

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	197
Land:	Gaza og Vestbredden
Kilde:	U. S. Department of State
Titel:	2012 Report on International Religious Freedom – The Occupied Territories
Udgivet:	20. maj 2013
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	5. august 2013



2012 Report on International Religious Freedom - The Occupied Territories

Publisher [United States Department of State](#)

Publication Date 20 May 2013

Cite as United States Department of State, *2012 Report on International Religious Freedom - The Occupied Territories*, 20 May 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/519dd48174.html> [accessed 23 May 2013]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

Executive Summary

Religious freedom in the Occupied Territories falls under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Israel, or Hamas (which maintains de facto control in the Gaza Strip). The laws and policies of the PA and Israel protect religious freedom, and in practice the two governments generally respected these rights. The trend in the governments' respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year. The de facto Hamas authorities in Gaza continued to restrict religious freedom in both law and practice, and the negative trend for respect of this right was reflected in such abuses as arresting or detaining Muslims in Gaza who did not abide by Hamas' strict interpretation of Islam and broadcasting a program calling for Jews to be killed.

The PA does not have a constitution, but the Palestinian Basic Law generally functions as a temporary constitution. The basic law provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites unless such practices violate public order or morality. PA policy generally protected the free practice of religion, although problems persisted. The Basic Law states that Islam is the official religion and the principles of Sharia (Islamic law) shall be the main source of legislation. It also proscribes discrimination based on religion, stipulates that all citizens are equal before the law, and holds that basic human rights are liberties that shall be protected.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal, military, and economic control in the Occupied Territories. Israel's Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty provides for the protection of religious freedom. The Israeli government respected the right to freedom of religion within the Occupied Territories during the year, although the government's closure policies and the separation barrier restricted the ability of Palestinian Muslims and Christians to reach some places of worship. Israeli security authorities at times restricted Muslim and Christian worship within Jerusalem. Israeli policies also limited the ability of Israeli Jews to reach places of worship in areas under Palestinian control.

Since the 2007 Hamas coup in the Gaza Strip, Hamas, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, has exercised de facto authority over the territory and has enforced conservative Islamic law, harassed non-Muslims, and imposed religious restrictions on women.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Christians and Muslims generally enjoyed good relations during the year in the Occupied Territories. However, tensions remained high among Jewish communities, and between Jews and non-Jews; continuing violence heightened those tensions.

U.S. consulate general officials in Jerusalem monitored the status of religious freedom and raised instances of abuses and discriminatory practices with relevant government officials at all levels, as well as with religious and human rights groups. The consul general actively supported the Council of Religious Leaders in the Holy Lands' (CRIHL) efforts to denounce acts of violence, religious intolerance, and vandalism of holy sites.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to 2011 World Bank statistics, approximately 4 million Palestinians live in the Occupied Territories. Roughly 98 percent of Palestinian residents are Sunni Muslims. According to the 2010 Statistical Yearbook of the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 491,800 Jews live in Jerusalem, amounting to roughly 62 percent of the city's population. The Israeli Ministry of Interior reports that 350,150 Jews reside in the West Bank. Although there is no official count, there are about 52,000 Christians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, according to a 2008 survey conducted by the Lutheran ecumenical institution, Diyar Consortium. A majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox; the remainder consists of Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Armenian Orthodox, Copts, Maronites, Ethiopian Orthodox, and member of several other Protestant denominations. Christians are concentrated primarily in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus, but smaller communities exist elsewhere. Approximately 400 Samaritans reside in the West Bank, as well as a small number of evangelical Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses.

According to local Christian leaders, Palestinian Christian emigration has accelerated since 2001. Lower birth rates among Palestinian Christians also contribute to their shrinking numbers.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The laws and policies of the PA protect religious freedom. The PA does not have a constitution but has stated that the Palestinian Basic Law functions as its temporary constitution. The Basic Law states that Islam is the official religion and the principles of Sharia (Islamic law) shall be the main source of legislation. It provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites unless they violate public order or morality. The Basic Law also proscribes discrimination based on religion, stipulates that all citizens are equal before the law, and holds that basic human rights and liberties shall be protected. A 1995 PA presidential decree stipulates that all laws in effect before the advent of the PA continue in force until the PA enacts new laws or amends the old ones.

Islamic institutions and places of worship receive preferential financial support from the government by law. The PA Ministry of Awqaf (religious endowments) and Religious Affairs pays for the construction and maintenance of mosques and the salaries of most Palestinian imams in the West Bank. It provides imams with themes they are required to use in Friday sermons, and prohibits them from broadcasting Quran recitations from minarets prior to the call to prayer.

The ministry also provides limited financial support to some Christian clergy and Christian charitable organizations. The PA does not provide financial support to Jewish institutions in the West Bank; the Israeli government controls most Jewish holy sites in the West Bank.

