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2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Israel

Executive Summary

Israel is a multiparty parliamentary democracy. Although it has no constitution, parliament, the unicameral 120-member Knesset, has enacted a series of “Basic Laws” that enumerate fundamental rights. Certain fundamental laws, orders, and regulations legally depend on the existence of a “state of emergency,” which has been in effect since 1948. Under the Basic Laws, the Knesset has the power to dissolve the government and mandate elections. Following the nationwide Knesset elections in April and September, which were generally considered free and fair, Israeli political parties failed to form a coalition government. Therefore, the Knesset voted on December 11 to dissolve itself and set March 2, 2020, as the date for a third general election within a year.

Under the authority of the prime minister, the Israeli Security Agency (ISA) combats terrorism and espionage in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. The national police, including the border police and the immigration police, are under the authority of the Ministry of Public Security. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) is responsible for external security but also has some domestic security responsibilities and reports to the Ministry of Defense. ISA forces operating in the West Bank and East Jerusalem fall under the IDF for operations and operational debriefing. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security services.

Significant human rights issues included: reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings, including targeted killings of Israeli civilians and soldiers; arbitrary detention; restrictions on non-Israelis residing in Jerusalem including arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, and home; and significant restrictions on freedom of movement.

The government took steps to prosecute and punish officials who committed abuses within Israel regardless of rank or seniority.

This section includes Israel, including Jerusalem. The United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017 and recognized Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights in March 2019. It is the position of the United States that the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem are subject to final status negotiations between the parties. The Palestinian Authority exercises no authority over Jerusalem.

As stated in Appendix A, this report contains data drawn from foreign government officials; victims of alleged human rights violations and abuses; academic and congressional studies; and reports from the press, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with human rights. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, some of those sources have been accused of harboring political motivations. The Department of State assesses external reporting carefully but does not conduct independent investigations in all cases. We have sought and received input from the government of Israel and we have noted responses where applicable.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

During the year Palestinian militant groups launched 1,340 rockets and mortars from the Gaza Strip toward arbitrary or civilian targets in Israel, killing six Israelis and injuring more than 150 Israeli civilians.

Israeli forces engaged in conflict throughout the year with Palestinians at the Gaza fence, including armed terrorists, militants who launched incendiary devices into Israel, and unarmed protesters. Engagements occurred during weekly mass protests co-opted by terrorist organization Hamas and dubbed a “March of Return.” On August 10, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that Hamas was responsible for all aggression emanating from the Gaza Strip and that Israel would continue to

act to thwart infiltration of its territory and attacks on Israeli citizens. Israeli forces killed 132 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, including 33 at the Gaza perimeter fence with Israel, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OCHA) (see West Bank and Gaza section). Human rights organizations claimed most victims posed no imminent threat to the IDF. The government stated that many of the victims were operatives of Hamas or encouraged by Hamas to protest near the fence. The government claimed the IDF used live fire as a last resort, when a clear and imminent threat existed, and they aimed below the knee towards the ankle with the intention to wound but not to kill. The government also stated that it used live fire with lethal intent against terrorists perpetrating attacks against IDF forces at the border. IDF officials stated they opened an internal inquiry into each Palestinian death at the border. As of September 3, the Military Advocate General had ordered nine criminal investigations related to 17 separate instances of Palestinian fatalities, eight of which were underway. Not all of these related to incidents at the Gaza perimeter fence.

In May 2018 the Supreme Court rejected human rights organizations’ objections to the IDF rules of engagement that permitted live ammunition against demonstrators near the Gaza fence. The court ruled the applicable international legal paradigm is that of war, not law enforcement, but it called on the IDF to learn operational lessons that would lead to the use of alternative, nonlethal means, in light of “the number of casualties and injuries, and the fact that many were injured in their upper body and some in the back.” The number of Palestinian deaths from IDF fire at the border decreased during the year, according to OCHA.

According to the government and media reports, terrorist attacks targeting Israelis killed nine persons in Israel. The locations of attacks included Jerusalem, Ashdod, Kibbutz Erez, and Ashkelon. Most attackers were Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza. In addition, the Israeli government reported that security forces foiled more than 500 major terrorist attacks during the year.

On January 10, the Knesset approved an amendment to the penal code that includes a motive of racism or hostility based on the victim’s religion, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation, or on racism toward or hate for foreign workers, as an aggravated circumstance in a murder offense. In the explanatory notes of this amendment, the Knesset noted that murder committed due to racism or hostility justifies severe treatment in the form of mandatory life imprisonment.

On October 28, the Supreme Court granted a petition filed by the family of Israeli citizen Kheir al-Din Hamdan ordering Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit and the Ministry of Justice Department for Investigating Police Officers (DIPO) to indict police officer Yizhak Begin, who shot and killed Hamdan, and deferring to Mandelblit to determine the exact charges. In 2015 DIPO had closed its investigation into the 2014 killing of Hamdan in Kafr Kana.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits torture, the application of physical or psychological pain, and assault or pressure by a public official. ISA interrogators may be exempt from criminal prosecution if they use “exceptional methods” in extraordinary cases determined to involve an imminent threat, such as the “ticking bomb” scenario, as long as such methods did not amount to torture. The government determined in 2018 that ISA rules, procedures, and methods of interrogation were confidential for security reasons but subject to governmental supervision from within and outside the ISA.

Authorities continued to state the ISA held detainees in isolation only in extreme cases and when there was no alternative option and that the ISA did not use isolation as a means of augmenting interrogation, forcing a confession, or punishment. An independent Office of the Inspector for Complaints against ISA Interrogators in the Ministry of Justice handled complaints of misconduct and abuse in interrogations. The decision to open an investigation against an ISA employee is at the discretion of the attorney general.

In criminal cases investigated by police involving crimes with a maximum imprisonment of 10 years or more, regulations require recording interrogations; however, an extended temporary law exempts the ISA from the audio and video recording requirement for interrogations of suspects related to “security offenses.” In non-security-related cases, ISA interrogation rooms are equipped with closed-circuit cameras, and only supervisors appointed by the Ministry of Justice have access to real-time audio-visual feeds. Supervisors are required to report to the comptroller any irregularities they observe during interrogations. The NGO Public Committee against Torture in Israel (PCATI) criticized this mechanism as insufficient to prevent and identify torture, since there is no recording of interrogations for later accountability and judicial review.

According to PCATI, the government acknowledged that it used “exceptional measures” during interrogation in some cases. These methods included beatings, forcing an individual to hold a stress position for long periods, threats of rape and physical harm, painful pressure from shackles or

restraints applied to the forearms, sleep deprivation, and threats against families of detainees. PCATI stated the government's system for investigating allegations of mistreatment of detainees was complex and fragmented. For example, allegations against police and the ISA are investigated by two separate departments in the State Attorney's Office of the Ministry of Justice, each with different procedures, while the National Prison Wardens Investigation Unit is responsible for investigating allegations against members of the Israel Prison Service (IPS). PCATI reported this fragmentation created a disorganized system characterized by widely varying response times and professional standards. The Ministry of Justice stated that its internal reviews had led to the opening of two examinations since January 2018.

Samer al-Arbid, a Palestinian suspect in the August 23 killing of Rina Shnerb, was arrested on September 25 and immediately placed in solitary confinement and transferred to an interrogation center in Jerusalem. Two days later he was admitted to a hospital unconscious with serious injuries, including inability to breathe, kidney failure, and broken ribs. According to PCATI, the ISA used “exceptional measures” in interrogating Arbid, who was subsequently released from the hospital into an IPS medical facility, where his interrogation continued. The Ministry of Justice's Inspector of Interrogee Complaints opened an investigation into the incident. The investigation was underway at year's end.

According to PCATI and Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI), medics and doctors ignored bruises and injuries resulting from violent arrests and interrogations. In its 2016 review of the country's compliance with the UN Convention against Torture, the UN Committee against Torture recommended (among 50 other recommendations) that the government provide for independent medical examinations for all detainees. The government stated that requests from prisoners for independent examination at the prisoner's expense are reviewed by an IPS medical team.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

The law provides prisoners and detainees the right to conditions that do not harm their health or dignity.

Physical Conditions: Local rights organizations reported “security prisoners” (those convicted or suspected of nationally motivated violence) often faced more restrictive conditions than those for prisoners characterized as criminals, including increased incidence of administrative detention, restricted family visits, ineligibility for temporary furloughs, and solitary confinement.

A May report on 42 prisons and detention centers by the Public Defender's Office warned that despite efforts by the IPS to improve prison conditions and correct deficiencies noted in previous reports, grave violations of the rights of detainees continued to occur. The report described thousands of prisoners held in unsuitable living conditions in outdated facilities, some of which were unfit for human habitation. According to the report, many of the prisoners, especially minors, were punished by solitary confinement and disproportionate use of shackling. The Public Defender's Office found this particularly concerning in cases where prisoners suffered from mental illness.

As of December the government had not applied a 2015 law authorizing force-feeding of hunger-striking prisoners under specific conditions. The Israel Medical Association declared the law unethical and urged doctors to refuse to implement it. Regulations stipulate that medical treatment must be provided in reasonable quality and time, and all based on medical considerations and within the resources and funding available for the IPS. Regulations also allow the IPS to deny medical treatment if there are budgetary concerns, according to Physicians for Human Rights Israel.

A report published in November by PHRI points to significant failures in the functioning of the IPS medical system. The report assessed the separate health care system for prisoners was unable to provide services equivalent to those provided to the general population through enrollment in government-sponsored health maintenance organizations (HMOs). According to PHRI's findings, the services do not meet the accepted HMO standards, and in half of the incidents examined, there was a risk posed to the health of the inmates due to substandard treatment or denial of treatment. PHRI recommendations included applying national HMO standards to medical care provided in IPS facilities, establishing a professional and efficient supervision mechanism to govern medical services provided by IPS, and increasing the opportunities for outside medical practitioners to provide care in Israeli prisons.

Administration: Authorities conducted proper investigations of credible allegations of mistreatment, except as noted above. While authorities usually allowed visits from lawyers and stated that every inmate who requested to meet with an attorney was able to do so, this was not always the case. Credible sources reported that adult and juvenile detainees who are not citizens of Israel were denied access to a lawyer during their initial arrest. The government granted permits to family members of prisoners from the West Bank on a limited basis and restricted those entering from Gaza more severely.

Independent Monitoring: The International Committee of the Red Cross maintained its regular visits to all detention and interrogation facilities in Israel that hold Palestinian detainees. The Public Defender's Office is mandated to report on prison conditions, which it does every two years.

Improvements: In November 2018, the Knesset passed a temporary law for three years granting early release of prisoners (excluding security prisoners) in order to facilitate implementation of a Supreme Court verdict requiring prisons to allocate a living space of 48 square feet to each prisoner. According to ACRI, each prisoner is currently allocated 33 square feet and approximately 40 percent of prisoners were imprisoned in cells that amounted to less than 32 square feet per person. The court ruled that the implementation of the verdict on the ISA's detention center must be implemented no later than May 2021.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court, and the government generally observed these requirements. Israeli authorities applied the same laws to all residents of Jerusalem, regardless of their Israeli citizenship status. Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza detained on security grounds fell under military jurisdiction, even if detained inside Israel (see “West Bank and Gaza” section).

