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2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Israel, West Bank and Gaza—West Bank and Gaza

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Israel's security forces continued large-scale military operation in densely populated Gaza and conducted targeted raids in West Bank villages and refugee camps. Hamas and other terrorist organizations used the civilian population as cover and concealment in Gaza, continued to hold hostages, attack the Israel Defense Force, and launch rocket attacks against civilian populations in Israel.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of:

1) With respect to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank: arbitrary or unlawful killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists and censorship; violence or threats of violence motivated by antisemitism; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; and existence of the worst forms of child labor.

The Palestinian Authority took some steps to identify and punish officials accused of committing human rights abuses, but human rights groups consistently criticized officials for not taking sufficient action or implementing measures against persons implicated in such cases.

2) With respect to Hamas in Gaza: unlawful killings; disappearances; severe physical abuses and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment by Hamas; arbitrary arrest or detentions; serious abuses in a conflict; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified detentions of journalists, and censorship; crimes involving violence or threats of violence motivated by antisemitism; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; and existence of the worst forms of child labor.

There were no legal or independent institutions in Gaza capable of holding Hamas accountable for acts of terror. Hamas continued to act with impunity in the enclave, as have associated terrorist organizations such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

3) With respect to Israeli security forces in the West Bank and Gaza: there have been reports of arbitrary or unlawful killings; and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom.

Israeli authorities took steps to identify and punish officials or civilians accused of committing human rights abuses in the West Bank and Gaza; human rights groups frequently criticized authorities for not adequately pursuing investigations and disciplinary actions related to human rights abuses and violence against Palestinians.

Section 1.

Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were numerous reports that Hamas committed arbitrary or unlawful killings targeting civilians, including extrajudicial killings, during the year, as did Israeli and Palestinian authorities or their agents.

Media and NGOs reported that Hamas continued to carry out politically motivated killings in Gaza. On August 29, Hamas executed six hostages taken captive on October 7, 2023 and abducted to Gaza, according to Israeli officials. In March, media reported that Hamas executed the leader of the Doghmush clan in northern Gaza after public reports that Israeli authorities had contacted the family to oversee aid distribution in that area.

Local NGOs and media reported that on May 1, Palestinian security service members shot and killed Muhammad Abu al-Foul in Tulkarm at a roadblock. Witnesses reported he posed no threat. As of December 5, no charges had been filed.

On September 6, media reported that Turkish American human rights activist Ayşenur Eygi was shot in the head and killed by an Israeli sniper while she was observing a demonstration in the West Bank village of Beita against the Israeli outpost of Evyatar. On September 10, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) issued a statement asserting that “it is highly likely that [Eygi] was hit indirectly and unintentionally by IDF fire which was not aimed at her.” The IDF’s investigation continued at year’s end.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

c. War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Evidence of Acts that May Constitute Genocide, or Conflict-related Abuses

There were reports by NGOs and international media of extensive conflict-related abuses by Israel, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other Palestinian militant groups. According to the Israel Security Agency (also known as Shin Bet), 45 Israelis were killed in terror attacks in Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank during the year, excluding portions of northern and southern Israel involved in military operations. According to these data, 37 of those killed were civilians and eight were members of the security forces.

Hamas and PIJ used civilian areas to hide and operate among the civilian population and stage attacks, store weapons, and hold hostages. Hamas carried out indiscriminate rocket attacks at Tel Aviv and nearby cities, per media reports.

Israeli forces targeting Hamas militants conducted widespread aerial bombardment and shelling. On July 13, at least 90 individuals were killed and 300 injured in an IDF airstrike on the al-Mawasi camp, according to media reporting. The IDF later confirmed that prominent Hamas leaders along with “other terrorists” were killed in the strike on al-Mawasi, which it labeled as a targeted operation informed by an intelligence assessment.

At year’s end, the United Nations calculated that 90 percent of the population of the Gaza Strip had at some point been displaced under an IDF evacuation order. Numerous humanitarian aid workers were killed and wounded, including seven staff members from the World Central Kitchen killed by an IDF drone strike as they traveled by night in an unarmored and marked convoy. A subsequent IDF investigation described the incident as a tragic mistake and announced plans to improve coordination with humanitarian actors.

In the West Bank, incidents of Israeli violence against Palestinians and their property reached their highest daily average figures since the UN started recording data in 2005. On July 29, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the Israeli government was obligated to protect Palestinian residents of the West Bank from this kind of violence.

On August 15, an estimated 70 to 100 Israeli civilians attacked the West Bank Palestinian village of Jit near Nablus. According to multiple press reports and Palestinian officials, the assailants fired live bullets and tear gas at residents, killing Rasheed Seda, age 23, and critically wounding another Palestinian civilian, and set fire to numerous homes, cars, and other property during the attack. Israeli officials condemned the attacks, apprehended four individuals, and announced an investigation that was pending at year's end.