Islamic or Christian religious courts must handle all legal matters relating to personal status, including inheritance, marriage, dowry, divorce, and child support. For Muslim Palestinians,

personal status law is derived from Sharia, while various ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status matters for Christians. All legally recognized religious groups are empowered to adjudicate personal status matters, and most do so in practice. The PA does not have a civil marriage law. Legally, members of one religious group may agree to submit a personal status dispute to a different denomination for adjudication. Churches the PA does not recognize must obtain special permission to perform marriages or adjudicate personal status matters; many unrecognized churches advise their members to marry or divorce abroad.

The PA requires Palestinians to declare their religious affiliation on identification papers.

PA President Mahmoud Abbas has informal advisers on Christian affairs. Six seats in the 132-member Palestinian Legislative Council are reserved for Christians; there are no seats reserved for members of any other religion.

Churches in the West Bank and Gaza are in three categories: churches the PA recognizes in accordance with status quo agreements reached under Ottoman rule in the late 19th century and Protestant churches with established episcopates; churches that it does not recognize but which exist and operate, such as some Protestant churches, including evangelical ones, that were established between the late 19th century and 1967; and a small number of churches that have become active within the last decade and whose legal status is less certain. There is no specific process by which religious organizations gain official recognition; rather, each religious group seeks bilateral agreements with the PA individually.

The PA respects the 19th century status quo agreements reached with Ottoman authorities. These agreements specifically established the presence and rights of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian, Coptic, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Syrian Orthodox churches. The Episcopal and Evangelical Lutheran churches were added later to this list. These religious groups are permitted to have ecclesiastical courts whose rulings are considered legally binding on personal status and some property matters for members of their religious communities. Civil courts do not adjudicate such matters.

Churches in the second category, which includes the Assemblies of God, Nazarene Church, and some Baptist churches, have unwritten understandings with the PA based on the principles of the status quo agreements, although they are not officially recognized. They generally are permitted to operate freely and some are able to perform certain personal status legal functions, such as issuing marriage certificates.

The third category consists of a small number of groups that normally proselytize, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christian groups. These churches also generally operate unhindered by the PA, although they must agree not to engage in proselytizing.

Religious education is compulsory for students in grades one through six in schools the PA operates. There are separate courses for Muslims and Christians.

The site Muslims refer to as the Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary) contains the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Jews refer to the same place as the Temple Mount and recognize it as the foundation of the first and second Jewish temples. The location has been under Israeli control since 1967 when Israel captured the eastern sector of the city (the Israeli government formally annexed East Jerusalem in 1980, and Israel applies its laws in East Jerusalem). However, the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, a Jordanian-funded and administered Islamic trust and charitable organization, administers the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

Since 1967, the Government of Israel as a matter of stated policy generally prohibits non-Muslim worship at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and many Jewish leaders promote the view that Jewish law prohibits Jews from entering the compound due to the risk of accidentally defiling the (unknown) location of the Temple's Holy of Holies. They instead direct worshippers to the

Western Wall. The Israeli High Court ruled in 1997 that "Jews, even though their right to the Temple Mount exists and stands historically, are not permitted to currently actualize their right to perform public prayer on the Temple Mount." However, in a number of instances, Israeli police reportedly facilitated the entrance of Jewish groups that attempted to perform religious acts at the site.

The Rabbi of the Western Wall, an Israeli government appointee, sets the guidelines for religious observance at the Western Wall, such as the strict separation of women and men on the plaza. Women are not allowed to conduct prayers at the Western Wall while wearing prayer shawls and are not permitted to read from Torah scrolls. Doing so is punishable under Israeli law by up to 12 months in prison or a fine of 500 NIS (\$135).

Under Oslo-era agreements, both Israel and the PA share responsibility for the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, although disagreements over division of responsibilities are significant.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal, military, and economic control in the Occupied Territories. Israel's Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty provides for the protection of religious freedom. However, its closure and curfew policies and its separation barrier restrict that freedom. Israeli security authorities at times restrict Muslim and Christian worship within Jerusalem. Israeli policies also limit the ability of Israeli Jews to reach places of worship in areas under Palestinian control.

Since the 2007 Hamas coup in the Gaza Strip, Hamas has exercised de facto authority over the territory. It enforces conservative Islamic law, harasses non-Muslims, and imposes religious restrictions on women.

The PA observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Zikra al-Hijra al-Nabawiya, and Christmas (both Western and Orthodox). The PA maintains a Friday-Saturday weekend, but Christians are allowed to take Sunday off instead of Saturday. Christians take Easter as a paid religious holiday.

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including detentions.

The Public Committee Against Torture submitted affidavits in March to the Israeli attorney general on behalf of nine Palestinian women that alleged Israeli intelligence officials used religion as one of the means to threaten and embarrass women it questioned. Israeli intelligence officials publicly stated that these claims were untrue.

Israeli police in August detained four members of the Women of the Wall, a group that organizes monthly women's services at the holy site, for wearing prayer shawls at the Western Wall. The group's chairperson, Anat Hoffman, was again arrested in October on the same charges, but was released the next day. Israeli authorities refuted her claim that she was mistreated while in detention.