The law allows the government to detain irregular migrants from countries to which government policy prohibits deportation, mainly Eritrea and Sudan, who arrived after 2014, including asylum seekers, for three months in the Saharonim Prison “for the purpose of identification and to explore options for relocation of the individual.” The law also states authorities must bring irregular migrants taken into detention to a hearing within five days. After three months in Saharonim, authorities must release the migrant on bail, except when the migrant poses a risk to the state or the public, or when there is difficulty in identity verification.

The government may detain without trial and for an indefinite period irregular migrants who were “implicated in criminal proceedings.” As of October, 14 Eritreans and 16 Sudanese were incarcerated under this policy, according to the NGO Hotline for Refugees and Migrants. The NGO noted this policy enabled indefinite detention even in cases in which there was insufficient evidence to try a suspect, including for relatively minor crimes, as well as cases of migrants who completed a sentence following a conviction. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated this policy is “at variance with international human rights and refugee law” and called for migrants suspected of crimes to be treated equally under criminal laws. On January 4, the Supreme Court ruled that the legality of this policy required additional review, but it had not issued any new guidance by year's end.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Police must have a warrant based on sufficient evidence and issued by an authorized official to arrest a suspect. The following applies to detainees, excluding those in administrative detention: Authorities generally informed such persons promptly of charges against them; the law allows authorities to detain suspects without charge for 24 hours prior to bringing them before a judge, with limited exceptions allowing for up to 48 hours; authorities generally respected these rights for persons arrested in the country; there was a functioning bail system, and detainees could appeal decisions denying bail; and authorities allowed detainees to consult with an attorney in a timely manner, including one provided by the government for the indigent, and to contact family members promptly.

Authorities detained most Palestinian prisoners within Israel. (Further information on arrest procedures under military law can be found in the West Bank and Gaza section.)

Authorities may prosecute persons detained on security grounds criminally or hold them as administrative detainees or illegal combatants, according to one of three legal regimes.

First, under a temporary law on criminal procedures, repeatedly renewed since 2006, the IPS may hold persons suspected of a security offense for 48 hours prior to bringing them before a judge, with limited exceptions allowing the IPS to detain a suspect for up to 96 hours prior to bringing the suspect before the senior judge of a district court. In security-related cases, authorities may hold a person for up to 35 days without an indictment (versus 30 days for nonsecurity cases), and the law allows the court to extend detentions on security grounds for an initial period of up to 20 days for interrogation without an indictment (versus 15 days for nonsecurity cases). Authorities may deny security detainees access to an attorney for up to 21 days under Israeli civilian procedures.

Second, the Emergency Powers Law allows the Ministry of Defense to detain persons administratively without charge for up to six months, renewable indefinitely.

Third, the Illegal Combatant Law permits authorities to hold a detainee for 14 days before review by a district court judge, deny access to counsel for up to 21 days with the attorney general's approval and allow indefinite detention subject to semiannual district court reviews and appeals to the Supreme Court. As of October, according to B'Tselem and based on IPS data, no Palestinian prisoners were held under this law.

NGOs including Military Court Watch, HaMoked, and B'Tselem accused authorities of using isolation to punish or silence politically prominent Palestinian detainees. According to the government, the IPS did not hold Palestinian detainees in separate detention punitively or to induce confessions. The government stated it uses separate detention only when a detainee threatens himself or others and authorities have exhausted other options—or in some cases during interrogation, to prevent disclosure of information. In such cases authorities maintained the detainee had the right to meet with International Committee of the Red Cross representatives, IPS personnel, and medical personnel, if necessary.

The Public Defender's Office reported in May that prisoners suffering from a mental illness are often held in conditions that may worsen their mental health. Palestinian sources reported the IPS placed Palestinian detainees who were mentally disabled or a threat to themselves or others in isolation without a full medical evaluation. According to PHRI, isolation of Palestinian prisoners with mental disabilities was common.

Arbitrary Arrest: Allegations continued that authorities arbitrarily arrested Israeli citizens of Arab and Ethiopian ancestry and Palestinians who participated in protests. For example, new police procedures led to the arrest of demonstrators without a legal basis. Among those arrested were Israeli citizens of Ethiopian ancestry who were protesting police violence near the residences of the minister of justice and the attorney general (see section 2.b.).

In November 2018 President Rivlin and Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked invited Ethiopian-Israelis whom authorities had previously charged with minor offenses, such as insulting or obstructing a public servant, or participating in prohibited assemblies, to apply for their criminal records to be deleted if they were not imprisoned due to their offenses. According to data from the President's Office received by Ha-Makom, 66 requests were submitted as of March. Of those cases, 15 met the prerequisites, and five received pardon.

Pretrial Detention: Administrative detention continued to result in lengthy pretrial detention for security detainees (see above).

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Exceptions to the right for a public trial include national security concerns, protection of the interest of a minor or an individual requiring special protection, and protection of the identity of an accuser or defendant in a sex-offense case. In December 2018 the Knesset passed an amendment eliminating the requirement for court involvement before publishing the identity of a victim of a sex offense, provided the victim gave written consent for publication.

Defendants enjoy the rights to a presumption of innocence, to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them, to a fair and public trial without undue delay, and to be present at their trial. They may consult with an attorney or, if indigent, have one provided at public expense. They have adequate time and facilities to prepare their defense. Defendants who cannot understand or speak the language used in court have the right to free interpretation as necessary from the moment charged through all appeals. Defendants have the right to confront witnesses against them and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. They may not be compelled to testify or confess guilt and may appeal to the Supreme Court.

The prosecution is under a general obligation following an indictment to provide all evidence to the defense. The government may on security grounds withhold from defense lawyers evidence it has gathered but will not use in its case against the accused. The Supreme Court (with regard to civilian courts) and the Court of Appeals (with regard to military courts) can scrutinize the decision to withhold such evidence. The rules of evidence in espionage cases tried in criminal court do not differ from the normal rules of evidence, and no use of secret evidence is permissible.

Children as young as 12 years old may be imprisoned if convicted of serious crimes such as murder, attempted murder, or manslaughter. The government reported no child was imprisoned under this law as of the end of the year.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

The government described security prisoners as those convicted or suspected of nationalistically motivated violence. Some human rights organizations claimed that Palestinian security prisoners held in Israel should be considered political prisoners.

In 2017 the Supreme Court imposed restrictions on an ISA practice of summoning Israeli political activists suspected of “subversive” activity unrelated to terror or espionage for questioning under caution, indicating they might be charged with a crime. Such summoning may be carried out only after consultation with the legal advisor of the ISA; police and the ISA must clarify that questioning is voluntary and the person summoned is not required to appear; and the ISA must clarify during questioning that the suspect’s statements cannot be used in court for other proceedings. In July 2018 the NGO Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) sent a letter to the State Attorney’s Office contending the ISA had violated the Supreme Court ruling in three incidents at Ben Gurion Airport in June and July 2018, when it detained employees of civil society organizations for questioning upon their return from outside the country. In September 2018 the Ministry of Justice and the ISA responded that the investigations were conducted by virtue of the role of the ISA in preventing violent and illegal activity, whether on nationalistic or terrorist grounds, and not related to subversion or delegitimization of the State of Israel. Regarding investigations conducted in the context of subversion, the Ministry of Justice said they were carried out in accordance with the Supreme Court restrictions.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

An independent and impartial judiciary adjudicates lawsuits seeking damages for, or cessation of, human rights violations. Administrative remedies exist, and court orders usually were enforced. Non-Israeli citizens in Jerusalem can file suit against the government of Israel under the same rules that govern access to judicial and administrative remedies by Israel citizens. By law nonresident Palestinians may file suit in civil courts to obtain compensation in some cases, even when a criminal suit is unsuccessful and the actions against them are considered legal.

Property Restitution

In 2016 the State Comptroller recommended the government quickly act to settle land claims, plan resettlement of Bedouin citizens in cooperation with the Bedouin community, develop infrastructure in recognized Bedouin communities, and formulate an enforcement policy regarding illegal construction. A 2017 law increased the government’s power to demolish unpermitted structures. New construction remained illegal in towns that did not have an authorized plan for development. Arab members of the Knesset (MKs) and human rights organizations condemned the law for increasing enforcement and demolitions without addressing the systemic housing shortages in Arab communities that led to unpermitted construction. According to human rights organizations, approximately 50,000 Arab families lived in unpermitted houses.

The government stated that, as of October, 132 of 133 Arab localities had approved outline plans for development, of which 76 had been updated since 2005 and 18 had new plans undergoing statutory approval. NGOs criticized the lack of Arab representation on regional planning and zoning approval committees and stated that planning for Arab areas was much slower than for Jewish municipalities, leading Arab citizens to build or expand their homes without legal authorization, risking a government-issued demolition order. Authorities issued approximately 1,770 administrative and judicial demolition orders during the year, including both Jewish-owned and Arab-owned structures. In cases of demolitions with no agreement from the residents to relocate, the government levied fines against residents to cover expenses incurred in the course of demolitions.

A development plan for the Bedouin village of al-Fura’a was not yet completed as of the end of the year, despite government recognition of the village in 2006. As a result, the village lacked basic electricity and water infrastructure, and NGOs reported house demolitions occurred regularly. The government stated that a team from the Ministry of Agriculture’s Authority for the Development and Settlement of Bedouin in the Negev began working on this issue in the second half of 2018, after completing a survey of 180 Bedouin residential clusters.

According to the NGO Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF), Bedouins accounted for 34 percent of the population of the Negev, but only 12.5 percent of the residential-zoned land was designated for the Bedouin population. The seven Bedouin townships were all crowded, especially in comparison with the Jewish towns and cities in the area, and had low-quality infrastructure and inadequate access to health, education, welfare, public transportation, postal, and garbage disposal services. In 35 unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev inhabited by approximately 90,000 persons, the government stated it used a “carrot and stick” approach to attempt to compel Bedouin Israelis to move, including demolishing unpermitted structures and offering incentives to move to Bedouin towns. Bedouins often refused to participate because they asserted they owned the land or that the government had given them prior permission to settle in their current locations. Bedouins also feared losing their traditional livelihoods and way of life, as well as moving onto land claimed by a rival Bedouin clan.

As of the end of the year, 31 percent of the 202,620 acres of Arab Bedouin land in the south of the country that was under ownership dispute was no longer in dispute as a result of either settlement agreements or following legal proceedings, according to the government.

According to the NCF, 115 of the 126 Jewish communities in the Negev maintained admission committees to screen new residents, effectively excluding non-Jewish residents. Following objections by multiple NGOs, authorities canceled plans for new Jewish communities called Daya, Eshel HaNasi, and Neve Gurion to replace existing Bedouin villages.

In April 2018 Bedouin residents of the unrecognized village Umm al-Hiran signed an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture's Authority for the Development and Settlement of Bedouin in the Negev to self-demolish their structures and relocate to vacant plots in the Bedouin town of Hura, following extended legal action and negotiations. Umm al-Hiran was to be replaced with a Jewish community called Hiran. As of October, Bedouin residents still resided in the unrecognized village.

The NCF recorded 2,326 demolitions of Bedouin Israelis' structures in 2018 and stated the demolition policy violated Bedouin Israelis' right to adequate housing. Demolitions by Israeli authorities dropped to 262 in 2018 from 641 in 2017, while Bedouins demolished the remaining structures to avoid fines. The NGO Regavim praised the demolitions as combatting illegal construction by squatters.

