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World Report 2024 - Israel and Palestine

In 2023, civilians were targeted, attacked, and killed at a [unprecedented](#) scale in the recent history of Israel and Palestine.

On October 7, Hamas-led gunmen from the Gaza Strip launched an attack in southern Israel, [deliberately killing civilians](#), firing into crowds, gunning people down in their homes, and taking hostages back to Gaza, including older people and children, acts that amount to war crimes. [According to Israeli authorities](#), more than 1,200 people, most of them civilians, have been killed since October 7 and 133 remained held hostage, as of December 15.

Shortly thereafter, Israeli authorities [cut off essential services](#), including water and electricity, to Gaza's population and [blocked the entry](#) of all but a trickle of fuel and critical humanitarian aid, acts of collective punishment that amount to war crimes and were ongoing at time of writing. Israeli air strikes incessantly pounded Gaza, hitting [schools](#) and [hospitals](#) and reducing large parts of neighborhoods to rubble, including in attacks that were apparently [unlawful](#). Israeli forces also unlawfully [used white phosphorous](#) in densely populated areas. They ordered [the evacuation](#) of all people from northern Gaza and displaced [an estimated](#) 85 percent of Gaza's population—1.9 million people—as of December 11. More than 18,700 Palestinians, most of them civilians, including more than [7,800 children](#), were [killed](#) between October 7 and December 12, according to Gaza authorities.

The blockade exacerbated the humanitarian situation stemming from Israel's 16-year-long sweeping restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza. The prolonged closure, as well as Egyptian restrictions on its border with Gaza, has deprived the 2.2 million Palestinians in Gaza, with rare exceptions, of their right to freedom of

movement and [opportunities to better their lives](#); severely limited their access to electricity, health care, and water; and devastated the economy.

In the West Bank, between the start of 2023 and December 12, Israeli forces had killed 464 Palestinians, including 109 children, according to the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), more than twice as many as in any other year since 2005, when the UN began systematically recording fatalities. This included [unlawful killings](#) stemming from Israel's regular use of excessive lethal force and some cases of [extrajudicial executions](#).

Israeli authorities also held [2,873 Palestinians](#) in administrative detention, without charge or trial based on secret information, as of December 1, according to Israeli Prison Services figures. This figure marks a [three-decade high](#), according to the Israeli human rights group HaMoked.

During the first half of 2023, the Israeli government [approved building](#) 12,855 new housing units in settlements in the occupied West Bank. This is the highest number the Israeli group Peace Now, which has systematically tracked plans since 2012, has ever recorded. The transfer of civilians into occupied territory is a war crime.

During the first eight months of 2023, incidents of settler violence against Palestinians and their property reached their [highest daily average](#) since the UN started recording this data in 2006: an average of three incidents per day as compared to two per day in 2022 and one in 2021. This included rampages by mobs of settler in Huwara and [Turmus Ayya](#). That rate increased to over [five incidents](#) per day after October 7.

Prominent Palestinian civil society organizations [remain outlawed](#) as “terrorist” and “illegal” organizations. Israeli forces raided their offices in August 2022.

Israeli authorities' repression of Palestinians, undertaken as part of a policy to maintain the domination of Jewish Israelis over Palestinians, amount to the crimes against humanity [of apartheid and persecution](#).

Gaza Strip

Amid Israeli intense military operations since October 7, more than 46,000 housing units have been destroyed and 234,000 others damaged, accounting for 60 percent of the housing stock in Gaza, as of November 24, according to [aid organizations](#). At least 342 schools have been damaged, according to [OCHA](#), and 187 “attacks on health care” were carried out, damaging 24 hospitals, according to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#).

Israeli air strikes and the blockade caused the [majority of hospitals](#) to cease operating. The lack of electricity and fuel forced wastewater, desalination facilities, and bakeries to shut down and [contributed](#) to telecommunications blackouts. The lack of water created a [public health crisis](#). While some aid trucks began entering Gaza on October 21, with even more entering during a multiday ceasefire that began on November 24, the aid fell short of meeting the needs of Gaza's population.

Israel's order to evacuate northern Gaza did not take into the account the needs of [older people](#), [people with disabilities](#), and patients, many of whom are unable to leave. The move risks forced displacement, a war crime.

A prior round of hostilities in May, featuring Israeli strikes on Gaza and rocket attacks on Israel by Palestinian armed groups in Gaza, left [at least](#) 33 Palestinians in Gaza, including at least 12 civilians, and 2 civilians in Israel dead, according to [OCHA](#).