The Government of Israel continued to apply travel restrictions during the year that impeded access to particular places of worship in the West Bank and Jerusalem for Muslims and Christians. The Israeli government's strict closures and curfews hindered residents from practicing their religion at key holy sites, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

The process by which the Israeli government granted Palestinians access to various sectors of the Occupied Territories at times involved de facto discrimination based on religion. The Israeli government made some accommodations for Palestinian Christians in the West Bank to access

Jerusalem for religious purposes, granting 20,000 permits without age restrictions for West Bank Christian Palestinians to visit Israel during Christmas. Israeli authorities issued 500 permits to members of Gaza's Christian community under the age of 16 and over the age of 35 to enter Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank for religious reasons and family visits during Christmas. However, it did not issue permits to all members of a family, which may have reduced the overall number of permits used, as some families opted not to be separated during the holidays. It issued no permits for Gazans between 16 and 35 years of age.

Israel made few accommodations for Palestinian Muslims to enter Jerusalem for religious purposes. The Israeli human rights organization Gisha filed an appeal in February 2011 on behalf of four Gazan Muslims above the age of 40 who were denied permits to enter Jerusalem to pray at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount during the Prophet Mohammed's birthday in 2011. Gisha argued that Israel categorically rejected requests from Gazan Muslims and was obligated to set reasonable criteria that allow Muslims from Gaza to travel in areas under Israeli control for purposes of prayer. An Israeli court in August rejected Gisha's argument and accepted the premise that the state's obligation to Gazans is limited to permitting travel in "exceptional humanitarian cases." The court imposed court costs on Gisha and the plaintiffs of 25,000 NIS (\$6,250).

The Israeli government kept in place an amended visa issuance process for foreigners working in Jerusalem and the West Bank, which also significantly impeded the work of Christian institutions. Christian advocates claimed that the difficulty of obtaining permits gradually worsened in the past decade. Israeli authorities continued to limit visas for Arab Christian clergy serving in the West Bank or Jerusalem to single-entry visas, complicating their travel, particularly to areas under their pastoral authority outside the West Bank or Jerusalem. This disrupted their work and caused financial difficulties for their sponsoring religious organizations. Clergy, nuns, and other religious workers from Arab countries faced long delays, and sometimes authorities denied their applications. The Israeli government indicated that delays or denials were due to security processing for visas and extensions.

Israel generally prohibited Arab Christian clergy from entering Gaza, including bishops and other senior clergy seeking to visit congregations or ministries under their pastoral authority.

During the month of Ramadan, Israeli authorities eased restrictions for Palestinian West Bank residents who did not hold permits to enter Jerusalem to worship at Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount to include men and women over the age of 40 and children under 12. The requirement for males and females between the ages of 13 and 40 to obtain permits remained in place. Israeli authorities also temporarily permitted Palestinians to use three additional checkpoints (Gilo, Shu'fat Camp, and Az Zeitoun) along the separation barrier, instead of just the Qalandiya crossing. The Israel government continued to ban access for Gaza residents to East Jerusalem.

The Israeli government started building a separation barrier in 2002 due to security concerns. This barrier, like restrictions on permits, limited access to holy sites and seriously impeded the work of religious organizations that provide education, health care, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians, particularly in and around East Jerusalem.

The separation barrier significantly impeded Bethlehem-area Christians, including clergy, from reaching the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and made visits to Christian sites in Bethany and Bethlehem difficult for Palestinian Christians who live on the Jerusalem side of the barrier. Foreign pilgrims and religious aid workers occasionally experienced difficulty obtaining access to Christian holy sites in the West Bank because of the barrier and Israeli restrictions on movement in the West Bank.

The barrier and checkpoints also impeded the movement of clergy between Jerusalem and West Bank churches and monasteries, as well as the movement of congregants between their homes and places of worship. Construction of the separation barrier continued south of Jerusalem near the

Cremisan convent of Salesian nuns and their school of approximately 170 students. The barrier, if completed, will separate the convent and school from the Palestinian communities they serve, and cut off area residents from their lands. The Salesian nuns were joined by the neighboring Franciscan friars in their suit to prevent the construction. Israeli court hearings were slated for early 2013.

The PA and Israeli Defense Force (IDF) jointly provided Jews access for approved visits to holy sites in the West Bank in areas under PA security control (Area A), particularly to Joseph's Tomb in Nablus. Jewish groups visited the site during hours of darkness and with a significant PA and IDF security escort. Some Jews complained that securing an IDF escort required extensive coordination. On May 19, Palestinians reportedly threw Molotov cocktails at Israeli troops guarding 1,500 Jewish worshipers at Joseph's Tomb. There were no reports of damages or injuries.