In addition to the Negev, authorities ordered demolition of private property in Arab towns and villages, and in East Jerusalem, stating some structures were built without permits. B'Tselem reported that as of October 31, authorities had demolished 118 housing units in East Jerusalem, and owners had self-demolished 37 units to avoid additional fines. This represented an increase of 68 percent and 105 percent, respectively, from the previous highest level B'Tselem had reported in 2016. Legal experts pointed to the recent Kaminitz law, which reduced administrative processing times for demolitions, as a key factor in the increased number of demolitions this year in Jerusalem. There were credible claims that municipal authorities in Jerusalem often placed insurmountable obstacles against non-Israeli residents who applied for construction permits, including failure to incorporate community needs into zoning decisions, the requirement that they document land ownership despite the absence of a uniform post-1967 land registration process, the imposition of high application fees, and requirements to connect new housing to municipal works that were often unavailable. In addition, NGOs asserted that there was an ongoing policy intended to limit construction to prevent the creation or maintenance of contiguous neighborhoods between the West Bank and Jerusalem.

According to the government, all land ownership cases are assessed individually by an administrative committee, which is subject to judicial review.

According to Ir Amim and B'Tselem, religious discrimination is a factor in resolving disputes over land titles acquired before 1948. The law facilitates the resolution of claims by Jewish owners to land owned in East Jerusalem prior to 1948 but does not provide an equal opportunity for non-Jewish claimants.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected those prohibitions.

The 2003 Law of Citizenship and Entry, which is renewed annually, prohibits non-Jewish Iranians, Iraqis, Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza, including those who are spouses of Israeli residents or citizens, from obtaining resident status unless the Ministry of the Interior makes a special determination, usually on humanitarian grounds. The government has extended the law annually due to government reports that Palestinian family reunification allows entry to a disproportionate number of persons who are later involved in acts of terrorism. HaMoked asserted that statistics from government documents obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests contradicted these terrorism allegations, and the denial of residency to Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza for the purposes of family reunification led to cases of family separation.

According to HaMoked 2018 reports, there were approximately 10,000 Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza living in Israel, including Jerusalem, on temporary stay permits because of the law, with no legal guarantee that they would be able to continue living with their families. There were also cases of Palestinian spouses living in East Jerusalem without legal status. Authorities did not permit Palestinians who were abroad during the 1967 war or whose residency permits the government subsequently withdrew to reside permanently in Jerusalem. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations called on the government to repeal this law and resume processing family unification applications. The law allows the entry of spouses of Israelis on a “staying permit” if the male spouse is age 35 or older and the female spouse is age 25 or older, but they may not receive residency based on their marriage and have no path to citizenship.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The law generally provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, and the government generally respected this right. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for the press.

The law imposes tort liability on any person who knowingly issues a public call for an economic, cultural, or academic boycott of the State of Israel or of institutions or entities in areas under its control in the West Bank. Plaintiffs must prove direct economic harm to claim damages under the “anti-boycott” legislation. The law also permits the finance minister to impose administrative sanctions on those calling for such a boycott, including restrictions on participating in tenders for contracts with the government and denial of government benefits.

In 2017 the Knesset passed an amendment barring entry to the country of visitors who called for boycotts, and in January 2018 the Ministry of Strategic Affairs published a list of 20 organizations whose members would be refused entry to Israel. The government also used this law to deport Human Rights Watch director of Israel and Palestine Omar Shakir (see section 5).

Freedom of Expression: The law prohibits hate speech and content liable to incite to violence or discrimination on grounds of race, origin, religion, nationality, and gender.

The maximum penalty for desecrating the Israeli flag is three years in prison and a fine of 58,400 shekels (\$16,900).

In cases of speech that are defined as incitement to violence or hate speech, the law empowers police to limit freedom of expression.

A 2018 law “prohibit[s] individuals or organizations that are not part of the education system from engaging in activities within an educational institution when the nature of the activity undermines the goals of state education.” Both supporters and opponents of the bill said it targeted the NGO Breaking the Silence, which described its activities as collecting and publishing “the testimonies of soldiers who served in the occupied territories in order to generate public discourse on the reality of the occupation, with the aim of bringing it to an end.” Breaking the Silence criticized the law as a violation of freedom of political expression. As of year’s end, the Ministry of Education had not issued regulations necessary to implement the law.

Security officials prohibited groups affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) or Palestinian Authority (PA) from meeting in Jerusalem based on a 1995 law banning the PA from engaging in political, diplomatic, security, or security-related activities in Israel, including Jerusalem.

Press and Media, Including Online Media: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction, with a few exceptions.

In October 2018 police issued a new regulation regarding the work of journalists in areas experiencing clashes, which authorities claimed balanced freedom of the press and security requirements. According to the Seventh Eye media watchdog group, the regulation grants police broad authorities to prevent journalists’ access to public incidents involving violence (i.e., riots, demonstrations, protests) if there exists a concern that the entry of journalists would lead to “special circumstances,” such as injury or the loss of life, further violence, disrupting investigative procedures, serious violation of privacy, or violation of a closure order. According to the regulation, however, police must also consider alternatives to minimize the violation of press freedom, for instance by escorting journalists in and out of dangerous situations.

Violence and Harassment: Palestinian journalists who were able to obtain entry permits, as well as Jerusalem-based Arab journalists, reported incidents of harassment, racism, and occasional violence when they sought to cover news in Jerusalem, especially in the Old City and its vicinity. According to a January 23 Foreign Press Association statement, “Arab journalists [are] needlessly hassled by Israeli security in what we believe is clear ethnic profiling.” This included reports of alleged harassment by Israeli soldiers and acts of violence against Palestinian and Arab-Israeli journalists that prevented them from covering news stories. According to the Journalists Support Committee, 26 Palestinian journalists were detained in Israeli prisons as of August. In April the Committee to Protect Journalists issued a statement criticizing the government for holding Palestinian journalists in its jails, noting “Israel’s use of administrative detention to hold journalists without charge runs completely contrary to its professed values of democracy and rule of law.”

The Ministry of Interior sought to deport stateless photojournalist Mustafa al-Haruf from East Jerusalem to Jordan, after he was unable to obtain residency status in Jerusalem, and held him in administrative detention between January and October. In March the Committee to Protect Journalists called on authorities to either clarify the reasons for al-Haruf’s detention and deportation order or release him immediately. After Jordan refused to accept al-Haruf, on October 24, a court

reviewing border-control decisions released him, due to the Ministry of Interior's inability to deport him. The court ordered al-Haruf to regularize his status by February 12, 2020. While the government classified the reasons for the denial of al-Haruf's status for security reasons, in an appeal of his deportation a Supreme Court justice stated al-Haruf “crossed the line between his journalistic work and assisting terrorist organizations” but also mentioned “reports that are not sympathetic to the State of Israel,” according to +972 *Magazine*.

Prime Minister Netanyahu and his supporters criticized journalists, media channels, and media owners for reporting on investigations into a series of allegations (see section 4) involving the prime minister, for which the attorney general decided to indict him. In January the Likud Party published billboards with photographs of four journalists saying, “they will not decide,” according to media reports. Following attacks in media and social media by the prime minister and his son, Yair Netanyahu, against Channel 12 News legal correspondent Guy Peleg, who covered the Netanyahu investigations, Peleg received a series of threats on WhatsApp and social media, which led the channel to provide him with a private security guard on August 30. On August 31, Netanyahu criticized the heads of Channel 12 News for their coverage of his office, called for a boycott of the channel, and said they were carrying out a “terror attack against democracy,” while treating rival political parties more gently than Likud. Netanyahu argued that he was working to increase competition in the domestic television market.

On October 26, a group of ultra-Orthodox men physically attacked an *Israel Hayom* reporter near Haifa. The attackers severely assaulted the journalist, breaking his nose and resulting in a concussion. The attackers called him a “traitor” and a “leftist” after confirming he was a journalist. On October 31, police arrested a suspect in the attack, and the investigation of the case was pending as of December.

On September 2, the state attorney issued a directive instructing prosecutors to consider requesting increased sentences of three to five years' imprisonment for violent offenses committed against journalists.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: All media organizations must submit to military censors any material relating to specific military issues or strategic infrastructure problems, such as oil and water supplies. Organizations may appeal the censor's decisions to the Supreme Court, and the censor may not appeal a court judgment.

News printed or broadcast abroad is subject to security censorship. The government regularly enacted restrictive orders on sensitive security information and continuing investigations and required foreign correspondents, as well as local media, to abide by these orders. According to data provided by the armed forces through a Freedom of Information Act request by +972 *Magazine*, in 2018 the censor intervened in 2,721 articles of 10,938 submitted to it and banned 363 articles.

While the government retained the authority to censor the printing of publications for security concerns, anecdotal evidence suggested authorities did not actively review the Jerusalem-based *al-Quds* newspaper or other Jerusalem-based Arabic publications. Those publications, however, reported they engaged in self-censorship.

National Security: The law criminalizes as “terrorist acts” speech supporting terrorism, including public praise of a terrorist organization, display of symbols, expression of slogans, and “incitement.” In 2018 the Knesset amended the law to authorize restrictions on the release of bodies of terrorists and their funerals to prevent “incitement to terror or identification with a terrorist organization or an act of terror.” The government issued 53 indictments and courts convicted 39 persons under the law during the year. On May 16, the Nazareth District Court partially accepted the appeal of Daren Tatour, who was convicted by the local magistrate's court due to poems, pictures, and other media content she posted online in 2015. The court reversed lower court verdicts on charges of “incitement to violence” and “support of a terrorist organization” related to her poetry, but it upheld convictions related to her other publications. The ruling stated that when examining freedom of expression, the fact that Tatour's words were part of an artistic piece had to be taken into consideration.

Internet Freedom

The government monitored electronic communications for security purposes. The law authorizes district court judges to restrict access to internet sites to prevent the commission of crimes. The end-of-year report for 2018 by the state attorney's Cyber Unit stated that requests to digital services companies to remove content based on its assessment that the content is illegal under the law led to the removal of 13,140 online postings, compared with 10,500 in 2017. According to the report, 80 percent of the requests were due to offenses related to a terror organization, and 19 percent were due to incitement offenses. On November 26, Adalah and ACRI petitioned the Supreme Court to stop the Ministry of Justice's Cyber Unit process of requesting that digital services companies voluntarily remove contents prior to a formal legal review, arguing these requests infringe on the rights of freedom of expression and due process. The state prosecution argued the Cyber Unit approached

companies only after investigative authorities identified the contents as violating the law. On August 19, a district court judge rejected a request by ACRI to review the 1,700 websites for transparency purposes, arguing that a publication of domains would contradict the reason for their removal.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The “Nakba Law” prohibits institutions that receive government funding from engaging in commemoration of the Nakba, or “catastrophe,” the term used by Palestinians to refer to the displacement of Palestinians during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence. Activities forbidden by the law include rejection of the existence of Israel as a “Jewish and democratic state” or commemorating “Israel’s Independence Day or the day on which the State was established as a day of mourning.”

On July 25, the Supreme Court issued an injunction demanding that Science and Technology minister Ofir Akunis explain why he blocked the appointment of an Israeli professor to an official Israeli-German scientific committee. In 2018 Akunis had claimed he blocked the appointment because years earlier the professor had signed a petition by faculty members in universities, expressing “support and appreciation to the students and lecturers who refuse to serve as soldiers in the occupied territories.”