Palestinians committed violence against Israelis in the West Bank. On April 12, Israeli shepherd Benjamin Achimeir, age 14, went missing after leaving a farm near the West Bank outpost of Malachei Ha Shalom. His body was discovered the next day, and Israeli authorities released a statement calling the death a terrorist attack. On April 22, Israeli authorities arrested a Palestinian man, age 21, from Duma who they believed had links to the attack.

Section 2.

Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

According to NGOs, the Palestinian Authority (PA) enforced legislation that restricted press and media freedom in the West Bank. Enforcement tactics included harassment, intimidation, and arrest. The PA actively monitored social media to harass activists and journalists and arrested and detained Palestinians because of their posts on social media. Palestinian activists reported that the PA arrested opponents of the Fatah party, critics of the PA, and peaceful protesters in the West Bank, which suppressed political discussion.

Under Hamas rule in Gaza, there was no freedom of the press. Since October 7, 2023 Hamas used every tool to only permit or facilitate pro-Hamas terrorist propaganda including through arrests, detentions, harassment, interrogations, and physically assaulting or engaging in violence with journalists. Hamas routinely limited press access and movement. Hamas actions and restrictions led many journalists and activists to self-censor. Hamas also forced Palestinian reporters to delete footage and physically assaulted local journalists who reported stories critical of Hamas leadership. Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups also sought to inhibit press by monitoring journalists' social media and harassing them and their families.

During Israel's military operations in Gaza, Israel reportedly uncovered a number of individuals who posed as journalists who were members of or had direct ties to Hamas and other terrorists in Gaza.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

In Gaza, Hamas detained, harassed, intimidated, and physically assaulted journalists critical of its policies. Civil society organizations reported that Hamas members forced Palestinian reporters to delete footage and physically assaulted local journalists who reported stories critical of Hamas leadership. Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups also sought to inhibit press by monitoring journalists' social media and harassing them and their families.

According to the NGO Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 82 journalists and media workers were killed during the year due to the Israel-Hamas conflict. In some cases, the IDF claimed the journalists killed were embedded with Hamas terrorists. Two Palestinian journalists from Gaza, Nidal al-Waheidi and Haitham Abdelwahed, remained missing at year's end.

According to NGOs and media reports, the ISF detained Palestinian journalists in the West Bank, some of whom were arrested while carrying out their work. In separate incidents, freelance journalist Asma Hraish and Wafa journalist Rasha Hirzallah were each held in administrative detention for six months before being released without charge.

There were numerous reports that the PA harassed, detained, assaulted, prosecuted, and fined journalists in the West Bank for reporting on protests criticizing the PA or for expressing their views on social media on political detention matters. According to NGO reports, the Palestinian Authority Security Force (PASF) arrested West Bank journalists and blocked websites associated with political rivals, including sites affiliated with political parties and opposition groups critical of the Fatah-controlled PA. NGOs criticized the Palestinian Cyber Crime Law of 2017's vague definitions, which they allege authorities used to suppress free speech and dissent.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

Local journalists reported that throughout the year, the Israeli Second Authority Ministry of Communications issued official and unofficial directives on restricted terminology, story lines, and directions on who to interview. The ISF occasionally ordered the closing of Palestinian radio stations in the West Bank for "inciting behavior that could harm public safety or public order."

In September, Israeli soldiers raided al-Jazeera's offices in the West Bank city of Ramallah and prevented the media organization from operating in the West Bank, citing what Israeli authorities identified as a pro-Hamas slant to al-Jazeera coverage and Qatari support for Hamas. The office remained closed at year's end.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

PA law provided for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively without any pressure or influence, and conduct legal strikes.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

PA law provided for minimum wage in the West Bank and Gaza, but it was less than the official estimate for the poverty income level. Wage and hour violations were common in the service industries, such as cleaning and maintenance.

Occupational Safety and Health

According to Palestinian NGOs, OSH standards were not sufficient for the main industries in PA-controlled territory in the West Bank. The main industries included construction, mining, quarrying, manufacturing, and agriculture. The PA Ministry of Labor was responsible for setting appropriate OSH standards in the West Bank. The PA proactively identified unsafe conditions, and the Occupational Safety Department within the Ministry of Labor was responsible for investigating complaints regarding work safety.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

Israel provided for a national minimum wage above the individual poverty income level for all sectors of the economy. On April 1, the minimum wage for a full-time position was raised consistent with the Minimum Wage Law that set the minimum wage at 47.5 percent of the average wage in Israel. Israeli law required certain protection for workers including advance notice of dismissal, maternity leave for women employees, and paid family leave.

The PA claimed to provide a minimum wage for workers in the West Bank and Gaza (including those who were members of Hamas). At the same time, the PA continued to provide hundreds of millions of dollars per year in salaries and benefits to Palestinian terrorists and their families that U.S. law – the Taylor Force Act – recognized was a system of compensation that incentivizes, rewards, and supports terrorism.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of PA authorities during the year in the West Bank.

