

ISRAEL 2019 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

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 nationalistically 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."

Authorities continued to provide an edited version of the Palestinian Authority curriculum that deleted information on Palestinian history and culture to schools in neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and sought to tie funding for those schools to the use of Israeli curriculum (see the West Bank and Gaza report for concerns regarding incitement and anti-Semitism in Palestinian Authority textbooks). Some expressed concern at what they perceived as Israeli efforts to impose Israeli views on these students. Others welcomed the curriculum, and the additional resources associated with it, as better preparing students in Jerusalem to work in the Israeli workforce.

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 Ilit), 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.

WEST BANK AND GAZA 2019 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Palestinian Authority (PA) basic law provides for an elected president and legislative council. There have been no national elections in the West Bank and Gaza since 2006. President Mahmoud Abbas has remained in office despite the expiration of his four-year term in 2009. The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) has not functioned since 2007, and the PA Constitutional Court dissolved it in 2018. President Abbas called in September for the PA to organize PLC elections within six months, but elections did not take place by year's end. The PA head of government is Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh. President Abbas is also chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and general commander of the Fatah movement.

Six PA security forces (PASF) agencies operate in the West Bank, and the PA maintained effective civilian control. Several are under PA Ministry of Interior operational control and follow the prime minister's guidance. The Palestinian Civil Police have primary responsibility for civil and community policing. The National Security Force conducts gendarmerie-style security operations in circumstances that exceed the capabilities of the civil police. The Military Intelligence Agency handles intelligence and criminal matters involving PASF personnel, including accusations of abuse and corruption. The General Intelligence Service is responsible for external intelligence gathering and operations. The Preventive Security Organization (PSO) is responsible for internal intelligence gathering and investigations related to internal security cases, including political dissent. The Presidential Guard protects facilities and provides dignitary protection.

In Gaza the terrorist organization Hamas exercised de facto authority. The security apparatus of the Hamas de facto government in Gaza largely mirrored the West Bank. Internal security included civil police, guards and protection security, an internal intelligence-gathering and investigative entity (similar to the PSO in the West Bank), and civil defense. National security included the national security forces, military justice, military police, medical services, and the prison authority. The "Islamic Resistance Movement"--a group with some affiliation to the Hamas political movement--maintained a large military wing in Gaza, named the Izz ad-din al-Qassam Brigades. In some instances the Hamas de facto "civilian" authorities utilized the Hamas movement's military wing to crack down on internal dissent.

The government of Israel maintained a West Bank security presence through the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), the Israeli Security Agency, the Israeli National Police, and the Border Guard. Israel maintained effective civilian control of its security forces throughout the West Bank and Gaza.

West Bank Palestinian population centers mostly fall into Area A, as defined by the Oslo-era agreements. The PA has formal responsibility for security in Area A, but Israeli security forces (ISF) regularly conducted security operations there, at times without coordinating with the PASF. The PA and Israel maintain joint security control of Area B in the West Bank. Israel retains full security control of Area C and has designated the majority of Area C land as either closed military zones or settlement zoning areas.

Significant human rights issues included:

- With respect to the PA: reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings, torture, and arbitrary detention by authorities; holding political prisoners and detainees, including as reprisal for participation in foreign investment conferences; significant problems with the independence of the judiciary; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; restrictions on free expression, the press, and the internet, including violence, threats of violence, unjustified arrests and prosecutions against journalists, censorship, and site blocking; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including harassment of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); restrictions on political participation, as the PA has not held a national election since 2006; acts of corruption; violence and threats of violence motivated by anti-Semitism; violence and threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons; and reports of forced child labor.
- With respect to Israeli authorities: reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings, including allegations that deaths of Palestinians in the course of Israeli military operations were due to unnecessary or disproportionate use of force; reports of torture; reports of arbitrary detention; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; restrictions on free expression, the press, and the internet, including violence, threats of violence, unjustified arrests and prosecutions against journalists, censorship, and site blocking; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association,

including harassment of NGOs; and significant restrictions on freedom of movement, including the requirement of exit permits.

- With respect to Hamas: reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings, systematic torture, and arbitrary detention by Hamas officials; political prisoners; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; restrictions on free expression, the press, and the internet, including violence, threats of violence, unjustified arrests and prosecutions against journalists, censorship, site blocking, and the existence of criminal libel laws; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; restrictions on political participation, as there has been no national election since 2006; acts of corruption; violence and threats of violence motivated by anti-Semitism; unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers; violence and threats of violence targeting LGBTI persons; the criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and forced or compulsory child labor.
- With respect to Palestinian civilians: five reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings, and violence and threats of violence motivated by anti-Semitism.
- With respect to Israeli civilians: two reports of unlawful or arbitrary killing of Palestinian residents of the West Bank.

The PA took some steps to address impunity or reduce abuses, but there were criticisms that senior officials made comments glorifying violence in some cases and inappropriately influenced investigations and disciplinary actions related to abuses. Israeli authorities operating in the West Bank took steps to address impunity or reduce abuses, but there were criticisms they did not adequately pursue investigations and disciplinary actions related to abuses. There were no legal or independent institutions capable of holding the Hamas de facto authority in Gaza accountable.

