al-Khalidi, who were shot in the back on 3 and 31 July respectively after throwing stones or petrol bombs at Israeli military checkpoints or vehicles, and Falah Abu Maria, who was shot in the chest on 23 July when Israeli forces raided his home.

Many of the deaths occurred in the last quarter of the year when Israeli police and military forces fatally shot Palestinians who carried out stabbings or other attacks on Israelis, including civilians, or were suspected of intending such attacks, in circumstances where they were not posing an imminent threat to life and could have been apprehended, making the killings unlawful. In some cases, Israeli forces shot dead Palestinians as they lay wounded, or failed to provide timely medical assistance to injured Palestinians.

Extrajudicial executions

Some Palestinians appeared to be victims of extrajudicial executions, including Fadi Alloun, whom Israeli forces shot dead on 4 October in Jerusalem; Dania Ershied, 17, and Sa'ad al-Atrash, whom Israeli forces shot dead in Hebron on 25 and 26 October; and Abdallah Shalaldah, whom Israeli undercover forces killed on 12 November in al-Ahli Hospital in Hebron.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

Israeli forces, including undercover units, used excessive and lethal force against protesters in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, killing dozens, including 43 in the last quarter of the year, and injuring thousands with rubber-coated metal bullets and live ammunition. While many protesters threw rocks or other projectiles, they generally posed no threat to the lives of well-protected Israeli soldiers when they were shot. In September, Israel's security cabinet authorized police to use live ammunition in East Jerusalem. On 9 and 10 October, Israeli forces used live ammunition and rubber-coated metal bullets against Palestinian protesters in border areas of the Gaza Strip, killing nine, including a child, and injuring scores.

FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Israeli military orders prohibiting unauthorized demonstrations in the West Bank were used to repress protests by Palestinians and jail activists, including human rights defender Murad Shtewi, who was released in January after serving a nine-and-a-half-month sentence under Military Order 101. On numerous occasions, journalists covering protests and other developments in the West Bank were assaulted or shot by Israeli police and military forces.

The authorities also increased restrictions on Palestinian citizens inside Israel, banning the northern branch of the Islamic Movement and closing 17 NGOs associated with it in November, and arresting more than 250 demonstrators and protest organizers between October and December.

In September, Israeli whistle-blower Mordechai Vanunu was sentenced to one week's house arrest following an interview with Israel's Channel 2. He continued to be banned from travelling abroad and communicating electronically with foreign nationals throughout the year.

HOUSING RIGHTS – FORCED EVICTIONS AND DEMOLITIONS

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli forces demolished at least 510 Palestinian homes and other structures built without Israeli permits, which are virtually impossible to obtain, forcibly evicting more than 610 people. They also forcibly evicted more than 120 people by demolishing or making uninhabitable 19 family homes of Palestinians who carried out attacks on Israelis. In Area C of the West Bank, under full Israeli control, dozens of Bedouin and herding communities continued to face forcible relocation.

The authorities also demolished scores of Palestinian homes inside Israel that they said were built without permits, mostly in Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab region. Many of the villages were officially "unrecognized". In May, the Supreme Court approved the planned demolition of the "unrecognized" village of Um al-Heiran and the eviction of its Bedouin residents to construct a new Jewish town. In November the government approved the establishment of five new Jewish communities in the region, including two on the sites of existing Bedouin villages.

SETTLER VIOLENCE

Israelis living in illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank frequently attacked Palestinian civilians and their property, sometimes in the presence of Israeli soldiers and police who failed to intervene. A settler arson attack on the Dawabsheh family home in the village of Duma, near Nablus, on 31 July killed 18-month-old Ali and his parents Sa'ad and Riham, and critically injured his four-year-old brother Ahmad. The incident highlighted an increase in settler attacks inside Palestinian communities, leaving many Palestinians feeling unsafe in their homes. Suspects were subsequently arrested, and several remained in detention at the end of the year.

An Israeli civilian shot and killed Fadel al-Qawasmeh in close proximity to Israeli soldiers in the Old City of Hebron on 17 October; the Israeli man was not arrested at the scene and there were no indications he would be prosecuted.

Although two of the three Israelis charged with the July 2014 abduction and killing of Palestinian teenager Muhammad Abu Khdeir were convicted in November and due to be sentenced in January 2016, in most cases the Israeli police failed to investigate alleged crimes by settlers effectively and prosecute suspects, leading to continued impunity for settler violence.

IMPUNITY

In June the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict published its report, documenting war crimes by Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups during the 50-day conflict and calling for accountability. Israel rejected the UN findings and continued its military investigations, but they were not independent and failed to deliver justice. Israeli military authorities opened investigations into deaths of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank, but these investigations were similarly flawed, and only one case from 2013 led to an indictment for "negligent use of a firearm", following lengthy delays and an appeal to Israel's High Court.

In September, a government committee released its review of the Turkel Commission's recommendations of 2013 on Israel's investigation systems and their compliance with international law. It side-stepped some recommendations, such as making war crimes offences under national law, and failed to define practical steps or budgets necessary to implement others.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

There were new reports of violence against women, particularly within Palestinian communities in Israel. According to activists, at least 18 women were murdered in Israel, mostly by partners or family members; some were killed after seeking police protection.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

The authorities continued to deny asylum-seekers, over 90% of whom were from Eritrea and Sudan, access to a fair refugee status determination process. More than 4,200 were held at the Holot detention facility and Saharonim Prison in the Negev/Naqab desert at the end of the year.

In August, the High Court of Justice ruled that provisions of a December 2014 amendment to the Prevention of Infiltration Law allowing the authorities to detain asylum-seekers at Holot for 20 months were disproportionate, and ordered the government to revise the law and release those who had been held at the facility for more than a year. Around 1,200 out of approximately 1,800 asylum-seekers were subsequently released from Holot, but they were arbitrarily banned from the cities of Tel Aviv and Eilat. Thousands of others were summoned to Holot under expanded detention criteria, and the numbers detained at the facility reached an all-time high. In November the government introduced a new draft amendment under which asylum-seekers would be detained at Holot for a year, extendable by an additional six months.

Only a handful of the thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese nationals who had applied for asylum by the end of the year were granted asylum, and the authorities continued to pressure many, including detainees at Holot, to leave Israel "voluntarily". By the end of November, more than 2,900 asylum-seekers had accepted such "voluntary return". In November, a district court upheld a government decision announced in March to deport some of the 45,000 asylum-seekers still in the country without their consent to Rwanda and Uganda or detain them indefinitely at Saharonim prison. The government refused to release details on reported agreements with Rwanda and Uganda, or any guarantees that those deported, "voluntarily" or otherwise, would not subsequently be transferred to their home countries, violating the prohibition of *refoulement*.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

At least four conscientious objectors were imprisoned. They included Edo Ramon, imprisoned repeatedly from March for refusing to serve in the Israeli military.

[1] Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories: Palestinian parliamentarian sentenced: Khalida Jarrar (MDE 15/3031/2015)

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