There were numerous reports during the year of disappearances by or on behalf of Hamas de facto authorities or other Palestinian armed groups in Gaza. The exact whereabouts of many of the hostages abducted to Gaza by Hamas in the October 7, 2023 attack remained unknown at year's end. Hamas had not granted the International Committee of the Red Cross or other groups access to Israeli and international hostages held in Gaza since the October 7, 2023 attack.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

According to NGOs, the PA, Hamas, and Israeli security forces committed numerous arbitrary detentions throughout the year.

In Gaza, Hamas reportedly detained many persons during the year without giving them recourse to legal counsel, judicial review, or bail.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

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

e. Trafficking in Persons

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

Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

PA law prohibited torture or use of force against detainees, but international and local human rights groups reported that torture and abuse remained a problem, and the PA had yet to establish a protocol for preventing torture.

Hamas and other terrorists engaged in such actions against Israel on and after October 7, 2023 including Israeli and American hostages. Hostages who returned from Hamas captivity testified of being tortured, sexual violence, deprived of food, water, and medical treatment, and suffering other forms of physical and psychological abuse. Hamas regularly employed similar tactics on Gazans to preserve its rule and seek to counter supposed allegations that a Gazan might be working against Hamas.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

In Gaza, Hamas detained, harassed, intimidated, and physically assaulted journalists critical of its policies. Civil society organizations reported that Hamas members forced Palestinian reporters to delete footage and physically assaulted local journalists who reported stories critical of Hamas leadership. Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups also sought to inhibit press by monitoring journalists' social media and harassing them and their families.

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b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

See the Department of Labor's Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor at <http://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/> .

Child Soldiers

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

Palestinian children were reportedly vulnerable to recruitment and use as child soldiers. In the past, Palestinian armed groups have organized camps for children that also served as recruitment events, involving firearms instruction and military training. Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas have allegedly recruited and used children in Gaza, and the Nassar Salah al-Din Brigades in Gaza reportedly recruited or used child soldiers through 2022.

Child Marriage

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics published data showing that, as of 2020, 4.3 percent of girls younger than age 18 in the West Bank were married, compared with 19.3 percent in Gaza.

In Gaza, local Palestinian law set the minimum age for marriage to 15 for girls and 16 for boys. A judge could authorize the marriage of a boy and girl younger than the minimum age if both children had reached puberty and the girl's guardian, typically the father or grandfather, consented.

The legal minimum age for marriage in the West Bank was 18 for both men and women, unless a judge agreed marriage at 15 or older was in "the best interest of both parties."

Wage and Hour Laws

PA law provided for minimum wage in the West Bank and Gaza, but it was less than the official estimate for the poverty income level. Wage and hour violations were common in the service industries, such as cleaning and maintenance.

Occupational Safety and Health

According to Palestinian NGOs, OSH standards were not sufficient for the main industries in PA-controlled territory in the West Bank. The main industries included construction, mining, quarrying, manufacturing, and agriculture. The PA Ministry of Labor was responsible for setting appropriate OSH standards in the West Bank. The PA proactively identified unsafe conditions, and the Occupational Safety Department within the Ministry of Labor was responsible for investigating complaints regarding work safety.

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c. Protection to Refugees

The PA cooperated with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in providing protection and assistance to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank.

Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 forcibly displaced tens of thousands of Israelis from their homes and communities in the south near Gaza. On October 8, 2023 – Hezbollah joined Hamas in the attack upon Israel – which forcibly displaced tens of thousands of Israelis from their homes and communities in the north near Lebanon and Syria.

Tens of thousands of individuals in Gaza have voluntarily left as a direct result of Hamas' attack on Israel, which helped to provide safe passage out for those who chose to leave. Egypt kept its borders closed except for smuggling routes that risks the safety and health of those seeking to leave through the Sinai. Much of the international community opposed efforts to permit Palestinians to voluntarily leave Gaza if they chose, entrapping Palestinians in Gaza.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

According to NGOs, the PA, Hamas, and Israeli security forces committed numerous arbitrary detentions throughout the year.

In Gaza, Hamas reportedly detained many persons during the year without giving them recourse to legal counsel, judicial review, or bail.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

Hamas officials called for the annihilation of Israel and extermination of all Jews living there. Antisemitism, including expressions of longing for a world without Israel and glorification of terror attacks on both Israelis and Jews, regularly featured in public discourse, was repeatedly broadcast on official media, and was prevalent in many academic settings. Some Palestinian and Muslim religious leaders used antisemitic rhetoric, including Holocaust denial. Israeli civil society organizations and media outlets stated there was problematic content in PA textbooks, including those used by UNRWA in its schools, such as antisemitic content, incitement to violence directed against Israel, and the glorification of terrorism.