Since early 2001, following the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the Israeli government has prohibited Israeli citizens in unofficial capacities from traveling to the parts of the West Bank under the civil and security control of the PA. This restriction has prevented Jewish Israelis from routinely visiting several Jewish holy sites, although the IDF occasionally provided security escorts for groups to visit selected Jewish holy sites. Beginning in 2009, the Israeli Ministry of Defense gradually lifted restrictions on Arab Israelis visiting Area A cities in the West Bank.

Again during the year, Israeli authorities severely limited the access of Palestinians to Rachel's Tomb, a Bethlehem shrine holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims under Israeli jurisdiction in Area C, but allowed relatively unimpeded access to Jewish visitors.

Again during the year, the IDF limited access to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, a holy site revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims as the tomb of Abraham. The IDF restricted Muslim access for 10 nonconsecutive days, including Passover and Yom Kippur; Jews were restricted access for 10 nonconsecutive days corresponding with Muslim holidays. Muslims could enter only through one entry point and had to submit to intensive IDF security screening. Jews had access to several entry points and were not required to submit to security screening. Both Muslims and Jews were able to pray at the site simultaneously. In only one place, through the tomb of Abraham, was each able to see the other through Plexiglas.

The Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount has been under Israeli control since 1967 but the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf maintained administrative custody of the holy places. The Israeli National Police (INP) was responsible for security of the compound, with police stationed outside each entrance to the site. The INP conducted routine patrols on the outdoor plaza, regulated traffic in and out of the compound, screened non-Muslims for religious paraphernalia, and generally prohibited them from praying publically in the compound. Israeli police had exclusive control of the Mughrabi Gate entrance – the only entrance through which non-Muslims could enter the compound – and in general allowed visitors through the gate during set visiting hours. Waqf employees were stationed inside each gate and on the plaza. They could object to the presence of particular persons, such as individuals dressed immodestly or causing disturbances, but they lacked effective authority to remove persons from the site.

The Government of Israel restricted access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount by Muslims from Jerusalem and the West Bank. The Israeli government provided Muslims from Gaza no opportunity to access the site. Israel's permitting regime also generally restricted most West Bank Muslims from accessing the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, although some with permits to enter Jerusalem generally were able to visit the site. Israeli security authorities in Jerusalem frequently restricted residents in East Jerusalem from entering the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound for Friday prayers. Citing security concerns, authorities also frequently barred entry of male residents under the age of 50, and sometimes barred women under the age of 45. Infrequently authorities would close the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount entirely, often after skirmishes at the compound between Arabs and Israeli police.

Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the compound, most frequently Jerusalem Islamic Waqf employees. Waqf officials complained that Israeli police violated agreements regarding control of access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site. Israeli reinforcement of the ramp leading to the Mughrabi Gate of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, as well as excavations in the immediate vicinity, continued during the year without consultation with the Islamic Waqf.

Although most Orthodox rabbis continued to discourage Jewish visits to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound, a small but growing number of rabbis in recent years have softened their view against Jews entering the compound. During the year Jewish groups visited the compound, escorted by Israeli police, and performed religious acts such as prayers and prostration. Waqf officials criticized the visits, and in some instances the visits sparked violence between Palestinian worshippers and Israeli police. According to Jewish worship groups, as of October, Jewish visits to the site surpassed 12,000, up 30 percent from 2011. On October 6, IDF soldiers dispersed Muslim worshipers who clashed with a group of Jewish visitors. PA President Abbas called the IDF response and treatment of Palestinian worshipers "an assault on the site." In October a Jerusalem Magistrate's Court judge noted that police should allow Jews to pray at the compound. Some fringe Israeli groups supported this view and called on the Israeli government to implement a time-sharing plan at Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount that would set aside certain hours for Jewish worship, similar to one used at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Palestinians objected to any change at the site.

Again during the year, Arab Christian leaders said that Israeli security authorities obstructed access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem for Palestinian Christian residents of the West Bank, including clergy, which significantly reduced their ability to enter Jerusalem. Some Christian leaders said that Israeli authorities gave preferential treatment to Jews celebrating Passover and to international visitors making pilgrimages when the authorities enacted restrictions that impeded the activities of local Christians celebrating Easter.

The Israeli authorities imposed a full closure on the West Bank September 16-18 during the Jewish New Year holiday. During the closure, authorities prohibited West Bank residents who held Israeli-issued access permits from entering Jerusalem or Israel, except those working for international organizations or in a humanitarian capacity. On September 17, Israeli forces closed all northern entrances to the Silwan area of East Jerusalem to facilitate access of Israeli settlers to the area.

The PA began refusing church-issued documents from the First Baptist Church of Bethlehem in 2011. The First Baptist Church told a journalist in March that PA officials informed the church that it lacked the authority to function as a religious institution in the West Bank. A small number of proselytizing groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christians, continued to meet official resistance in their efforts to obtain recognition in areas Israel and the PA administered.