On November 7, following a demand from Minister of Culture and Sports Miri Regev, the mayor of Ma’alot-Tarshiha decided not to show the documentary film *Advocate*, about attorney Lea Tsemel’s defense of Palestinian prisoners, in the city’s cultural center as a part of a DocAviv film festival. Following a letter from ACRI arguing the decision was illegal, the deputy attorney general informed the mayor he had no authority to cancel the showing of a film. In protest DocAviv presented the film in a nearby Kibbutz and outside the Ma’alot-Tarshiha cultural center. In June, after the film was selected as the winning film in the DocAviv Documentary Film Festival, Mifal Hapayis (the country’s state lottery), announced it would stop funding the award for the winning film in the festival but later retracted its announcement.

The government maintained prohibitions on some prominent Jerusalem-based Palestinian institutions, such as the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce and Orient House, which had been the de facto PLO office. The government renewed a military closure order for these and other institutions on the grounds they violated the Oslo Accords by conducting political activities or otherwise operating on behalf of the PA in Jerusalem. The government likewise continued to shut down Palestinian institutions and cultural events in Jerusalem due to PA participation or support. According to *Haaretz*, Minister of Public Security Gilad Erdan approved 10 such orders during the year.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law provides for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law provides for this right, and the government generally respected it.

There were reports that police used excessive force in response to protests by certain groups, including members of the ultra-Orthodox community, Arab citizens and residents, Israelis of Ethiopian origin, and persons with disabilities. For example, on May 23, military police officers reportedly forced to the floor an autistic boy at an ultra-Orthodox demonstration. According to police, the boy allegedly hit a police officer prior to the incident.

In June authorities implemented a new procedure granting police the ability to impose conditions on outdoor gatherings of 50 or more persons. NGOs expressed concern that this restriction was a violation of freedom of expression and assembly and criticized police for creating obstacles to free speech and assembly in cases where demonstration permits were not required. On August 14, police arrested seven activists who protested against the killing of an Ethiopian-Israeli by a police officer (see section 6), and on August 16, authorities arrested an additional nine anticorruption activists, arguing they violated the new conditions.

Freedom of Association

The law provides for this right, and the government generally respected it.

The law prohibits registration of an association or a party if its goals include denial of the existence of the State of Israel or of the democratic character of the state.

The law requires NGOs receiving more than one-half of their funding from foreign governments to state this fact in their official publications, applications to attend Knesset meetings, websites, public campaigns, and any communication with the public. The law allows a fine of 29,200 shekels (\$8,400) for NGOs that violate these rules. As of October the government had not taken legal action against any NGO for failing to comply with the law.

Local NGOs, particularly those focused on human rights problems and critical of the government, asserted the government sought to intimidate them and prevent them from receiving foreign government funding (see section 5).

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights for citizens.

In-country Movement: The security barrier that divided the majority of the West Bank from Israel also divided some communities in Jerusalem, affecting residents' access to places of worship, employment, agricultural lands, schools, and hospitals, as well as the conduct of journalism and humanitarian and NGO activities. For example, restrictions on access in Jerusalem had a negative effect on residents who were patients and medical staff trying to reach the six Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem that offered specialized care, including delays at checkpoints lasting up to two hours. Authorities sometimes restricted movement within these neighborhoods of Jerusalem and Jerusalem's Old City and periodically blocked entrances to the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Issawiya, Silwan, and Jabal Mukabber. The government stated that restrictions on movement in Jerusalem were temporary and implemented only when necessary for investigative operations, public safety, or public order, and when there was no viable alternative.

Foreign Travel: Citizens generally were free to travel abroad provided they had no outstanding military obligations and no administrative restrictions. The government may bar citizens from leaving the country based on security considerations, due to unpaid debts, or in cases in which a Jewish man refuses to grant his wife a Jewish legal writ of divorce. Authorities do not permit any citizen to travel to any state officially at war with Israel without government permission. This restriction includes travel to Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen.

The government requires all citizens to have a special permit to enter Area A in the West Bank (the area, according to the Interim Agreement, in which the PA exercises civil and security responsibility), but the government allowed Arab citizens of Israel access to Area A without permits. The government continued selective revocations of residency permits of some non-Israeli citizens in Jerusalem. This meant those residents could not return to reside in Jerusalem. Reasons for revocation included holding residency or citizenship of another country; living in another country, the West Bank, or Gaza for more than seven years; or, most commonly, being unable to prove a “center of life” (interpreted as full-time residency) in Jerusalem. Some non-Israeli citizens who were born in Jerusalem but studied abroad reported losing their Jerusalem residency status, but the government denied revoking residency status of anyone who left for the sole purpose of studying abroad. The government added that the residency of individuals who maintain an “affinity to Israel” will not be revoked and that former residents who wish to return to Israel may receive renewed residency status under certain conditions.

Non-Israeli citizens possessing Jerusalem identity cards issued by the Israeli government needed special documents to travel abroad.

Exile: In 2018 the Knesset passed an amendment to the Entry Into Israel Law granting the minister of interior authority to revoke the permanent resident status of individuals who have committed acts that constitute “breach of trust” or terrorism. On August 22, Minister of Interior Aryeh Deri revoked the residency of two East Jerusalemites who were convicted of being involved in terrorist attacks and sentenced to life in prison, based on the amendment. HaMoked appealed against the law and one of the revocations, and the case continued at year's end.

Citizenship: The law allows revocation of citizenship of a person on grounds of “breach of trust to the State of Israel” or following a conviction for an act of terror.

e. Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: Communities with large concentrations of African migrants were occasionally targets of violence. Additionally, the nature of government policies on the legality of work forced many refugees to work in “unofficial” positions, making them more susceptible to poor treatment and questionable work practices by their employers. According to the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA) inspectors used violence against imprisoned migrants during their deportation during the year. According to Hotline, PIBA, unlike police or the IPS, did not have an external body to which migrants could file complaints if subjected to violence.

The government cooperated with UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, or other persons of concern, except as noted below.

Refoulement: The government provided some protection against expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom could be threatened and stated its commitment to the principle of nonrefoulement.

As of September 30, there were 32,090 irregular migrants and asylum seekers in the country, of whom 29,141 were from Eritrea or Sudan, according to PIBA.

In October 2018 PIBA announced the government ended a policy that provided temporary protection for citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and requested those without a visa to depart the country by January 5. The Supreme Court issued an injunction in December 2018 temporarily halting the deportation following a petition by NGOs. On March 7, Minister of Interior Aryeh Deri halted the deportation based on a recommendation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs due to “recent developments in the DRC.” According to PIBA, there were 311 asylum seekers from the DRC in the country in 2018.

The government offered irregular migrants incentives to “depart” the country to an unspecified third country in Africa, sometimes including a \$3,500 stipend (paid in U.S. dollars). The government claimed the third-country government provided for full rights under secret agreements with Israel. The government provided most returnees with paid tickets, but NGOs and UNHCR confirmed that migrants who arrived at the destination did not receive residency or employment rights. From January 1 until September 30, 2,024 irregular migrants departed the country under pressure, compared with 2,677 in 2018. NGO advocates for irregular migrants claimed many of those who departed to other countries faced abuses in those countries and that this transfer could amount to refoulement.

In February 2018 an administrative appeals tribunal ruled that an Eritrean asylum seeker had a well-founded fear of persecution after he fled military conscription in his home country and that PIBA should not have rejected his asylum application arbitrarily. The Ministry of Interior appealed the ruling to a district court and then requested to reexamine the individual's request for asylum, but the judge refused. The case continued at year's end.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for granting of asylum or refugee status. The government has established a system for providing protection to refugees, but it rarely did so. In 2008 authorities began giving the majority of asylum seekers a “conditional release visa” that requires frequent renewal. Only two Ministry of the Interior offices in the country, located in Bnei Brak and Eilat, renew such visas. The government provided these individuals with a limited form of group protection regarding freedom of movement, protection against refoulement, and informal access to the labor market. Advocacy groups argued that the policies and legislation adopted in 2011 were aimed at deterring future asylum seekers by making life difficult for those already in the country and that these actions further curtailed the rights of this population and encouraged its departure.

Refugee status determination recognition rates remained extremely low. From 2009 to 2017, the government approved only 52 of 55,433 asylum requests, according to a 2018 report from the State Comptroller's Office. Of these, 13 were for Eritrean citizens and one was for a Sudanese citizen. The government approved six asylum requests during the year. As of May there were 15,000 asylum applications awaiting examination, according to a government response to a Supreme Court petition.

Irregular migrants subject to deportation, including those claiming but unable to prove citizenship of countries included in Israel's nonrefoulement policy, were subjected to indefinite detention if they refused to depart after receiving a deportation order. In 2018 at year's end, there were 165 migrants with undetermined or disputed citizenship in detention.

On January 2, PIBA stopped examining asylum requests of Eritrean citizens following a request by the attorney general in order to reevaluate the criteria for approving asylum requests. In July the government announced it would reexamine all requests from Eritrean asylum seekers, including 3,000 that were previously turned down, based on new criteria that require asylum seekers to prove they would be persecuted if returned home and they did not flee to avoid compulsory military service. On July 9, the government informed the Supreme Court that it stopped examining asylum claims of Sudanese citizens from Darfur, Nuba Mountains, and Blue Nile due to the “dynamic political situation in Sudan.” On July 28, the Supreme Court overturned the revocation of residency permits of three asylum seekers.

Palestinian residents of the West Bank who claimed to be in a life-threatening situation due to their sexual orientation or other reasons, such as domestic violence, did not have access to the asylum system in Israel; however, many of them resided in Israel without legal status. NGOs stated this

situation left persons who claimed they could not return to the West Bank due to fear of persecution vulnerable to human traffickers, violence, and exploitation. Some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex Palestinians were able to obtain a temporary permit allowing them to stay in Israel from the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), but without authorization to work. The government stated that COGAT examined the issue on a case-by-case basis.

The government did not accept initial asylum claims at its airports.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: In 2017 PIBA announced a fast-track procedure to reject asylum applications from applicants whose country of citizenship the Ministry of the Interior determined was safe for return and began applying it to Georgian and Ukrainian applicants.

Freedom of Movement: Authorities prohibited asylum seekers released from the closed the Holot detention facility and Saharonim Prison from residing in Eilat, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Petah Tikva, Netanya, Ashdod, and Bnei Brak-cities that already had a high concentration of asylum seekers.

Employment: On July 9, the government informed the Supreme Court that it would remove text from the visas of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers stipulating “this is not a work visa,” a restriction that had not been enforced since 2011 due to a government commitment to the Supreme Court. The government also stated it would grant work permits to 300 asylum seekers from Sudan. According to NGOs, these steps did not change the asylum seekers’ ability to work. According to UNHCR, beginning in October asylum seekers from countries not listed under Israel’s nonrefoulement policy were restricted from working for three to six months after submitting their requests if they did not have a visa before applying. In 2017 the Supreme Court ruled that asylum seekers are included as “foreign workers,” a category prohibited by Finance Ministry regulations from working on government contracts, including local government contracts for cleaning and maintenance, which often employed irregular migrants.

The law requires employers to deduct 20 percent of irregular migrants’ salaries for deposit in a special fund and adds another 16 percent from the employer’s funds. Some vulnerable populations, including individuals recognized as human trafficking victims, are eligible for a reduced rate of 6 percent, but many of them either still paid the full deduction or did not receive reimbursements for previously paying the full deduction, according to PHRI and UNHCR. On December 8, PIBA announced all recognized victims of trafficking would receive retroactive reimbursements and would pay a deposit of 6 percent without having to declare their status to their employers. Employees can access the funds only upon departure from the country, and the government may deduct a penalty for each day that the employee is in the country without a visa.