Israeli Closure Policy

Since 2007, Israeli authorities have blocked most of Gaza's population from traveling through the Erez Crossing, the only passenger crossing from Gaza into Israel through which Palestinians can travel to the West Bank and abroad. Israeli authorities often justify the closure, which came after Hamas seized political control over Gaza from the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA) in June 2007, on security grounds. However, the closure policy is not based on an individualized assessment of security risk; a generalized travel ban applies to all except those whom Israeli authorities deem as presenting "exceptional humanitarian circumstances," mostly people needing vital medical treatment and their companions, as well as prominent businesspeople.

Even those [seeking urgent medical care](#) outside of Gaza at times face denials or delays in approvals. WHO [reported](#) that 839 Palestinians in Gaza died between 2008 and 2021 while waiting for a response to their permit requests.

During the first eight months of 2023, an average of 1,653 Palestinians in Gaza exited via Erez daily, according to the Israeli rights group Gisha. This marked an increase over previous years, largely driven by work permits, but remains less than 7 percent of the daily average of more than 24,000 before the beginning of the Second Intifada, or Palestinian uprising, in September 2000.

Gaza's exports during the first eight months of 2023, mostly produce destined for the West Bank and Israel, averaged 607 truckloads per month, less than the monthly average of 1,064 truckloads prior to the June 2007 tightening of the closure, according to Gisha. Authorities

severely restricted the entry of construction materials and other items they deemed “dual-use” materials that could also be used for military purposes. The list of such items also includes X-ray and communications equipment, spare parts and batteries for assistive devices for people with disabilities, and other vital civilian items.

Since October 7 and until time of writing, Israeli authorities [sealed its crossings](#) into Gaza, blocking the entry of people and goods, including residents in need of urgent medical care, from leaving Gaza via Erez. Israeli authorities have regularly resorted to such measures, which target civilians and amount to [unlawful collective punishment](#).

The closure limits access to basic services. Between January and September 2023, families in Gaza were without centrally provided electricity for an average of [13 hours per day](#), according to OCHA. Chronic prolonged power outages encumber many aspects of everyday life, including heating, cooling, sewage treatment, health care, and business. The outages imposed particular hardships on people with disabilities, who rely on light to communicate using sign language or equipment powered by electricity to move, such as elevators or electric wheelchairs. More than 96 percent of groundwater in Gaza, its only remaining natural water source, is “unfit for human consumption,” according to the [Palestinian Water Authority](#) and [OCHA](#). This leaves most Gaza residents reliant on desalination and water coming via Israel, which have been disrupted amid the hostilities. Before October 7, [about 80 percent](#) of Gaza’s residents relied on humanitarian aid, according to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Egypt also restricts the movement of people and goods via its Rafah crossing with Gaza, at times fully sealing the crossing. In the first eight months of 2023, an average of 27,975 Palestinians crossed monthly in both directions, less than the monthly average of over 40,000 before the 2013 military coup in Egypt, according to Gisha.

Abuses by Hamas and Palestinian Armed Groups

Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups on October 7 deliberately killed civilians and committed a range of other abuses, including taking civilians hostage, and launched thousands of indiscriminate rockets at Israeli communities, all of which are war crimes. During the October 7 attacks, Hamas-led fighters attacked the “Supernova Sukkot Gathering” outdoor music festival, killing at least 260 people, according to the Israeli rescue service, and invaded homes. Armed groups [threatened to execute](#) hostages. They released some of the hostages in late November in exchange for the release by Israel of Palestinian prisoners, as part of a short-term ceasefire agreement.

Human Rights Watch investigated an October 17 explosion at the al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City, which caused scores of casualties, and found that it resulted from an apparent rocket-propelled munition, such as those commonly used by Palestinian armed groups.

In June 2022 and January 2023, Hamas authorities published footage that appeared to show Avera Mangistu and Hisham al-Sayed, Israeli civilians with psychosocial disabilities that they have apparently held for more than eight years after the two men entered Gaza. Their incommunicado detention is [unlawful](#).

Courts in Gaza had sentenced [203 people to death since June 2007](#) when Hamas authorities took control in Gaza, including [14 people](#) between January and September 2023, according to Gaza-based organizations Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) and al-Mezan. Hamas authorities have carried out 33 executions since June 2007 for common criminal offenses and “collaboration” with Israel; none occurred during the first nine months of 2023.

