

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	247
Land:	Gaza og Vestbredden
Kilde:	UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Titel:	Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories - Country of Concern: Latest update 30 September 2014
Udgivet:	16. oktober 2014
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	9. januar 2015

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- **Source:**
FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- **Title:**
Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) - Country of Concern: latest update, 30 September 2014
- **Publication date:**
16 October 2014
- **ecoi.net summary:** Quarterly updates on human rights situation [ID 292366]
- **Countries:**
Israel, Occupied Palestinian Territory
- **Original link** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/israel-and-the-occupied-palestinian-territories-opts-country-of-concern/israel-and-the-occupied-palestinian-territories-opts-country-of-concern-latest-update-30-september-2014>

Recommended citation:

FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) - Country of Concern: latest update, 30 September 2014, 16 October 2014 (available at ecoi.net) http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/292366/412986_en.html (accessed 18 December 2014)



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Commonwealth
Office

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) - Country of Concern: latest update, 30 September 2014

0.1 Latest Update: 30 September 2014

1. Gaza

There was a significant escalation of hostilities between Israel and militants in the de facto Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, leading to fifty-one days of conflict and a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza. From 7 July, there were intensive rocket attacks by Gazan militants on Israel and Israeli strikes on Gaza. Israel launched Operation Protective Edge on 8 July with subsequent ground operations from 17 July. The then Foreign Secretary, William Hague, [condemned](#) the rocket attacks on 8 July, and stressed the need for de-escalation to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman on 12 July. He outlined the UK response to the crisis in a [statement to Parliament](#) on 14 July.

On [15](#) and [17 July](#), Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, welcomed Egypt's ceasefire initiative, calling for Hamas to cease rocket fire and for Israel to act proportionately. He reiterated the need for proportionality and for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to be respected, following the killing of over 15 people at a school run by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) on 24 July. He also raised UK concerns about the high number of casualties and the humanitarian impact of the conflict with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Lieberman, and President Abbas, during his visit to the region on 23-24 July.

Israeli forces withdrew from Gaza on 26 August, after an agreement by all parties to an open-ended ceasefire was announced. Minister for the Middle East, Tobias Ellwood, [welcomed](#) this agreement and urged the need to work toward a sustainable solution that tackled the underlying causes of the conflict.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), between 7 July and 26 August, 2,131 Palestinians were killed, of whom 1,473 were identified as civilians, including 501 children and 257 women. 67 Israeli soldiers, one security coordinator and four civilians were killed. One Thai civilian was also killed.

At the height of the conflict, an estimated 28% of the Gazan population were internally displaced. As of 4 September, approximately 110,000 internally displaced persons remained in UNRWA emergency shelters and with host families.

18,000 housing units were destroyed or severely damaged during the conflict, leaving 108,000 Gazans homeless. 450,000 people are reported to be unable to access water. Most areas of Gaza continue to experience 18-hour daily power outages, disrupting the provision of basic services including water and health.

The UK worked hard to help alleviate the suffering and improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, sending over £19 million worth of emergency assistance during the conflict. We also activated our International Emergency Trauma Register to deploy a team of NHS staff directly to the region to help treat hundreds of those affected by the crisis.

The already fragile Gazan economy was severely damaged by the crisis. Gaza's 17,000 hectares of cropland and much of its agricultural infrastructure sustained major damage. Farmers and herders were unable to access their land, and fishermen were prohibited from entering the sea during the fighting. The six nautical mile fishing limit was re-imposed following the ceasefire, but the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights recorded 25 incidents after the truce in which Israeli forces opened fire on or detained fisherman accused of approaching or exceeding the limit.

Hamas executed 18 Palestinians during the conflict for alleged collusion with Israel, in contravention of the moratorium on the death penalty imposed by the Palestinian Authority in the OPTs.

A Special Session of the UN Human Rights Council on 23 July mandated the UN to set up a Commission of Inquiry (COI) to investigate all violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law during the conflict. The UK encourages all parties to cooperate with the COI, which itself must operate with a balanced mandate.

