



State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2015 - Israel/Palestine

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For the marginalized and besieged communities of Israel and the State of Palestine, 2014 was the most deadly year in recent history. Over a seven-week period in July and August, Israel's aerial and ground assault against militant groups in the occupied and blockaded Gaza Strip, known as Operation Protective Edge, resulted in the deaths of at least 1,486 Palestinian civilians, including 513 children, and the displacement during the hostilities of around 500,000 people. This was the latest episode in a series of violent escalations in recent years, set against a backdrop defined by unstable progress towards the reconciliation of the two main Palestinian factions, another failed round of US-convened peace talks and unprecedented Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The unstable political situation led to rising tensions in the West Bank at the start of the summer, triggered in part by the abduction of three Israeli teenagers who, it later transpired, had been murdered by two members of Hamas. In the wake of their disappearance, Israeli military shot and killed five Palestinians, and detained at least 150 more during raids on Palestinian towns and villages in search of the missing boys – actions condemned by Human Rights Watch (HRW) as amounting to 'collective punishment' of the Palestinian population.

Incitement to violence and racist language on social media directed at the Arab minority in Israel also rose dramatically during Operation Protective Edge, as did incidents of abusive graffiti and attacks on private property. Arabs were also harassed and physically attacked by ultra-nationalist gangs during demonstrations against Operation Protective Edge. The hostile atmosphere was aggravated by provocative statements from public figures and by attempts to pass legislation undermining the rights of the Arab minority. This was exemplified by the endorsement of the so-called 'nation-state bill' by a majority vote in the Israeli cabinet in November. If enacted, the bill will limit collective rights to Jewish citizens of the country and could pave the way for other discriminatory policies against non-Jewish populations.

Israeli civilians were also attacked by militants on a number of occasions during the year. Besides the abduction of the three Israeli teenagers, there were several other incidents, including two in which Palestinian drivers targeted Israeli pedestrians at Jerusalem light rail stations located in Palestinian neighbourhoods. The series of attacks against Israeli civilians culminated in an armed assault in November by two Palestinians on a West Jerusalem synagogue, killing five civilians and injuring six others. Israeli authorities responded by conducting large-scale arrests, including

hundreds of children, and reinstating their policy of demolishing the homes of the families of the Palestinians involved. This was again condemned by HRW as tantamount to collective punishment and a policy liable to stoke the cycle of violence.

The Israeli army was also criticized for its excessive use of force in response to demonstrations by Palestinians throughout the year. This included, in December, the death of Ziad Abu Ein, a senior minister in the Palestinian Authority, following an assault by an Israeli soldier during a peaceful protest against illegal Israeli settlements. On the same day, during protests against Abu Ein's killing, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy was seriously wounded in Jalazone Refugee Camp by a gunshot to the head fired by Israeli security personnel. The UN reported that a total of 56 Palestinians had been killed during incidents with Israel's security forces in the West Bank during 2014, double the number for 2013, and 5,868 injured – the highest annual figure since records began in 2005. Almost half of these injuries were recorded in Jerusalem, where tensions were stoked by the murder of a 16-year-old Palestinian by Israeli settlers in retaliation for the murder of the three Israeli teenagers. Israel's suppression of Palestinian protests and decision to limit access for Muslims to the city's holy sites led to an increased number of violent clashes between Palestinian youth and the Israeli military.

House demolitions in general also increased to unprecedented levels in 2014, with more than 1,200 people displaced in the West Bank, the highest figure recorded by the UN since it began tracking incidents in 2008. A large number of these concern buildings and shelters erected by Palestinian communities in land assigned under the 1993 Oslo Accords as Area C, where Israel has control over law enforcement, planning and construction. Area C makes up over 60 per cent of the West Bank, with the remainder divided and designated either as Area A or Area B, which nominally fall under full and partial Palestinian administration respectively. The 300,000 Palestinian residents of Area C are especially vulnerable to displacement due to discriminatory planning policies and the threat of violence from groups of religious and nationalist extremists living in neighbouring Israeli settlements. Large swathes of Area C have been designated as nature reserves or closed military areas, and are therefore off-limits for Palestinian construction. Additionally, over 6,000 Palestinians live in 38 communities located within Israeli-designated 'firing zones' allocated for military training.

While only 1 per cent of Area C is slated for Palestinian development, Israeli settlements continue to expand in violation of international law. There are currently 340,000 Israelis living in these illegal settlements in Area C and that number is set to rise. The Israeli NGO PeaceNow has reported that during the peace talks that spanned August 2013 to March 2014 the Israeli government promoted plans and tenders for at least 13,851 housing units in the settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – a significant increase on the same period from the previous year. Settlement growth comes at the expense of living standards for Palestinians throughout the West Bank, and communities in Area C are particularly vulnerable to the neglectful provision of public services and infrastructure, specifically electricity, water and sewerage. According to the UN, more than 70 per cent of these communities are not connected to the water network and depend on tankered water, at significantly greater expense. Daily water consumption in some areas is as little as 20 litres per capita, just a fifth of the World Health Organization's recommended minimum.