Hamas authorities [forcibly dispersed](#) protesters during the summer “We Want to Live” demonstrations against difficult living conditions, [roughing up](#) and [detaining](#) some demonstrators and journalists, according to PCHR and al-Mezan. The Palestinian statutory watchdog, the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), received 56 complaints of arbitrary arrests and 81 complaints of torture and ill-treatment against Hamas authorities between January and August 2023.

Hamas authorities have blocked some women from traveling pursuant to regulations issued in February 2021 that allow male guardians to apply to courts to block unmarried women from leaving Gaza when such travel will cause “absolute harm,” a broad term that allows men to restrict women’s travel at will. In January, Hamas authorities tracked down and [forcibly returned](#) two women, Wisam and Fatma al-Tawil, to their father, whom they had previously fled from after reporting severe domestic violence, including death threats.

West Bank

Israel’s repression of Palestinians in the West Bank intensified during 2023, especially after October 7.

Israeli Use of Force

Israeli forces carried out several large-scale raids in 2023, particularly targeting the city of Nablus and Jenin refugee camp. The latter on July 3-4 was the scene of the largest and deadliest operation in the West Bank since 2005, resulting in the killing of 12 Palestinians, including 4 children,

the temporary displacement of 3,500 people, and damage to 460 housing units, according to [OCHA](#).

The more than 460 killed in 2023—at least an 18-year-high—included Palestinians who attacked Israelis or threw Molotov cocktails or stones at Israeli forces, [bystanders](#), those [helping the wounded](#), and others [uninvolved](#) in the fighting. OCHA [reported](#) that more than half the fatalities since October 7 took place during Israeli operations that did not involve armed clashes.

Israeli settlers killed [15 Palestinians](#), as of December 7, according to OCHA. Between October 7 and November 28, settlers attacked 93 Palestinian communities, the Israeli human rights group Yesh Din [found](#).

Israeli authorities have rarely held accountable security forces who used excessive force or settlers who attacked Palestinians. [Less than 1 percent](#) of complaints of abuses by Israeli forces filed by Palestinians in the West Bank between 2017 and 2021 and [7 percent of complaints](#) of settler violence between 2005 and 2022 led to indictments, according to Yesh Din. Even in the settler rampage of Huwara, Israeli authorities [released most](#) of the 17 men arrested on suspicion of involvement within days of their arrest. In July, the Jerusalem District Court [acquitted](#) the officer who in Jerusalem in 2020 [killed Eyad al-Hallaq](#), a 32-year-old unarmed Palestinian man with autism who had threatened no one. The court called the fatal shooting an “honest mistake.”

Unchecked settler violence and intimidation [continues](#). According to [OCHA](#), 1,105 Palestinians, including 4 entire communities, displaced since the beginning of 2022 cite settler violence and the prevention of access to grazing lands by settlers as the primary reason that they were forced to leave their homes. Between October 7 and December 13, 1,257 people have been [displaced](#).

Palestinian Attacks

As of November 30, Palestinians killed 24 Israeli civilians during fatal attacks in the West Bank, a more than 15-year-high, [according to OCHA](#). This included an incident in January in which a Palestinian killed seven civilians, including a child, in the Israeli settlement of Neve Yaakov in occupied East Jerusalem. Hamas praised many of the attacks.

Israeli Detention, Torture, and Ill-Treatment of Palestinians

Israeli authorities apply Israeli civil law to settlers but govern West Bank Palestinians under harsh military law. In so doing, they deny them basic due process and try them in military courts with a [nearly 100 percent conviction rate](#) against Palestinians.

As of December 1, Israel [held 7,677 Palestinians](#) in custody for “security” offenses, according to Israeli Prison Services figures. This includes 200 Palestinian children, as of November 6, according to the [Palestinian prisoner rights group Addameer](#). Israel incarcerates many Palestinians from the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) inside Israel, complicating family visits and violating international humanitarian law’s prohibition against their transfer outside occupied territory.

In May, Khader Adnan, 45, died in his prison cell on the 86th day of his hunger strike against Israeli detention practices. Adnan spent about eight years detained, much of it in administrative detention, and [launched previous months-long hunger strikes](#) to challenge Israeli repression.