The PA has implemented a policy of unifying the message in weekly sermons in the West Bank in an effort to control incitement from the pulpit. Before the ban on incitement, imams sometimes delivered intolerant and anti-Semitic sermons. The PA also prohibited the broadcast of Quran recitations from minarets in the West Bank prior to the call to prayer. The PA oversaw approximately 1,800 mosques in the West Bank and paid imams' salaries.

As in past years, some observers of archaeological practices in Jerusalem alleged that the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), a government entity, exploited archaeological finds that bolstered Jewish claims to the city while overlooking other historically significant archaeological finds.

Likewise, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation continued to promote ongoing archaeological excavations north of the Western Wall plaza.

Construction for the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in West Jerusalem continued during the year on the grounds of the Mamilla cemetery, a 1,000-year-old Muslim cemetery containing the gravesites of several prominent Palestinian families and, according to Islamic tradition, Prophet Muhammad's companions and tens of thousands of Salah ad-Din's warriors. Supporters of the center cited an 1894 ruling by the Islamic Law court, stating that the cemetery was no longer sacred because it was abandoned and claiming that it served as a municipal parking lot for almost 50 years without a single complaint. In late March the U.S.-based human rights NGO Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) released a video it claimed confirms that excavations of "archaeological artifacts and human remains" continued in secret in the cemetery, despite claims by the Wiesenthal Center that such digs would end at the site. Historian and Columbia University professor Rashid Khalidi, whose ancestors are buried at the Mamilla Cemetery, publicly refuted the Wiesenthal Center's assertions and claimed that Israeli authorities "systematically disrespected" Muslim and Christian sites of cultural, religious, and historical significance.

PA President Mahmoud Abbas, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the CRIHL, and foreign governments continued to denounce so-called "price tag" attacks. "Price tag" attacks refer to illegal actions (ranging from vandalism of houses of worship and arson to physical assault) that Israeli settlers carried out to exact a "price" for Israeli government actions they viewed as contrary to their interests. Although Israeli authorities made arrests in a few of the "price tag" incidents, there were no prosecutions by the end of the year. As an example, on September 4, suspected "price tag" vandals spray-painted "Jesus is a monkey" and set fire to the doors of Latrun monastery in the West Bank. Israeli officials pledged to punish the culprits, but there were no arrests by year's end.

Both Muslim and Christian Palestinians accused Israeli officials of attempting to foster animosity among Palestinians by exaggerating reports of Muslim-Christian tensions. Palestinian Muslim and Christian opinion makers and businesspeople denied an Israeli ambassador's claims in a March 9 *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece and April 22 *60 Minutes* episode that Muslim persecution of Christians has spurred Christian migration from Jerusalem and the West Bank. Palestinians countered that Israel's policies were chiefly responsible for Christian flight and not interreligious tensions between the two communities.

In explaining increased emigration, church leaders cited the limited ability of Christian communities in the Jerusalem area to expand due to building restrictions, difficulties in obtaining Israeli visas and residency permits for Christian clergy, Israeli government family reunification restrictions, and taxation problems.

On December 4, the IDF demolished a mosque in the village of al-Mufarqarah in the South Hebron Hills in the West Bank. The mosque was first demolished in November 2011 and was in the process of being rebuilt.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the heads of churches in Jerusalem, the PA Ministry of Islamic Waqf, and the PA Islamic Sharia courts continued dialogue through the CRIHL. (The CRIHL is an umbrella body of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious institutions that includes the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the PA Ministry of Islamic Waqf, the PA Islamic Sharia courts, and the leaders of the major Christian denominations in Jerusalem.)

The Israeli High Court ruled in 2010 that the segregation of men and women on some public streets and sidewalks in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea She'arim in Jerusalem was illegal. A large sign pointing to a women-only sidewalk was still posted in October in Mea She'arim despite the ruling, according to a press report. A Jerusalem city council member charged with removing illegal signs told the press that the sign was mistakenly not removed and that "there is no [legal] segregation whatsoever." The ruling ended a tradition of gender segregation during the Jewish festival of Sukkot. Local authorities gave permission to erect a barrier again this year

and the High Court upheld its previous decision, stating that 2011 was the last year such a barrier would be allowed.

The Western Wall, the place of worship nearest the holiest site in Judaism, was open to visitors from all religions during the year, and Muslims and Christians were permitted to make individual prayers at the site. However, the Israeli government exercised its prohibition of mixed gender prayer services at religious sites. Men and women at the Western Wall had to use separate areas to visit and pray, and the women's section is less than half the size of the men's section. The gender restrictions were also enforced on non-Jews visiting the site.

On September 20, commemorating the 43rd anniversary of an attempt by an Australian national to set fire to al-Aqsa mosque, PA President Abbas issued a statement that Jerusalem "will forever be Arabic, Islamic, and Christian" and called the attack the first in a series aimed at demolishing al-Aqsa and building "the alleged Temple in order to uproot its citizens, Judaize it and eternalize its occupation." Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, an Israeli government-appointed who administers the Western Wall complex, condemned the statement for denying Jewish ties to Jerusalem and claimed that Palestinians sought to "appropriate for themselves and their faith the holy city of King David."