At even greater risk of displacement due to Israel's settlement expansion policies are the Bedouin communities of the West Bank. There are around 7,000 Palestinian Bedouins and herders, some 60 per cent of them children, living in 46 small residential areas in Area C. Over 3,600 have been displaced since 2008. In September, Israel published plans to move six communities from the vicinities of Jericho, Ramallah and Jerusalem. Over a dozen others are also under threat of displacement and have endured months of eviction orders, as well as the destruction of their homes and livelihood structures. The designated 'relocation' sites include three new townships to

be developed in Area C. As there is limited grazing land at the proposed sites, the resettlement will likely threaten the traditional livelihoods and culture. These communities have been specifically targeted as they are in an area designated for the expansion of Israeli settlements as part of the so-called E1 Plan. This controversial proposal, which has been widely condemned by the UN and rights groups for violating international humanitarian law, would see the construction of thousands of residential and commercial units linking settlements in East Jerusalem to the large Ma'ale Adumim settlement, creating a bloc spanning much of the central West Bank.

Israel's barrier has intensified the separation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, incorporating 13 checkpoints through which Palestinian residents in the remainder of the Palestine require special permits to cross. The barrier's circuitous route has been planned as such in order to include the large majority of Israeli settlements. As a result, some Palestinian communities such as Kafr 'Aqab and Shu'fat refugee camp are now situated within the Jerusalem municipal boundary, on the West Bank side of the barrier, and therefore required to pass through checkpoints to access health care and other services. On the other hand, an estimated 1,400 West Bank residents are now caught on the Jerusalem side of the barrier, but still denied residency rights, employment or services in East Jerusalem.

The barrier is not the only example of divisive Israeli infrastructure. The light rail has also been a target of Palestinian anger and resentment since its completion in 2011, reflected in multiple attacks against rail commuters during the year. Running from West Jerusalem to the Israeli settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev on the eastern edge of the municipality, the light rail was initially portrayed by Israel's leadership as a symbol of coexistence and unity. However, its importance to the projection of Israeli sovereignty over the entirety of Jerusalem has since been explicitly stated by public figures such as the city's mayor Nir Barkat. For Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, the light rail has been seen as another expression of the occupation, and a 2010 resolution from the UN Human Rights Council declared its route to be in clear violation of international law.

The lack of government investment in East Jerusalem has resulted in significant discrimination and overcrowding for Palestinian residents. Besides neglected municipal services such as rubbish collection and lighting, there is a severe shortage of public buildings and facilities like schools or playgrounds. The June announcement of a five-year plan for East Jerusalem was only a partial step forward: NIS200 million will be invested in infrastructure, education, welfare and employment, while NIS95.4 million will go towards security. And commentators noted that the government's express intention is to strengthen its control over East Jerusalem, rather than to secure the rights of Palestinians living there.

In densely populated Gaza, on the other hand, restrictions on the importing of construction materials imposed by blockade, enforced by both Israel and Egypt, make any systematic planning very difficult. To make matters worse, 118,000 housing units were destroyed or damaged during Operation Protective Edge in addition to schools, hospitals and the enclave's sole power plant. Their repair will depend on all parties upholding the terms of the ceasefire and implementing the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism which has since been set in place. Ultimately, Israel will have the final say about what materials will be allowed into Gaza and who will supply them. However, as HRW has reported, Israel's policy in the past has been to impose blanket restrictions 'unconnected or disproportionate to security considerations [which] unnecessarily harm people's access to food, water, education, and other fundamental rights in Gaza'.

Israel has also employed discriminatory planning policies to marginalize minorities within its own borders. Despite the welcome freezing towards the end of 2013 of the legislative process behind the Praver plan to forcibly remove 70,000 Bedouin living in unrecognized villages in the Negev (*Naqab* in Arabic), civil rights groups fear that they are still in danger of displacement due to the appropriation of large parts of their land. Amnesty International reports that the enactment of the

Regional Master Plan for the Be'er Sheva Metropolitan Area, approved in August 2012 despite outstanding objections by the Bedouin community, would result in the eviction and destruction of most of the 35 unrecognized villages. In the meantime, the Bedouin and herding communities are prone to house demolitions because of the obstacles to obtaining building permits.

Other discriminated communities include Ethiopian Israelis and Mizrahim, who are Jews from Arab countries. A lack of investment or policies directed at improving social cohesion in urban areas, such as south Tel Aviv, where large numbers from these groups reside, has resulted in poor living conditions, high levels of crime and social unrest. This has been exacerbated by Israel's policy towards African migrants and asylum seekers, who are assigned to social housing in neglected neighbourhoods that lack the necessary welfare services, infrastructure or personal safety measures to cater for the increased population.

More broadly, Arab minorities in Israel have been subjected to policies resulting in significant housing inequality. The most recent statistics show that in 2013, the Israel Land Authority issued tenders for the construction of more housing units in the illegal settlements in the Palestine than it did in the Arab communities in Israel, despite there being more than double the number of inhabitants in these villages than Jewish residents living in the occupied West Bank. Arab communities make up just 2.5 per cent of the territory of Israel and this has barely increased since 1948. Annually, 12,000 new housing units are required to close the housing gap; in 2013, however, only 3,547 housing units in Arab communities were marketed out of a total of 27,840. As a result, in contrast to the extensive planning and development of Jewish localities, Arab neighbourhoods in Israel have urbanized without any overarching strategy in place to meet the needs of the population.

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