2. West Bank, including East Jerusalem

There were widespread clashes between Palestinian protestors and Israeli police during the reporting period, initially in the context of protests against the kidnapping and killing of Palestinian teen Muhammad Abu Khdeir on 2 July, and subsequently in demonstrations against Israel's military operations in Gaza.

The OCHA reported that 24 Palestinians were killed, and a further 2,974 were injured by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) between 1 July and 15 September, including during arrest raids, violent demonstrations and in the 958 search and arrest operations conducted by Israeli forces. The UK is concerned by OCHA reports of increased use of live fire by the IDF as a crowd control method since the start of demonstrations against the Gaza crisis. Two West Bank members of Hamas suspected of kidnapping and killing the three Israeli teens in June were killed by the IDF on 23 September.

On 4 August, an Israeli soldier was shot and wounded in Jerusalem by a man on a motorcycle. On the same day, a Palestinian man attacked a bus with a mechanical digger in Jerusalem, killing one Israeli and injuring five others. The Palestinian was shot dead at the scene by a prison security guard. According to the Israeli Security Agency, 382 Israeli soldiers and civilians were injured during violent incidents in Israel and the OPTs between June and August.

According to Israeli NGO B'Tselem, at the end of July, 446 Palestinians were being held in Israeli administrative detention, the highest number since May 2009. NGO Defence for Children International reported that 192 Palestinian children were being held in Israeli military detention at the end of July.

On 31 August, the Israeli government announced the expropriation of 988 acres of land around the settlement of Etzion near Bethlehem. Mr Hammond [deplored](#) this move and called on Israel to reverse the decision on 1 September. On 24 September, Israel's Jerusalem Municipality announced final statutory approval for the construction of 2,610 new settlement units in Givat Hamatos, East Jerusalem. On 30 September, Israeli settlers moved into seven buildings in East Jerusalem.

Violent clashes also occurred between Israeli settlers and Palestinians, with 73 incidents resulting in Palestinian casualties or property damage between 1 July and 15 September, according to OCHA. 54 incidents led to injuries of Israeli settlers or damage to their property. On 14 September, Israeli settlers attacked and injured two international human rights activists in Hebron.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian structures continued during the reporting period, with 85 structures demolished in East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank, resulting in the displacement of 240 Palestinians. This included the Israeli High Court sanctioned punitive partial demolition of the house of a Palestinian suspected of killing an Israeli police officer. Punitive demolition orders were also served on the family homes of three Palestinians suspected of the kidnap and murder of three Israeli youths in June 2014. The UK is seriously

concerned by this revival of the policy of punitive demolitions, which was suspended by the Israeli authorities in 2005. The Geneva Convention stipulates that demolitions are only legal in the context of military necessity.

We have strong concerns about the development of Israeli plans to relocate Bedouin communities living in the strategic E1 area in Area C of the West Bank to a “township” near Jericho. Plans for the new townships were deposited for public objection on 25 August. If approved, it could result in the removal of 7,000 Bedouin from 45 sites in E1, and open up Israeli settlement development in E1, an area of particular strategic significance to a contiguous future Palestinian state. The UN Secretary General has said the potential relocation of Bedouin would amount to a “mass forcible transfer”, prohibited under IHL and human rights law.

3. Israel

Several violent protests sparked by the murder of Muhammad Abu Khdeir, and then against Israeli action in Gaza, took place in Arab-Israeli towns during the reporting period, with clashes erupting between police and demonstrators. Dozens of violent attacks against Arab-Israelis were also reported during the month of July, with “Death to Arabs” marches, physical attacks, and incidents of verbal abuse occurring almost daily. Arab and Jewish participants in anti-war demonstrations were also attacked by extremist Israelis.

Israeli authorities demolished three Bedouin structures in the Negev village of Umm Batin in September, sparking concerns about Israeli plans for the relocation of those living in unrecognised Bedouin villages in the Negev.

On 23 September, the Israeli High Court ruled that asylum seekers cannot be held in detention when there are no effective national deportation proceedings. Unless the government of Israel can legislate within three months in a way that meets the requirements of the ruling, the Holot open-air detention facility for asylum-seekers will be closed, and asylum-seekers entering Israel will no longer be held in a closed facility without trial for up to a year.

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