At a nationally televised West Bank rally held on January 9 to mark the 47th anniversary of the founding of the Fatah party, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Mohammed Hussein – a PA-appointed – quoted a hadith (text traditionally attributed to the prophet Mohammad) reading "The hour of judgment will not come until you fight the Jews ... The Jews will hide behind stones and behind the tree. The stone and tree will cry, 'Oh Muslim, Oh Servant of God, this is the Jew behind me, come and kill him.'" A video of the sermon posted on YouTube (since removed) shows Hussein being introduced by an unidentified man saying "Our war with the descendants of the apes and pigs is a war of religion and faith."

Official PA media generally sought to control and eliminate statements and material that it thought could incite violence, including criticism about the policies and actions of the Government of Israel and Israeli citizens. However, there were several instances in which official media carried explicitly intolerant material. The official PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* on November 19 published a piece perpetuating blood libel that said "the oppressive invaders" [a reference to Israel] are "hungry for human blood and liver." On January 6, PA TV aired a sermon in Al-Bireh, the West Bank, in which the preacher propagated conspiracy theories of Jewish world domination. He stated, "Oh servants of Allah, every evil and catastrophe on the land of Palestine – moreover, in the whole world – is caused by the Jews ... This is the history of the Jews. Many a covenant have they violated. Many a prophet they have slayed."

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

Hamis maintained control of Gaza throughout the year, used it as a base for attacks against Israel, and sometimes exploited its security apparatus to arrest or detain Muslims in Gaza who did not abide by Hamas' strict interpretation of Islam.

During the year terrorist organizations, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, launched indiscriminate rocket and mortar attacks from the Gaza Strip against Israeli citizens. Terrorists often issued statements that contained anti-Semitic rhetoric in conjunction with the attacks. During Israel's eight-day military operation against Hamas in the Gaza Strip in mid-November, Hamas' Al-Aqsa television station broadcast a program that called for killing Jews, which Hamas members defined as a religious Islamic act, and a music video had the words "Killing Jews is worship that draws us close to Allah" on the screen. Additionally, Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum criticized PA President's Adviser for Christian Affairs Ziad Bandak's July visit to the Nazi death camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau as "useless to the Palestinian cause and only benefits the Israeli occupation by propagating the lie of the Holocaust."

In January Hamas authorities reportedly raided a Shia religious gathering during the holiday of Arbæen in the Gazan neighborhood of Sheikh Zayyad. Reports differed on whether excessive force was used, although some claim at least 14 persons were arrested and some hospitalized. Hamas Ministry of Interior public statements claimed that the raid was a response to an illegal group with "corrupt views" that sought to commit unspecified crimes. It further stated that Gaza was a "Sunni country where Shiism does not exist."

Hamas enforced a conservative interpretation of Islam on Gaza's Muslim population. For example, Hamas operated a women's prison during the year to house women convicted of "ethical crimes" such as "illegitimate pregnancy." During the year Hamas' "morality police" punished women for infractions such as dressing "inappropriately," (i.e., Western-style or close-fitting clothing, such as jeans or T-shirts or not wearing a head covering).

Hamas largely tolerated the small Christian presence in Gaza and did not force Christians to abide by Islamic law. However, Hamas' religious ideology negatively affected Christians, according to church leaders. For example, local religious leaders received warnings ahead of Christian holidays against any public display of Christianity. Christians raised concerns that Hamas failed to defend their rights as a religious minority. Local officials sometimes advised converts to leave their communities to prevent harassment against them. Hamas officials on July 19 publicly denied allegations from the Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza that Hamas-affiliated officials coerced Ramez Ayman and Hiba Abu Dawoud and her three children to convert to Islam. Hundreds of Christians staged a protest at Gaza's main church in late July.

Due to Hamas' continued control of Gaza, the PA was unable to investigate and prosecute Gaza-based cases of religious discrimination.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

PA-Israeli security cooperation at Joseph's Tomb improved during the year following an agreement reached in 2011 between the PA, the IDF, and the Ministry of Defense's civil administration to station 10 permanent PA police officers at the tomb. On February 9, PA forces accompanied 15 rabbis from the West Bank's Huwwara checkpoint to the tomb in the first such security coordination with Israeli forces. The PA coordinated all visits with Israel.

Israel issued slightly more than 100,000 permits to allow Palestinian West Bank residents to enter Jerusalem during the month of Ramadan, representing a seven-fold increase from the 16,700 permits it granted in 2011. It expanded the categories of people exempted from the permit requirement for men and women above age 40 and allowed persons between the ages of 35 and 40 to receive permits.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including an increase in vandalism against Christian sites. Because ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance. Palestinian Christians and Muslims generally shared good relations, identifying more closely on ethnic and political similarities than religion. However, tensions were substantial between Jews and Palestinian Christians and Muslims, largely as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Israel's control of access to sites holy to Christians and Muslims. Relations among Jews living in Jerusalem and the West Bank were strained because of different interpretations of Judaism, and some non-Orthodox Jews and Christians experienced discrimination and harassment by some Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews. Christians also faced discrimination and threats from Muslim extremist vigilante groups in Gaza, and Hamas did not sufficiently investigate or prosecute religiously driven crimes committed by such groups.