[More than 1,400 complaints](#) of torture, including painful shackling, sleep deprivation, and exposure to extreme temperatures, committed by the Shabak (the Israel Security Agency) in Israel and the OPT have been filed with Israel’s Justice Ministry since 2001, resulting in three criminal investigations and no indictments, according to the Israeli rights group the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel. The group Military Court Watch [reported that](#) in 26 cases of detention of Palestinian children they documented in 2023, 69 percent said they were physically abused in detention by Israeli forces and 73 percent were strip searched.

Palestinian rights groups have also reported a deterioration in the conditions of Palestinian prisoners, including [violent raids, retaliatory prison transfers and isolation of prisoners, less access to running water and bread](#), and [fewer family visits](#). Conditions [worsened](#) after October 7.

Settlements and Home Demolitions

Israeli authorities provide security, infrastructure, and services to more than 710,000 settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

According [to OCHA](#), Israeli authorities demolished 1,004 Palestinian homes and other structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in 2023 as of December 11, displacing 1,870 people, which surpasses 2022 figures. Most buildings were demolished for lacking building permits, which authorities make nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain in these areas.

The difficulty in obtaining Israeli building permits in East Jerusalem and the 60 percent of the West Bank under Israel’s exclusive control (Area C) has driven Palestinians to build structures that are at constant risk of demolition or confiscation for being unauthorized, including dozens of schools. Entire Palestinian communities in areas like the South Hebron Hills find themselves at high risk of displacement. International law

prohibits an occupying power from destroying property unless “absolutely necessary” for “military operations.”

Authorities also [sealed the family homes](#) of Palestinians suspected of attacking Israelis, acts of unlawful collective punishment.

In July, Israeli police [forcibly evicted](#) two [older Palestinians](#), Nora Ghaith, 68, and Mustafa Sub-Laban, 72, from their long-time family home in the Old City of occupied East Jerusalem to make way for Israeli settlers after the Israeli Supreme Court in March denied their final appeal after a decades-long legal battle. They did so under [a discriminatory law](#) that allows settler organizations to pursue claims for land they claim Jews owned in East Jerusalem before 1948, a strategy they have particularly used in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan. Palestinians are meanwhile barred under Israeli law from reclaiming property they owned in what became Israel and from which they fled or were expelled in 1948.

Freedom of Movement

Israeli authorities continued to require Palestinian ID holders, with rare exceptions, to hold difficult-to-obtain, time-limited permits to enter Israel and large parts of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. B'Tselem [describes this](#) as “an arbitrary, entirely non-transparent bureaucratic system” where “many applications are denied without explanation, with no real avenue for appeal.”

As of early this year, Israeli authorities maintained [645 checkpoints and other permanent obstacles](#) within the West Bank, according to OCHA, in addition to ad hoc “flying” checkpoints. Israeli forces routinely turn back or delay and humiliate Palestinians at checkpoints without explanation while permitting largely unfettered movement to Israeli settlers.

Israel continued construction of the separation barrier. Authorities began building the barrier more than two decades ago, ostensibly for security reasons, but [85 percent](#) of it, according to OCHA, falls within the West Bank rather than along the Green Line separating Israeli from Palestinian territory. The barrier cuts off thousands of Palestinians from their agricultural lands, isolates [11,000 Palestinians](#) who live on the western side of the barrier but are not allowed to travel to Israel and whose ability to cross the barrier to access their property and basic services are highly restricted. When complete, [9 percent](#) of the West Bank will be isolated beyond the separation barrier.

Abuses by the Palestinian Authority

The State of Palestine [published](#) the Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol in the Palestinian Official Gazette in September, effectively making it Palestinian law. Also in September, the UN

Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture [visited](#) places of detention in the West Bank. However, the PA continued its systematic practice of arbitrarily detaining opponents and critics, including students. Lawyers for Justice, a group that represents Palestinians detained by the PA, documented 726 Palestinians they determined were detained arbitrarily between January and August 17, generally for periods of days or a few weeks. Between January and August 2023, the Palestinian statutory watchdog ICHR received 162 complaints of arbitrary arrests, 86 complaints of torture and ill-treatment, and 13 complaints of detention without trial or charge pursuant to orders from a regional governor against the PA.

In August, the PA registered Lawyers for Justice after [blocking its registration](#) for months.

Personal status laws for both Muslims and Christians discriminate against women, including in relation to marriage, divorce, custody of children, and inheritance. Palestine has no comprehensive domestic violence law. The PA has long been considering a draft family protection law, but women's rights groups have raised concerns that it does not go far enough to prevent abuse and protect survivors.