NGOs such as Kav LaOved and Hotline for Refugees and Migrants criticized the law for pushing vulnerable workers’ already low incomes below minimum wage, leading employers and employees to judge it to be more profitable to work on the black market, increasing migrants’ vulnerability to trafficking and prostitution. According to government officials and NGOs, some Eritrean women entered prostitution or survival sex arrangements in which a woman lives with several men and receives shelter in exchange for sex. The NGO Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel (ASSAF) reported significant increases in homelessness, mental health concerns, and requests for food assistance following implementation of the law. In a June 26 response to a NGO coalition petition against the law to the Supreme Court, the government stated that only 68 asylum seekers received the full amount deducted from their salaries in their deposits, and no money was deposited for 45 percent of the migrants to which the law applied, despite deductions having been taken from their salaries, according to *Haaretz*. The petition was pending at year’s end.

The law bars migrants from sending money abroad, limits the amount they may take with them when they leave to the minimum wage for the number of months they resided in the country, and defines taking money out of the country as a money-laundering crime.

Access to Basic Services: The few legally recognized refugees received social services, including access to the national health-care system, but the government for the most part did not provide asylum seekers with public social benefits. Asylum seekers who were either unemployed or whose employers did not arrange a private insurance policy for them as required by law had access only to emergency care, either in emergency rooms or in one refugee clinic in south Tel Aviv. The establishment of three additional refugee clinics throughout the country was postponed. The Ministry of Health offered medical insurance for minor children of asylum seekers for 120 shekels (\$35) per month, but in September 2018 it began excluding children of undocumented migrants from this program. The ministry stated an interministerial team was assessing this change in response to a Supreme Court petition. The government sponsored a mobile clinic and mother and infant health-care stations in south Tel Aviv, which were accessible to migrants and asylum seekers. Hospitals provided emergency care to migrants but often denied follow-up treatment to those who failed to pay, according to PHRI. Until September the Ministry of Health funded one provider of mental health services for approximately 700 irregular migrants that in the past year was unable to accept new patients due to budget and staffing shortages. On December 9, the Ministry of Welfare stated that local authorities must treat asylum seekers of three groups—women who suffered from

domestic violence, persons with disabilities, and the homeless—pending the regularization of insurance issues with the Ministry of Health, which did not take place by year's end. Asylum seekers who were recognized as victims of trafficking were eligible for rehabilitation and care. The same eligibilities did not apply for victims of torture.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to individuals whom it did not recognize as refugees, or who may not qualify as refugees—primarily to Eritrean and Sudanese irregular migrants, as described above.

g. Stateless Persons

Despite being eligible for Israeli citizenship since 1981, an estimated 23,000 Druze living in territory captured from Syria in 1967 largely refused to accept it, and their status as Syrian citizens was unclear. They held Israeli identification cards, which listed their nationality as “undefined.”

In 2017 media reported the Ministry of Interior had retroactively canceled the citizenship of 2,600 Bedouin citizens, alleging that a “registration error” had mistakenly granted citizenship to their ancestors between 1948 and 1951. Cancellation of their citizenship left these individuals stateless.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Non-Israeli citizens in Jerusalem who have permanent residency status may vote in Jerusalem municipal elections and seek some municipal offices, but not mayor, and they cannot vote in general elections or serve in the Knesset.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Observers considered the April 9 and September 17 parliamentary elections free and fair. In each of the elections, more than 67 percent of eligible voters cast ballots. In April the ruling Likud Party placed cameras in predominately Arab polling stations in an effort to dissuade Arab voter turnout. Following the elections, the Central Elections Committee ruled that the placement of recording devices in polling stations is forbidden and would require formal legislation, which the Likud Party was unable to pass in the Knesset. During the September elections, observers noted minimal irregularities that had no impact on the final outcome.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The Basic Laws prohibit the candidacy of any party or individual that denies the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people or the democratic character of the state or that incites racism. A political party may also not be registered if its goals include support of an armed struggle, enemy state, or terror organization against Israel. Otherwise, political parties operated without restriction or interference. The Northern Islamic Movement, banned in 2015, continued its practice of boycotting elections and prohibiting its members from running for local or national office.

The law restricts the funding of individuals and groups that engage in “election activity” during the period of a national election, which is typically three months. The law's sponsors described it as an effort to prevent organizations and wealthy individuals from bypassing election-funding laws, but some civil society organizations expressed concern the law would stifle political participation.

The law allows dismissal of an MK if 90 of 120 MKs vote for expulsion, following a request of 70 MKs, including at least 10 from the opposition. The party of an expelled member could replace the MK with the next individual on its party list, and the expelled member could run in the next election. Joint List MK Yousef Jabareen and NGOs argued the government intended the law to target Arab legislators and that it harmed democratic principles such as electoral representation and freedom of expression.

In the period preceding the April and September elections, the NGO Adalah demanded that the Central Elections Committee and the Ministry of Interior set up polling stations for Arab Bedouin citizens in the unrecognized villages in the Negev or provide the voters with transportation to their assigned polling stations. Authorities denied the request.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws limit participation of women or members of minorities in the political process, and they did participate. The law provides an additional 15 percent in campaign funding to municipal party lists composed of at least one-third women. Women and minorities participated widely in politics, although their representation in the Knesset decreased during the year. While at the beginning of the year the 120-member Knesset had 35 female members and 18 members from ethnic or religious minorities (12 Muslims, three Druze, two Ethiopian-Israelis, and one Christian), at year's end, following two elections, the Knesset had 28 women and 16 members from ethnic or religious minorities (nine Muslims, three Druze, two Christian and two Ethiopian Israelis). As of September the 23-member cabinet included four women and one Druze minister. One woman was a deputy minister; there were no Arabs. Aida Touma Suliman, an Arab, chaired a permanent committee in the Knesset, the Committee on the Status of

Women. Four members of the 15-member Supreme Court were women, and one was Arab. Following October 2018 municipal elections, the number of women mayors and local council heads increased from six to 14 of 257 such positions.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were reports of government corruption, although impunity was not a problem.

Corruption: The government continued to investigate and prosecute top political figures. On November 21, Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit decided to indict Prime Minister Netanyahu for offenses of allegedly taking a bribe, fraud, and breach of trust, related to possible corruption involving regulation of a telecommunications company, an alleged attempt to direct authorities to suppress media coverage in exchange for favorable press, and the alleged receipt of inappropriate gifts. On August 14, the attorney general decided to indict Minister of Welfare Haim Katz for fraud and breach of trust after he allegedly helped a businessman by promoting legislation in contravention of the law and involving a conflict of interest. Several other government ministers and senior officials were under investigation for various alleged offenses, including Minister of Interior Aryeh Deri, Deputy Minister of Health Yaakov Litzman, and MK David Bitan.

The law prohibits police from offering a recommendation whether to indict a public official when transferring an investigation to prosecutors. The attorney general or state prosecutor can ask police for a recommendation, however. Detectives or prosecutors who leak a police recommendation or an investigation summary can be imprisoned for up to three years. The law does not apply to investigations in process at the time of the law's passage.

The NGO Lawyers for Good Governance, which combats corruption in Israel's 85 Arab municipalities, reported that it received 934 corruption-related complaints through its hotline, up 20 percent from 2018. The NGO stated that during the year it prevented 48 senior staff appointments on the basis of nepotism or hiring without a public announcement.

Financial Disclosure: Senior officials are subject to comprehensive financial disclosure laws, and the Civil Service Commission verifies their disclosures. Authorities do not make information in these disclosures public without the consent of the person who submitted the disclosure. There is no specific criminal sanction for noncompliance.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of Israeli, Palestinian, and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally responsive to their views, and parliamentarians routinely invited NGOs critical of the government to participate in Knesset hearings on proposed legislation. The government stated it makes concerted efforts to include civil society in the legislation process, in developing public policy, and in a variety of projects within government ministries, but it did not cooperate with human rights organizations that it deemed “politically affiliated.” Human rights NGOs have standing to petition the Supreme Court directly regarding governmental policies and may appeal individual cases to the Supreme Court.

Domestic NGOs, particularly those focused on human rights issues, continued to view the law requiring disclosure of support from foreign entities on formal publications and its implementation as an attempt to stigmatize, delegitimize, and silence them. Supporters of the legislation described it as a transparency measure to reveal foreign government influence. Critics noted it targeted only foreign government funding, without requiring organizations to report private funding.

A 2017 law mandates additional scrutiny of requests for National Service volunteers from NGOs that receive more than one-half of their funding from foreign governments. After the National Service Authority rejected the requests of several NGOs, the organizations appealed the decisions, arguing they had complied with the new regulations and that the decision targeted them due to the nature of their work. The cases were pending at year's end.

The staffs of domestic NGOs, particularly those calling for an end to the country's military presence in the West Bank and NGOs working for the rights of asylum seekers, stated they received death threats from nongovernmental sources, which spiked during periods in which government officials spoke out against their activities or criticized them as enemies or traitors for opposing government policy. For example, on July 31, unknown individuals vandalized the offices of several NGOs working to advance the rights of asylum seekers, including ASSAF and Amnesty International. On the same day, a package with death threats and a dead mouse was left at the office of Elifelet, Citizens for Refugee Children.

In December 2018 the High Court overturned a Be'er Sheva municipality decision to evict the cultural center of the Negev Coexistence Forum (NCF) from a public shelter due to their engagement in “political activity.” In January the municipality demanded the organization retroactively pay property taxes dating back to 2012, totaling 480,000 shekels (\$139,000). The NCF viewed the decision as a tool to “persecute and silence those promoting joint Jewish-Arab activity in the city.” In April the municipality reached an agreement with the NCF, reducing the fine to 30,000 shekels (\$8,700), and gave the organization until October 2020 to leave the shelter.

On April 16, a Jerusalem district court upheld a government decision not to renew a work visa for the Human Rights Watch Israel and Palestine director, Omar Shakir, on grounds that he called for a boycott of West Bank settlements. (For information about boycotts against Israel and Israeli settlements in the West Bank, see section 2.a.) Human Rights Watch appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court. On November 5, the Supreme Court upheld the district court decision and ordered Shakir to depart the country by November 25.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government generally cooperated with the United Nations and other international bodies. The country withdrew from UNESCO in December 2018. The government continued its policy of nonengagement with the UN Human Rights Council’s “special rapporteur on the situation in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.”

Government Human Rights Bodies: The state comptroller also served as ombudsman for human rights problems and in this capacity investigated complaints against statutory bodies subject to audit by the state comptroller, including government ministries, local authorities, government enterprises and institutions, government corporations, and their employees. The ombudsman is entitled to use any relevant means of inquiry and has the authority to order any person or body to assist in the inquiry.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape, including spousal rape, is a felony punishable by 16 years’ imprisonment. Rape under aggravated circumstances or rape committed against a relative is punishable by 20 years’ imprisonment. The Central Bureau of Statistics reported approximately 15,000 women were victims of sex offenses in 2018, including indecent acts, attempted rape, and rape. The number of requests to the Association for Rape Crisis Centers for assistance related to rape in 2018 was 8 percent higher than in 2017. Authorities opened 1,534 investigations of suspected rape in 2018, compared with 1,443 in 2017. Authorities closed 91 percent of rape cases in 2018 without filing an indictment, mainly due to lack of evidence.

During the year, 13 women and girls were killed, most by family members or male partners.