Israeli settlers in the West Bank continued to justify violence against Palestinian persons and property as necessary for the defense of Judaism. Some Jewish groups continued to call for the destruction of the Islamic Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque to enable the building of a third Jewish temple.

Some settlers continued to carry out "price tag" attacks against Palestinians in response to Israeli government actions that were contrary to settlers' interests. These included acts of vandalism, arson, and anti-Muslim graffiti on mosques located primarily in the West Bank, as well as anti-Christian graffiti on churches in Jerusalem. There were at least four undisputed attacks on West Bank mosques and five against churches in and around Jerusalem, with one church suffering two separate attacks. On June 19, suspected "price tag" vandals struck the main mosque in the Palestinian village of Jabaa, southeast of Ramallah, for the second time in a year. Vandals set fire to the mosque and spray-painted "Ulpana war" (referring to Israeli settlements slated for evacuation), "The war has started," and "Pay the price" in Hebrew. The Israeli prime minister condemned the attack as "an act of intolerant and irresponsible hooligans" and said that Israel would "act swiftly to bring them to justice." On the evening of November 19, a group of Israeli settlers burned the entrance to a mosque in the village of Urif in Nablus. Israeli police clashed with villagers when they arrived the next day to investigate. There were no prosecutions in either case.

Some settlers also targeted Christians in "price tag" attacks. On February 20, settlers were suspected of writing "Death to Christianity," "price tag," and other insults on the walls of the Narkis Street Baptist Congregation in West Jerusalem. Local press noted that members of the church included Messianic Jews.

On October 2, suspected "price tag" vandals spray-painted "Jesus is a bastard" and "price tag" in Hebrew on the Monastery of St. Francis, located just outside of the Old City's Zion Gate. Israeli President Shimon Peres denounced the act as "contrary to the Jewish religion," and the Israeli police announced the creation of a special investigative unit to deal with this and other anti-Christian vandalism, which occurred with greater regularity during the year.

Throughout the year, the CRIHL strongly criticized acts of religious intolerance. It also spoke out against the May 22 desecration of the synagogue and Torah scrolls in Tel Tzion that vandals from the Palestinian village of nearby al-Birah allegedly perpetrated. It denounced the May 25 attack on the ancient synagogue in Na'aran, near Jericho, in which vandals painted swastikas and pro-PA slogans on the gate of the building and on an ancient mural, according to local press.

Israeli police arrested three Palestinian youths on December 13 for allegedly assaulting an ultra-Orthodox man near the Old City. The suspects reportedly confessed that they sought revenge against Jews for attacks on Palestinians.

As in past years, Orthodox Jews continued to harass Messianic Jews. The ultra-Orthodox anti-missionary organization Yad L'Achim continued to target Messianic Jews in settlements – whom it identified, often incorrectly, as "missionaries" – with the distribution of posters that threatened missionaries. The organization also called on the postal authority to prevent the distribution of missionary material through the mail. Some Haredim at the Western Wall harassed visitors and Jewish worshippers who did not conform to Jewish Orthodox traditions. Members of the Jewish Conservative and Reform movements publicly criticized gender segregation and rules governing how women pray at the Western Wall.

In June unidentified vandals spray-painted insults such as "Israel is the secular Auschwitz of the Sephardic Jewry" and "Hitler, thanks for the Holocaust" in Hebrew on the walls of the entrance to Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, praising Nazis and denigrating Sephardic Jews and Zionists. Israeli police opened an investigation, and according to Israeli press, the main suspects

probably came from the small but active fringe group of extremist ultra-Orthodox Jews who espouse anti-Sephardic sentiments and deny the Holocaust.

Some ultra-Orthodox youths in religious studies programs insulted and almost daily spat on Christian clergy, nuns, and seminarians in Jerusalem's Old City.

In Jerusalem, some ultra-Orthodox Jews denigrated Jerusalem residents who did not adhere to their strict interpretation of Orthodox Jewish law. Haredim protested municipal and commercial properties in Jerusalem that did not observe the Jewish Sabbath. Since May, weekly demonstrations organized by Haredi residents of Mea She'arim protested the operation of a municipal parking lot near the Old City's Jaffa Gate on Shabbat. On June 16, the demonstrations turned violent when hundreds of protesters threw stones and spat on passing vehicles and chanted insults at passersby and Israeli police.

The desecration of the Mount of Olives cemetery in Jerusalem continued and in April, Israeli police opened a station there in an effort to stem crime. Jewish tombstones in the Mount of Olives cemetery were vandalized during the year, trash commonly littered the cemetery, and Palestinian youths reportedly threw stones and Molotov cocktails at Jewish visitors. Three Palestinian youths in September were found attempting to burn the Book of Psalms, a Jewish holy book, at the cemetery. Police told reporters they planned to expedite prosecution of the case. In July Palestinians whose car struck a vehicle with Jewish passengers near the cemetery reportedly got out of their car and began to attack the Jewish driver and his daughter.