Israel

For much of the year, Israelis took to the streets in [unprecedented](#) weekly protests across the country to oppose the government's plan to weaken judicial independence. In July, the government implemented part of its plan when the Knesset passed a law that bars the Supreme Court from assessing the "reasonableness" of government decisions. The Supreme Court is reviewing the law in response to petitions challenging it.

The Knesset [renewed in March](#) a temporary order that bars, with few exceptions, the granting of long-term legal status inside Israel to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza who marry Israeli citizens or residents. Such a restriction, which has been in place since 2003, does not exist for individuals of virtually any other nationality who marry Israeli citizens or residents.

In February, the Knesset [passed a law](#), now in effect, that authorizes the revocation of citizenship or permanent residency of Palestinians who commit a "terrorist act" and receive compensation from the PA for that act and their consequent deportation to the West Bank.

In September, Netanyahu called for deporting African asylum seekers involved in violent clashes in Tel Aviv. Israeli authorities continued to systematically deny the asylum claims of African—largely Eritrean, Ethiopian and Sudanese—asylum seekers in the country, [estimated by the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants](#) to number 34,500, while allowing in

tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees. Over the years, the government has imposed restrictions on African asylum seekers' movement, work permits, and access to health care and to education to pressure asylum seekers to leave.

Key International Actors

Many states condemned the Hamas-led October 7 attacks. Far fewer, though, condemned Israeli authorities' grave abuses. The United States and other Western countries provided arms or military support to Israel, while other countries have provided military aid to Palestinian armed groups, which, in the face of ongoing grave abuses, risk making them complicit in war crimes.

President Joe Biden and other US officials traveled to Israel several times to urge civilian protection and to lobby Israeli officials to allow aid into Gaza, although at time of writing, the United States had not conditioned its military support to Israel on abiding by those requests. After October 7, the Biden administration [requested](#) US\$14.3 billion for further arms to Israel in addition to the \$3.8 billion in US military aid Israel receives annually. The US also either [transferred or announced](#) it is planning to transfer Small Diameter Bombs, Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) guidance kits, 155mm artillery shells, and [1 million rounds of ammunition](#), among other weapons. However, the US halted small arms shipments out of concern that they could be transferred to settlers.

In September, the [US admitted Israel](#) into its visa-waiver program, allowing Israeli citizens visa-free entry, despite Israel [not fully eliminating discrimination](#) against US nationals of Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim origin when they travel to Israel and the OPT.

In December, the US and the United Kingdom issued travel bans against violent settlers in the West Bank.

In mid-October, the US vetoed a resolution calling for humanitarian pauses in Gaza, but it abstained on a similar resolution in November. Like the resolution the US vetoed, the one the UN Security Council adopted called for Israel and Palestinian armed groups to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law. It was the council's first adopted resolution on Israel and Palestine since 2016. But again in December, the US vetoed a Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups. The General Assembly passed two resolutions calling for a ceasefire, one in October and the other in December.

Divisions among European Union member states prevented the bloc from reaching the unanimity necessary to adopt strong positions and concrete measures in response to Israeli abuses. This was particularly visible after

October 7, including through EU member states' diverging votes at the UN. While condemning Hamas, EU states could not unanimously agree on calling out Israel's war crimes. The EU high representative, Josep Borrell, proposed a package of targeted sanctions for settlers' abuses in the West Bank, but prospects for its adoption remained slim in light of the unanimity requirement.

The UN high commissioner for human rights in June updated the database of businesses operating in settlements. In July, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution to ensure funding for the continued updating of the database.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor's Palestine investigation remained ongoing. The prosecutor spoke from the Rafah Crossing and visited Israel and Palestine amid the hostilities. He signaled the ICC's ongoing mandate to the parties and made clear that any serious crimes committed in the current hostilities fall within the court's mandate.

In July, 54 states and 3 intergovernmental organizations made submissions to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the advisory opinion the UN General Assembly requested in December 2022 on the legal status of Israel's prolonged occupation and legal consequences of its abuses against Palestinians. Public hearings on the request for an advisory opinion are scheduled to open at the ICJ on February 19, 2024.

In December, South Africa [filed](#) a case at the International Court of Justice arguing that Israel violated its obligations under the 1948 Genocide Convention in the context of its military operations in Gaza. It called on the World Court to urgently issue provisional measures to protect the Palestinian people and to ensure Israel's compliance with the Convention. Public hearings on the matter were scheduled for January 11 and 12, 2024.

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