On January 1, the Knesset approved a law extending the statute of limitation on severe sexual offenses from 10 to 15 years, with a sentence of seven years’ imprisonment. The Knesset also approved an amendment to the penal code on murder charges and sentencing, which came into effect on July 10. According to the amendment, men who kill their partners after abusing them are to be charged with “murder under aggravated circumstances,” with a sentence of life imprisonment. Women who kill an abusive partner are to be charged with “murder under circumstances of reduced liability,” with a maximum punishment of 15 years’ imprisonment.

According to media reports, in June and July the parole board decided to grant early release to two women convicted of killing their abusive husbands. They served 17 and 18 years, respectively, of their 25-year sentences.

The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services operated 14 shelters for survivors of domestic abuse, including two for the Arab community, two mixed Jewish-Arab shelters, two for the ultra-Orthodox community, and eight for non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities. The ministry also operated a hotline for reporting abuse. The government stated that police officers receive training to interact with persons of different cultures and backgrounds, with an emphasis on special minority communities, although women from certain Orthodox Jewish, Muslim, and Druze communities faced significant social pressure not to report rape or domestic abuse.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is illegal. Penalties for sexual harassment depend on the severity of the act and whether the harassment involved blackmail. The law provides that victims may follow the progress on their cases through a computerized system and information call center. In 2018 prosecutors filed 168 indictments for sexual harassment, up from 129 in 2017. According to 2018 data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, 95 percent of sexual harassment victims older than age 20 did not report the incident to police. Throughout the year victims of sex offenses expressed discontent with law enforcement’s response to such cases through a #WhyIDidn’tComplain campaign. In March 2018 Supreme Court Chief Justice Esther Hayut established a committee to examine the judicial system’s treatment of victims of sex offenses. In a December report, while

acknowledging progress in treating victims of sex offense, the committee found victims faced difficulties at every step of the legal process. The report recommended establishing a commission for the promotion of rights for victims of offenses, including sex offenses, appointing social workers to accompany victims throughout the process, establishing centers providing services to victims, piloting teams specializing in sex offenses in law enforcement institutions, and developing restorative justice proceedings in the context of sex offenses.

On September 23, a district court convicted former Jerusalem police chief [Niso Shaham](#) for sexually harassing officers under his command, overturning a 2018 magistrate court ruling. Sentencing was pending at year's end.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: The law provides for the same legal status and rights for women as for men. The law requires every government ministry and every municipality to have an advisor working to advance women's rights. The government subsidizes day-care and after-school programs to encourage labor participation by mothers and offers professional training to single parents. Although the law prohibits discrimination based on gender in employment and wages and provides for class action antidiscrimination suits, a wage gap between men and women persisted. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2018 the average salary of men was 12,500 shekels (\$3,600) and 8,540 shekels for women (\$2,480). A part of the gap reportedly resulted from a differential between hours men and women worked each week on average.

In the criminal and civil courts, women and men enjoyed the same rights, but in some matters separate religious courts—responsible for adjudication of family law, including marriage and divorce—limited the rights of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Druze women. Although women served as judges in nonreligious courts, they remained barred from serving as judges in rabbinical courts.

The law allows a Jewish woman or man to initiate divorce proceedings, and both the husband and wife must give consent to make the divorce final. Sometimes a husband makes divorce contingent on his wife conceding to demands, such as those relating to property ownership or child custody. Jewish women in this situation could not remarry and any children born to them from another man would be deemed illegitimate by the Rabbinate without a writ of divorce. In rare cases Jewish women refused to grant men divorces, but this has a lesser effect on a husband under Jewish law. Rabbinical courts sometimes sanctioned a husband who refused to give his wife a divorce, while also declining to grant the divorce without his consent.

A Muslim woman may petition for and receive a divorce through the sharia courts without her husband's consent under certain conditions. A marriage contract may provide for other circumstances in which she may obtain a divorce without his consent. Through ecclesiastical courts, Christians may seek official separations or divorces, depending on their denomination. Druze divorces are performed by an oral declaration of the husband alone and then registered through the Druze religious courts, placing a disproportionate burden on the woman to leave the home with her children immediately. A civil family court or a religious court settles child custody, alimony, and property matters after the divorce, which gives preference to the father unless it can be demonstrated that a child especially “needs” the mother.

In some ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, private organizations posted “modesty signs” demanding women obscure themselves from public view to avoid distracting devout men. The local municipality of Beit Shemesh refused to remove the signs, resulting in a fine of 10,000 shekels (\$2,900) per day if the signs remained posted. Following the municipality's refusal to remove the signs, the Supreme Court ruled in November 2018 that authorities must comply with the order by December 31, 2018, or it would be subject to fines. The Supreme Court later extended the deadline until August 30. According to the government, the municipality did not fully implement the ruling by the end of the year, and some signs that were taken down had been replaced by new ones.

Women's rights organizations cited a growing trend of gender segregation and discrimination against women meant to accommodate soldiers of the national religious stream. Despite greater inclusion of women in the IDF in recent years, including in combat roles and senior leadership positions, on April 14, the IDF stopped allowing women to serve in combat positions in the Armored Corps, citing economic and logistical reasons. Women's rights organizations criticized the decision, claiming it was not made for legitimate reasons and hindered gender equality in the IDF. On September 10, a 19-year-old woman petitioned the Supreme Court demanding the option to serve in a combat role in the Armored Corps. The case was pending at year's end.

Women's rights organizations also expressed concern about gender segregation in some public events that took place during the year. On August 14, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of an NGO petition objecting to a gender-segregated event held by the Afula municipality. The event went forward prior to the Supreme Court ruling as a lower court had initially ruled in favor of the municipality. On August 18, the Office of the Attorney General issued a directive stipulating certain

circumstances in which gender-segregated events could be held, pending further examination of the issue. The guidelines deviated from a previous directive that permitted segregation only in events of a religious nature.

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive citizenship at birth if at least one parent is a citizen regardless of whether they are born inside or outside of the country. Births are supposed to be registered within 10 days of delivery. Births are registered in the country only if the parents are citizens or permanent residents. Any child born in an Israeli hospital receives an official document from the hospital that affirms the birth. If one of the parents is an Israeli citizen and the other is not, the child may be registered as Israeli as long as he or she lives with the parent who is an Israeli citizen or permanent resident.

The Supreme Court granted the minister of interior an extension due to the March 2020 elections for its response to a petition by 34 lesbian mothers against the Ministry of Interior's refusal to list nonbiological mothers on birth certificates, despite court-issued parenting orders. Another petition of a same-sex couple who demanded to make the process of registering parenthood for lesbian couples equal to that of heterosexual couples was pending at year's end. On September 23, the Supreme Court found against the Ministry of Interior's requirement for proof of a long-term relationship between two mothers, which does not exist for heterosexual couples, in order to recognize shared parenthood.

For children of nonresident parents, including those who lack legal status in the country, the Ministry of the Interior issues a confirmation of birth document, which is not a birth certificate. The Supreme Court confirmed in a November 2018 ruling that the ministry does not have the authority to issue birth certificates for nonresidents under existing law.

The government registers the births of non-Israelis born in Jerusalem, although some who have experienced the process reported that administrative delays can last years.

Education: Primary and secondary education is free and universal through age 17 and compulsory through grade 12.

The government did not enforce compulsory education in unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev. Bedouin children, particularly girls, continued to have the highest illiteracy rate in the country, and more than 5,000 kindergarten-age children were not enrolled in school, according to the NCF. The government did not grant construction permits in unrecognized villages, including for schools. In 2018 the government began to provide transportation to preschools for children from the unrecognized villages of al-Sira, al-Jaraf, and Umm al-Nameileh for the first time, in response to legal action.

There were reportedly insufficient classrooms to accommodate schoolchildren in Jerusalem. Based on population data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the NGO Ir Amim estimated in previous years a shortage of 2,500 classrooms for non-Israeli children resident in East Jerusalem, and 18,600 non-Israeli children in Jerusalem were not enrolled in any school.

The government operated separate public schools for Jewish children, in which classes were conducted in Hebrew, and for Arab children, with classes conducted in Arabic. For Jewish children separate public schools were available for religious and secular families. Individual families could choose a public school system for their children to attend regardless of ethnicity or religious observance.

The government funded approximately 34 percent of the Christian school system budget and restricted the schools' ability to charge parents tuition, according to church officials. The government offered to fund Christian schools fully if they become part of the public (state) school system, but the churches continued to reject this option, citing concerns that they would lose control over admissions, hiring, and use of church property.

Jewish schoolgirls continued to be denied admission to ultra-Orthodox schools based on their Mizrahi ethnicity (those with ancestry from North Africa or the Middle East) despite a 2009 court ruling prohibiting ethnic segregation between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi schoolgirls, according to the NGO Noar Kahalacha.

There is no Arabic-language school for a population of approximately 3,000 Arab students in Nof Hagalil (formerly Nazareth Illit), a town where 26 percent of residents are Arab. As a result, most Arab students attended schools in Nazareth and nearby villages. An NGO petition seeking the establishment of an Arabic-language school remained pending at year's end.

Child Abuse: The law requires mandatory reporting of any suspicion of child abuse. It also requires social service employees, medical and education professionals, and other officials to report indications that minors were victims of, engaged in, or coerced into prostitution, sexual offenses,

abandonment, neglect, assault, abuse, or human trafficking. The Ministry of Education operated a special unit for sexuality and for prevention of abuse of children and youth that assisted the education system in prevention and appropriate intervention in cases of suspected abuse of minors. On January 1, the Knesset approved a law extending the statute of limitation on serious crimes against children from 10 to 15 years.

The National Council for the Child received more than 222,544 complaints during the year relating to physical and sexual abuse, neglect, and child pornography.

According to local government officials and human rights organizations, Gaza fence protests, air raid sirens, and rocket attacks led to psychological distress among children living near the Gaza Strip, including nightmares and posttraumatic stress disorder.

Early and Forced Marriage: The law sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years, with some exceptions for minors due to pregnancy and for couples older than age 16 if the court permitted it due to unique circumstances. Some Palestinian girls were coerced by their families into marrying older men who were Arab citizens of Israel, according to government and NGO sources.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits sexual exploitation of a minor and sets a penalty of seven to 20 years in prison for violators, depending on the circumstances. The law prohibits the possession of child pornography (by downloading) and accessing such material (by streaming). Authorities enforced the law. The Ministry of Public Security operated a hotline to receive complaints of activities that seek to harm children online, such as bullying, dissemination of hurtful materials, extortion, sexual abuse, and pressure to commit suicide.

The minimum age for consensual sex is 16. Consensual sexual relations with a minor between the ages of 14 and 16 constitute statutory rape punishable by five years' imprisonment.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's report *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

Jews constituted close to 75 percent of the population, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. The government often defined crimes targeting Jews as nationalistic crimes relating to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict rather than as resulting from anti-Semitism.