There were occasional reports of societal abuses or discrimination involving Christians and Muslims, and societal attitudes continued to be a barrier to conversions. Although only nine Gaza Christians were known to have converted to Islam in recent years, according to international press reports, the issue continued to generate tension. In July dozens of Christians in Gaza protested the alleged kidnapping and forced conversion to Islam of five co-religionists, including a mother and her three children. The archbishop of the Greek Orthodox church in Gaza publicly reiterated that claim and accused "a dangerous organization" of converting Christians, "threatening the existence of Christianity in the Gaza Strip." Gazan authorities refuted the claim and publicly stated that the individuals contacted the police for protection from their relatives. In August the two adult converts appeared in a state-sponsored television recording claiming they willingly decided to convert. Representatives of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights reportedly met with the two adults and concluded that the conversion was not forced.

On August 20, a street fight broke out between an estimated 100 Palestinian Muslims and 15 residents of the Mount of Olives' Bethphage Christian housing project in East Jerusalem, according to the press. The fight began after a young Muslim man insulted a female Christian resident. The woman's husband allegedly attacked the other man, who left the area and then later returned with more than 100 young Muslim men. The brawl reportedly went on for about 90 minutes, injuring a number of people and resulting in significant damage to property belonging to residents of the housing project.

Mainstream independent Palestinian news outlets, including *Al Quds*, *Al Ayyam*, and *Ma'an*, attempted to avoid publishing material that incited hatred and limited their criticism to governmental policies and actions of individuals and not of ethnic or religious groups. However, they sometimes carried anti-Semitic opinion pieces. Such articles included descriptions of Jews as "Allah's enemy" and "murderers of all prophets" as well as political rhetoric longing for a world without Israel that crossed the line into anti-Semitism. Media outlets carried cartoons demonizing Israel and broadcasted anti-Semitic rhetoric, including by academics and clerics, accusing Jews of trying to take over the world and exploit the Holocaust to their advantage.

Other nonofficial PA and nonmainstream Palestinian media outlets, particularly those controlled by Hamas, continued to use inflammatory language during the year. Hamas television broadcast

content that sometimes praised holy war as a means to expel the Jewish presence in the region. In addition some children's programs glorified "martyrdom."

Interfaith dating remained a sensitive issue. Most Christian and Muslim families in the Occupied Territories pressured their children, especially their daughters, to marry within their respective religious groups. Couples who challenged this societal norm, particularly Palestinian Christians or Muslims who married Jews, encountered considerable societal and family opposition. Families sometimes disowned Muslim and Christian women who married outside their faith.

Nongovernmental organizations reported that it was more difficult for Christian Palestinians to get a divorce because of restrictions by some churches.

Established Christian groups generally did not welcome less established churches. A small number of proselytizing groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christians, encountered opposition to their efforts to obtain official recognition from the PA, both from Muslims who opposed their proselytizing and from Christians who feared the new arrivals might disrupt existing conditions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Officials from the U.S. consulate general in Jerusalem regularly met with religious representatives to monitor their concerns and ensure their views and experiences were discussed with local authorities. The consulate general maintained a high level of contact with representatives of the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf. U.S. government officials had frequent contact with Muslim leaders in Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank. The consulate general also maintained regular contact with leaders of the Christian and Jewish communities in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and where possible, the Gaza Strip. During the year the consul general hosted a meeting with members of the CRIHL, and met with the Greek Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), and Armenian Orthodox Patriarchates, and with leaders of the Anglican and Lutheran churches. Consulate general officers similarly met with a wide array of religious leaders and communities, including leaders of the Syrian Orthodox community and Christian evangelical groups. The consul general and consulate general officers also met with Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Haredi rabbis, and with representatives of various Jewish institutions. Consulate general officers visited religious sites in Jerusalem and the West Bank important to all three faith communities.

During the year the consulate general investigated a range of charges, including allegations of damage to places of worship, incitement, and allegations concerning access to holy sites. Consulate general officers met with representatives of the Bethlehem and Ramallah-area Christian communities.

Search Refworld

by keyword
and / or country

All countries

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Israel](#)
- [Occupied Palestinian Territory](#)

Topics

- [Armed groups / Militias / Paramilitary forces / Resistance movements](#)
- [Catholic](#)
- [Christian](#)
- [Copts](#)
- [Episcopalian](#)
- [Evangelical](#)
- [Freedom of religion](#)
- [Jehovah's Witness](#)
- [Jew](#)
- [Lutheran](#)
- [Maronite](#)
- [Muslim](#)
- [Orthodox Christian](#)
- [Protestant](#)
- [Religious discrimination](#)
- [Sunni](#)