



Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - The State of Israel and The Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs)

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We remained seriously concerned about the human rights situation in Israel and the OPTs in 2015. We were concerned by the Israeli government's violation of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation of the OPTs. We also had concerns about human rights infringements by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and grave concerns over those by Hamas in Gaza.

There was a marked increase in violence from October 2015 onwards, with attacks on Israelis, and clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces. This upsurge was characterised by uncoordinated random stabbing attacks, which the PA failed to condemn publicly. On 9 October, the Foreign Secretary issued a statement condemning the violence. Some of the measures Israel introduced in response (including punitive house demolitions, and restrictions on movement and access) exacerbated existing human rights concerns. Access to the Holy Sites in Jerusalem was restricted on several occasions. We also had concerns about the PA's approach to addressing the violence. For example, in September, PA security forces used excessive force to disperse a peaceful rally in Bethlehem.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian structures resulted in the displacement of at least 400 Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The UK was deeply concerned by advancement of existing settlement plans and "legalisation" of existing settlement units. We continued to condemn publicly and privately settlement expansion as illegal under international law. We also continued to express our concern over settler violence; for instance, on 31 July, FCO Minister for the Middle East, Tobias Ellwood, condemned the arson attack in Duma that caused the death of three Palestinians, including a small child.

The number of Palestinians Israel held in administrative detention increased, with an average of 417 at any one time. We continued to seek improvements in the treatment of Palestinians in detention, notably children. The Israeli authorities took some positive steps, including the use of summonses in place of night-time arrests. We were also concerned by continued reports of mistreatment towards detainees by the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank.

We continued to have concerns about breaches of human rights under Hamas, the de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip. Nine death sentences were passed for criminal acts; journalists were reportedly arrested and prevented from operating; and Gazan police used force to disperse peaceful demonstrations.

We remained deeply concerned that Hamas and other militants were re-arming, re-building tunnels, and running training camps.

In 2016, we will support genuine efforts towards a negotiated solution to the conflict. We will encourage the PA to make progress on human rights, including on incitement. We will continue to oppose any aspects of the Israeli occupation that violate human rights and international law, including demolitions and settlement construction. We will press for further improvement in the treatment of child detainees; maintenance of the status quo at al aram ash Shar f/Temple Mount; and reconstruction and improved rights of movement and access within Gaza.