Regarding claims for the return of, or restitution for, Holocaust-era assets, the government has laws and mechanisms in place. Relevant laws refer to assets imported during World War II whose owners did not survive the war. Unclaimed assets were held in trust and not transferred to legal inheritors, who in most cases were not aware that their late relatives had property in Israel.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Persons with Disabilities

The Basic Laws provide a legal framework for prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in the provision of government services. Legislation mandates access to buildings, information, communication, transportation, the judicial system, and physical accommodations and services in the workplace, as well as access to mental health services as part of government-subsidized health insurance, and the government generally enforced these laws. The law prioritizes access by persons with disabilities to public services, such as eliminating waiting in line. On June 22, an amendment to the Equal Rights Law came into effect, stipulating that public services cannot be provided from buildings or spaces that are not accessible to persons with disabilities. The law also mandates that all government buildings built before 2009 be made accessible to persons with disabilities by the end of the year, excluding local authority buildings, which should be made accessible by November 2021. As of November, 60 percent of public buildings were made accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Societal discrimination and lack of accessibility persisted in private-sector employment and education. Government ministries had not developed regulations regarding the accessibility of health services, roads, sidewalks, and intercity buses by the end of the year. The law requires that at least 5 percent of employees of every government employer with more than 100 workers be persons with disabilities. In 2018, 60 percent of government employers met this requirement, according to data from the National Insurance Institute.

Shortages of funding for Arab-majority municipalities adversely affected Arab citizens with disabilities. The disability rights NGO Bizchut reported a lack of accessible transportation services in Arab-majority neighborhoods of East Jerusalem.

A May 6 State Comptroller report acknowledged that state institutions, including police, Ministry of Justice, courts, IPS, and Ministry of Welfare, do not guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities under legal procedures. It also stated that criminals with disabilities were held for periods of time longer than usual, in unsuitable conditions, or released without punishment and therapy due to a lack of adequate facilities and resources.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Arab Christians and Muslims, Druze, and Ethiopian citizens faced persistent institutional and societal discrimination. There were multiple instances of security services or other citizens racially profiling Arab citizens. Some Arab civil society leaders described the government's attitude toward the Arab minority as ambivalent; others cited examples in which Israeli political leaders incited racism against the Arab community or portrayed it as an enemy.

In June 2018 the Knesset passed a new basic law referred to as the Nation State Law. The new law changed Arabic from an official language, which it had been since Israel adopted prevailing British Mandate law in 1948, to a language with a “special status.” The law also recognized only the Jewish People as having a national right of self-determination and called for promotion of “Jewish settlement” within Israel, which Arab organizations and leaders in the country feared would lead to increased discrimination in housing and legal decisions pertaining to land. Druze leaders criticized the law for relegating a minority in the country who serve in the military to second-class citizen status. Opponents also criticized the law for not mentioning the principle of equality to prevent harm to the rights of non-Jewish minorities. Supporters stated it was necessary to anchor the country's Jewish character in a basic law to balance the 1992 Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, which protected individual rights, noting the Supreme Court had already interpreted the 1992 law as mandating equality. Such supporters argued that the Human Dignity and Liberty law continues to safeguard individual civil rights. Political leaders conceded that the criticisms of the Druze community must be addressed. Multiple lawsuits challenging the Nation State Law remained pending with the Supreme Court at year's end.

On October 22, 14 soldiers of the Netzah Yehuda battalion were arrested on suspicion of attacking Bedouin individuals at a gas station in the southern part of the country, and eight of them were charged with assault, threats, and illegal use of weapons. According to media reports, the soldiers agreed to a plea bargain with military prosecutors in which they admitted to attacking and threatening the Bedouin in return for dismissal of the misuse of weapons charge. The soldiers also received sentences of 52 to 60 days in military prison.

On April 30, two citizens, Koren Elkayam and Tamir Bartal from Be'er Sheva, were convicted of racially motivated assault against Arab citizens and sentenced to one year in prison. They were convicted of involvement in four separate cases of assault in 2017 in which they targeted Arabs to prevent them from having romantic relationships with Jewish women. Elkayam and Bartal were also sentenced to eight months of probation and required to pay the victims 8,000 shekels (\$2,300) in compensation.

Throughout the year there were “price tag” attacks, which refer to violence by Jewish individuals and groups against non-Jewish individuals and property with the stated purpose of exacting a “price” for actions taken by the government against the attackers' interests. The government classifies any association using the phrase “price tag” as an illegal association and a price tag attack as a security (as opposed to criminal) offense. The most common offenses, according to police, were attacks on vehicles, defacement of real estate, harm to Muslim and Christian holy sites, assault, and damage to agricultural lands. For example, on October 31, two individuals were arrested after buildings and cars in Akbara, an Arab neighborhood in the city of Safed, were vandalized. Graffiti included stars of David and the writings “Kumi Uri” and “closed military zone.” The writing referred to an illegal outpost near the Yizhar settlement, where violence against soldiers led the government to declare the area a closed military zone. According to Yesh Din, the Lod District Court sentenced a member of the Nahliel Jewish underground group on July 15 to four years in prison on charges of arson, stone throwing at vehicles, and aggravated assault.

The government employed affirmative action policies for non-Jewish minorities in the civil service. The percentage of Arab employees in the public sector was 12 percent (63 percent entry-level), according to the NGO Sikkuy. The percentage of Arab employees in the 62 government-owned companies was approximately 2.5 percent; however, during the year Arab citizens held 12 percent of director positions in government-owned companies, up from 1 percent in 2000, and Arab workers held 11 percent of government positions, up from 5 percent in 2000, according to Sikkuy. In 2017 the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services announced an investment of 15 million shekels (\$4.3 million) over the next five years to integrate Arab employees into the high-tech sector.

Separate school systems within the public and semipublic domains produced a large variance in education quality. Arab, Druze, and ultra-Orthodox students passed the matriculation exam at lower rates than their non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish counterparts. The government continued operating educational and scholarship programs to benefit Arab students. As of October, 18 percent of undergraduate students in Israeli institutes of higher education were Arab citizens or residents, up from 13 percent in 2010, 14.6 percent in master's degree programs, up from 7.4 percent, and 7 percent in doctoral programs, up from 5.2 percent, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

Approximately 93 percent of land is in the public domain. This includes approximately 12.5 percent owned by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose statutes prohibit sale or lease of land to non-Jews. Arab citizens are allowed to participate in bids for JNF land, but the Israel Lands Administration (ILA) grants the JNF another parcel of land whenever an Arab citizen of Israel wins a bid. In June 2018 the Supreme Court ruled that the ILA Executive Council must have representation of an Arab, Druze, or Circassian member to prevent discrimination against non-Jews; however, there were no members from these groups on the executive council at year's end.

The Bedouin segment of the Arab population continued to be the most disadvantaged. More than one-half of the estimated 258,000 Bedouin citizens in the Negev lived in seven government-planned towns. In nine of 11 recognized villages, all residences remained unconnected to the electricity grid or to the water infrastructure system, according to the NCF. Nearly all public buildings in the recognized Bedouin villages were connected to the electricity grid and water infrastructure, as were residences that had received a building permit, but most residences did not have a building permit, according to the government. Each recognized village had at least one elementary school, and eight recognized villages had high schools.

Approximately 90,000 Bedouins lived in 35 unrecognized tent or shack villages without access to any government services. (See section 1.e. for issues of demolition and restitution for Bedouin property.)

The government generally prohibited Druze citizens and residents from visiting Syria. The government has prevented family visitations to Syria for noncitizen Druze since 1982.

An estimated population of 148,700 Ethiopian Jews faced persistent societal discrimination, although officials and citizens quickly and publicly criticized discriminatory acts against them.

On January 18, a police officer shot and killed Yehuda Biadga, an Ethiopian-Israeli who suffered from a mental disability and was deemed a threat by police after approaching them with a knife. The Department of Investigations of Police Officers closed the case against the officer without an indictment. On June 30, an off-duty police officer in Haifa shot and killed Selomon Teka, an 18-year-old of Ethiopian descent, after Teka threw rocks at him and physically confronted him. The incident spurred widespread demonstrations across the country calling out police brutality against Ethiopian citizens. On November 19, the officer was indicted for negligent homicide, an offense with a prison sentence up to three years.

On August 18, NGOs submitted a petition to the Supreme Court requesting an injunction against a police practice of racial profiling targeting Ethiopian-Israelis and other minority populations. Police continued to use this practice despite recommendations from a 2016 Ministry of Justice report on combating racism against Ethiopian-Israelis and a March police directive.

On October 28, police established a new unit for gender equality and cultural diversity to be responsible for advancing and developing cultural competency in the police force. The unit intended to provide tools to police officers to improve their interface with distinct populations in Israeli society.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, and the government generally enforced these laws, although discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity persisted in some parts of society. There were reports of discrimination in the workplace against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons, despite laws prohibiting such discrimination. According to an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission survey by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Social Services, 32 percent of transgender persons were unemployed.

On August 25, authorities indicted two individuals on charges of attempted murder of their 16-year-old brother, whom they stabbed outside an LGBTI youth shelter on July 26, allegedly on the basis of his sexual orientation. Their trial was pending as of October.

Violence and discrimination against transgender persons remained a matter of concern. For example, a 15-year-old transgender student from Ashkelon did not attend school for six months after being regularly attacked and threatened by children at her school. When she returned to school, she was attacked again and was rushed to the hospital with a concussion and internal injuries.

LGBTI activists were able to hold public events and demonstrations with few restrictions. On June 3, police agreed to withdraw its demand to require identification from all participants in the Jerusalem pride parade following negotiations with the Jerusalem Open House. Following a petition from ACRI, police canceled a security restriction it had imposed on organizers of a June 27 Bat Yam pride event, which required the organization to supply a barricade six and one-half feet high and a metal detector.

Despite IPS regulations prohibiting holding transgender prisoners in solitary confinement, transgender women who had not undergone full gender adjustment were being held under segregation, according to ACRI.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Although discrimination against persons with HIV is illegal, the Israel AIDS Task Force (IATF) reported instances of HIV-related stigma and discrimination, including cases related to insurance and rehabilitation centers.

According to the IATF, while the IPS regulations allowing HIV-positive prisoners to reside with the general prisoner population was being implemented, detainees who were HIV positive faced difficulties accessing treatment.

As of January, the IDF began allowing persons with HIV to enlist and serve in noncombat roles. Previously persons with HIV could join as only volunteers after they were found ineligible for general military service.

The Ministry of Health continued a two-year pilot program to accept blood donations from gay and bisexual men. Under the pilot program, a donation from a gay or bisexual man is to be stored until the man donates blood again four months later. If both donations pass routine screening tests, both will be used.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Individuals and militant or terrorist groups attacked civilians in Israel, including 13 stabbing attacks and vehicular attacks characterized by authorities as terror attacks (see section 1.a.), in addition to rockets shot into Israel by Gaza-based terrorist groups. (For issues relating to violence or discrimination against asylum seekers, see section 2.d.)

Arab communities in Israel continued to experience high levels of crime and violence, especially from organized crime, and high numbers of illegal weapons, according to government data and NGOs. Causes included low level of policing; limited access to capital; easy access to illegal weapons; and socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, unemployment, and the breakdown of traditional family and authority structures, according to The Abraham Fund Initiatives and other NGOs. Government action to address the issue included: opening five police stations in Arab towns between 2017 and 2018, increasing enforcement to prevent violence, improving communication with Arab citizens through Arabic-language media and social media, enhancing trust with the community and community policing, and examining legal aspects including proposals for legislative amendments with emphasis on weapon control and raising the threshold for punishments.

On June 24, the city of Afula announced it would close its main public park to nonresidents during the summer. The NGO Adalah petitioned against this decision, claiming the Afula municipality deliberately sought to prevent Arab residents of neighboring towns from entering the park. The attorney general announced his opposition to the decision of the Afula municipality to close the park to nonresidents, noting the decision on entering municipal parks, which are a shared public space, cannot be made on the basis of religion, nationality, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation, or any other inherent characteristic. On July 14, an administrative court called for reopening the park, and the municipality complied.

Israeli authorities investigated reported attacks against Palestinians and Arab citizens of Israel, primarily in Jerusalem, by members of organizations that made anti-Christian and anti-Muslim statements and objected to social relationships between Jews and non-Jews.

The Israeli government and Jewish organizations in Jerusalem made efforts to increase property ownership by Jewish Israelis and emphasized Jewish history in Jerusalem neighborhoods that are predominantly non-Jewish. Organizations such as UNOCHA, Bimkom, and Ir Amim alleged that the goal of Jerusalem municipal and Israeli national policies was to decrease the number of non-Jewish residents of Jerusalem. Jewish landowners and their descendants, or land trusts representing the families, were entitled to reclaim property they had abandoned in East Jerusalem during fighting prior to 1949, but others who abandoned property in Israel in the same period had no reciprocal right to stake their legal claim to the property. In some cases, private Jewish organizations acquired legal ownership of reclaimed Jewish property in East Jerusalem, including in the Old City, and through protracted judicial action sought to evict non-Israeli families living there. Authorities designated approximately 30 percent of East Jerusalem for Israeli settlements. Non-Israeli citizens

were able in some cases to rent or purchase Israeli-owned property, including private property on Israeli government-owned land, but faced significant barriers to both. Israeli NGOs stated that after accounting for Israeli settlements, Israeli government property and declared national parks, only 13 percent of all land in East Jerusalem was available for construction by others.

Although the law provides that all residents of Jerusalem are fully and equally eligible for public services provided by the municipality and other Israeli authorities, the Jerusalem municipality failed to provide sufficient social services, education, infrastructure, and emergency planning for neighborhoods where the majority of residents were not Israelis, especially in the areas between the security barrier and the municipal boundary. Approximately 117,000 Palestinians lived in that area, of whom approximately 61,000 were registered as Jerusalem residents, according to government data. According to the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 78 percent of East Jerusalem's Arab residents and 86 percent of Arab children in East Jerusalem lived in poverty in 2017.

Promotion of Acts of Discrimination

During the April and September national election campaigns, the Likud Party deployed messages promoting hatred against Arab citizens, including a chatbot message on Prime Minister Netanyahu's Facebook page saying, “the Arabs want to destroy all of us, women, children and men.” The chatbot was temporarily suspended by Facebook. Netanyahu stated he was unaware of the message.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, strike, and bargain collectively. After a union declares a labor dispute, there is a 15-day “cooling period” in which the Histadrut, the country's largest federation of trade unions, negotiates with the employer to resolve the dispute. On the 16th day, employees are permitted to strike. Workers essential to state security, such as members of the military, police, prison service, Mossad, and the ISA, are not permitted to strike. While the law prohibits strikes over political issues and also allows the government to declare a state of emergency to block a strike that it deemed could threaten the economy or trade with foreign states, according to the Histadrut, this law has never been applied.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. A labor court has discretionary authority to order the reinstatement of a worker fired for union activity.

The government generally respected workers' rights to freely associate and bargain collectively for citizens. Penalties were sufficient to deter violations, although foreign workers continued facing difficulties exercising these rights, according to the Histadrut.

Court rulings and union regulations forbid simultaneous membership in more than one trade union. According to the International Trade Union Confederation, some employers actively discouraged union participation, delayed or refused to engage in collective bargaining, or harassed workers attempting to form a union. Approval by a minimum of one-third of the employees in a given workplace is needed to allow the trade union to represent all workers in that workplace. Members of the Histadrut who pay 0.95 percent of their wages in affiliation fees may be elected to the union's leadership bodies. Instead of affiliation fees, Palestinian workers pay 0.80 percent of their wages as “trade union fees,” of which the Histadrut transfers half to the Palestinian trade union.

According to Kav Laoved, a growing number of workers in fields such as teaching, social work, security, cleaning and caregiving are employed as contract workers, which infringes on their right to associate, as it reduces their bargaining power, and on their right to equality.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes forced or compulsory labor and prescribes penalties sufficient to deter violations, but the government did not effectively enforce laws for foreign workers and some citizens.

Foreign agricultural workers, construction workers, and nursing care workers—particularly women—were among the most vulnerable to conditions of forced labor, including nonpayment or withholding of wages. NGOs reported some workers experienced conditions of forced labor, including the unlawful withholding of passports, restrictions on freedom of movement, limited ability to change or otherwise choose employers, nonpayment of wages, exceedingly long working hours, threats, sexual assault, and physical intimidation. For example, the Turkish construction company Yilmazlar, which employed approximately 1,200 workers, took extensive measures to deter employees from escaping, including requiring a bond of up to 138,000 shekels (\$40,000) before starting work, paying salaries three months in arrears, and employing thugs to chase and beat those who escape, according to NGOs. In April 2018 Yilmazlar employees filed legal proceedings against the company, alleging they suffered from abusive employment that amounts to human trafficking. The company denied all allegations. The case continued at year's end.

Palestinian laborers continued to suffer from abuses and labor rights violations, especially in construction, partly as a result of lack of adequate government oversight and monitoring.

According to government and NGO data as of October, foreign workers in caregiving, agriculture, and construction sectors, including primarily visa overstays from former Soviet Union countries, irregular African migrants, and Palestinians (both documented and undocumented) were ineligible to receive benefits such as paid leave and legal recourse in cases involving workplace injury. According to Kav LaOved, approximately 100,000 migrant workers and Palestinian workers lacked mobility in the labor market because their work permits were tied to their employers. Despite a 2016 government resolution to issue permits directly to Palestinian construction workers rather than Israeli employers, PIBA continued to issue work permits to employers. The work permits linked the employee to a specific employer, creating a dependence which some employers and employment agencies exploited to charge employees monthly commissions and fees; according to the Bank of Israel, 30 percent of Palestinian workers in the country and the settlements paid brokerage fees for their permits in monthly payments of approximately 2,000 shekels (\$580), or 20 percent of their salary. In many cases the employer on record hired out employees to other workplaces. More than one-half the documented Palestinian workers did not receive written contracts or pay slips, according to the International Labor Organization.

Gray market manpower agencies engaged in labor trafficking by exploiting visa waiver agreements between Israel and former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. The traffickers illegally recruited laborers to work in construction, caregiving, and prostitution and charged them exorbitant recruitment fees, and sometimes sold them fake documentation.

Also see the Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the worst forms of child labor, provides for the protection of children from exploitation in the workplace, and prohibits forced or compulsory labor. Children age 14 and older may be employed during official school holidays in light work that does not harm their health. Children age 15 and older who have completed education through grade nine may be employed as apprentices. Regulations restrict working hours for youths between the ages of 16 and 18 in all sectors. Penalties were sufficient to deter violations.

The government generally enforced these laws and conducted year-round inspections to identify cases of underage employment, with special emphasis on summer and school vacation periods. During the year authorities imposed a number of sanctions against employers for child labor infractions, including administrative warnings and fines. Minors worked mainly in the food-catering, entertainment, and hospitality sectors. The government forbade children younger than age 18 from working at construction sites.

On March 1, authorities indicted a Bedouin man from Rahat for forcing his two nephews to work under abusive, slave-like conditions. His trial was underway at year's end.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation based on age, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, and disability. The Equal Employment Opportunities Law prohibits an employer from discriminating against employees, contractors, or persons seeking employment. The Equal Pay Law provides for equal pay for equal work of male and female employees. The Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities (see section 6). The law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of citizenship and HIV/AIDS status.

The government effectively enforced applicable law, and penalties were sufficient to deter violations. The law charges the Commission for Equal Employment Opportunities with the implementation and civil enforcement of the Equal Employment Opportunities Law. According to the commission's annual report, in 2018 it received 748 complaints, a decrease from 766 in 2017. Civil society organizations reported discrimination in the employment or pay of women, Ethiopian-Israelis, and Arab citizens. In one case the commission joined a Muslim dentist in an antidiscrimination lawsuit against the New Shen Clinic in Netanya, which asked her to remove her hijab (Muslim religious women's head covering) at work. On September 8, a labor court ruled the clinic must pay compensatory damages for discrimination based on religion.

On January 1, an amendment to the Hours of Work and Rest Law became effective, allowing workers to refuse to work on a day of rest, based on their religion, even if they are not religiously observant.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The national minimum wage, which is set annually, was above the poverty income level for individuals but below the poverty level for couples and families. Authorities investigated employers, imposed administrative sanctions, and filed two indictments for violations of the Minimum Wage Law during the year.

The law allows a maximum 43-hour workweek at regular pay and provides for paid annual holidays. Premium pay for overtime is set at 125 percent for the first two hours and 150 percent for any hour thereafter up to a limit of 15 hours of overtime per week. According to Kav LaOved, 700,000 individuals were employed on an hourly basis, which reduced their social rights and benefits.

The Labor Inspection Service, along with union representatives and construction site safety officers, enforced labor, health, and safety standards in the workplace. The number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce the law, particularly in the construction and agriculture industries, and scaffolding regulations were inadequate to protect workers from falls. Employers were responsible for identifying unsafe situations. The PELES (an acronym of Working without Risk in Hebrew) police unit established in December 2018 was responsible for investigating workplace accidents that resulted in death or severe injuries, mainly at construction sites. No law protects the employment of workers who report on situations that endanger health or safety or remove themselves from such situations. The year marked the highest number of fatal work accidents in the last two decades, according to Kav LaOved. During the year 47 workers, including 14 Palestinians, died in accidents in the construction industry, and another 197 workers were injured, according to Kav LaOved. According to media reports, the PELES unit investigated only a small number of the incidents involving casualties.

The provisions of the labor law extended to most Palestinians employed by Israeli businesses in the West Bank. In response to a Supreme Court petition from Kav LaOved, the government confirmed in July 2018 that it had not disbursed any sick leave payments to Palestinian workers since January 1, 2018, despite depositing 2.5 percent of Palestinian workers' salaries in a sick leave fund. According to Kav LaOved, only several Palestinian employees received their pension funds. Court cases on both matters were continuing as of the end of the year.

The country has bilateral work agreements (BWA) with Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, and China to employ migrants in the construction sector and with Thailand and Sri Lanka for the agricultural sector. Government offices coordinated recruitment of workers from those countries, which led to significantly lower recruitment fees. During the year the government also implemented an agreement with the Philippines to employ caregivers and domestic workers.

BWAs provided foreign workers with information regarding their labor rights as well as a translated copy of their labor contract prior to arrival in the country. The government continued to help fund a hotline for migrant workers to report violations, and the government's enforcement bodies claimed all complaints were investigated. The absence of BWAs for foreign caregivers and additional migrant workers not covered by BWAs led to continuing widespread abuses and exploitative working conditions, including excessive recruitment fees, false employment contracts, and lack of legal protections related to housing, nonpayment of wages, physical and sexual violence, and harassment.

Some employers in the agriculture sector circumvented the BWAs by recruiting “volunteers” from developing countries to earn money and learn about Israeli agriculture. “Volunteers” worked eight to 10 hours per day in a salary equal to half the minimum wage and without social benefits and received volunteer visas, which did not permit them to work. Others employed foreign students registered for work-study programs, which consisted of long hours of manual labor and a pay beyond the minimum wage. A committee of inquiry at Tel Aviv University determined in June that students were employed inappropriately and recommended a change to the work-study program.

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