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 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 input

from the government of Israel and the PA and 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

Palestinian terrorist groups and unaffiliated individuals killed three Israeli civilians and two IDF soldiers in terrorist attacks in the West Bank, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). For example, on August 23, an improvised explosive device planted outside the West Bank settlement of Dolev detonated and killed 17-year-old Rina Shnerb and injured her father and brother, according to media reports and NGOs. In September the IDF and Border Police forces arrested three men in connection with the attack allegedly affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a political faction also involved in terrorist activities. In 2018, 17-year-old Palestinian Khalil Jabarin fatally stabbed Ari Fuld at a shopping mall in the West Bank before being shot by Fuld and another civilian and arrested by police. An Israeli military court indicted Jabarin on charges of “intentionally causing death.” In January the IDF demolished Jabarin’s room in his family home. His trial in military court began in May, and he remained in custody pending the trial’s conclusion. The IDF stated the Israeli intelligence community thwarted more than 500 attempted terrorist attacks throughout the year.

During the year Israeli forces killed Palestinians in the West Bank who were attempting or allegedly attempting to attack Israelis, according to the NGO B’Tselem and media reports. According to these reports, some of those killed did not pose a lethal threat to the ISF or civilians at the time they were killed. For example, on March 27, an IDF soldier shot 17-year-old volunteer medic Sajed Mizher when Israeli forces were involved in clashes with Palestinians in the Deheisha refugee camp near Bethlehem, according to media reports. Mizher later died from his wounds. At the time of his death, Mizher was wearing a reflective vest and paramedic’s service uniform while assisting a Palestinian who had been shot in the leg, according to media reports. Later that day an Israeli military spokesperson released a video allegedly showing Mizher taking off his reflective vest and taking part in the clashes, according to media reports. After their own investigation, B’Tselem claimed the video was misleading and that the person in the video was not Mizher. A criminal investigation into the incident has been completed and was under review by the Military Advocate General (MAG),

according to Israeli authorities. In 2018, IDF soldiers shot and killed Muhammad Hossam Habali in the West Bank city of Tulkarm. The IDF claimed they were reacting to a group of rock-throwing Palestinians, but security camera videos compiled by B'Tselem showed Habali walking away from the soldiers when he was killed. As of July an Israeli military investigation into Habali's death was underway.

Rights groups alleged the government of Israel used excessive force resulting in the deaths of several Palestinians, including minors, in the West Bank. For example, on May 31, the last Friday of Ramadan, Israeli border police shot and killed 15-year-old Abdullah Ghaith as he was approaching a known crossable section of the security barrier. Media, NGOs, and Ghaith's father said in public statements that Ghaith was hoping to attend Friday prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque with his family. (The last Friday of Ramadan is one of the most widely attended days of prayer at Al-Aqsa mosque and in 2019 coincided with Laylat al-Qadr, the holiest night of worship on the Muslim calendar.) Israeli authorities had granted Abdullah and his family a permit but denied his 16-year-old cousin. Abdullah planned to accompany his cousin across the fence, and Ghaith's father arranged to pick them up in the family car after they crossed to take them to prayers, according to media reports. The Israeli police stated they were investigating the incident.

On November 11, Israeli forces shot and killed Omar Haitham al-Badawi in Hebron, according to the PA Ministry of Health and the IDF. A video showed al-Badawi walking down an alley when a shot was fired and he fell to the ground. According to the IDF as quoted in media reports, Israeli soldiers were involved in clashes with Palestinians throwing stones and Molotov cocktails; one of the soldiers thought a towel in al-Badawi's hand was a Molotov cocktail and the soldier shot him. According to media reports, witnesses said al-Badawi was not involved in the clashes; the witnesses said a Molotov cocktail had set a tree near al-Badawi's house on fire and he was rushing to put it out when he was shot. The military police began an investigation after an initial IDF probe found al-Badawi did not present a threat and live ammunition should not have been used.

Palestinians in Gaza continued the "March of Return," a series of weekly protests along the fence between Gaza and Israel that began in March 2018. The protests, which drew thousands of people each week, included armed terrorists, militants who launched incendiary devices into Israel, and unarmed protesters. As the de facto authority in Gaza, Hamas controlled the weekly protests, variously encouraging violence at the protests and policing them to minimize attacks on the IDF. Gaza-based militant groups periodically conducted small-arms attacks into

Israel during the protests. The IDF shot and killed 38 Palestinians at the Gaza security fence demonstrations, including 12 minors, according to B'Tselem, and killed four others, including two minors, when they were struck in the head with tear gas canisters. B'Tselem stated that 28 of the Palestinians who were killed at the fence did not take part in hostilities. The Israeli government stated that many of the victims were operatives of Hamas or other terrorist organizations, such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

The Israeli government stated that an investigation into the 2018 killing of volunteer medic Razan al-Najjar north of Khuza'ah in Gaza during a Friday protest near the security fence with Israel had been completed and that the findings were under review by the MAG at year's end.

The Israeli government stated 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 it used live fire with lethal intent against terrorists perpetrating attacks against IDF forces at the border.

In 2018 the Israeli military opened an investigation into the IDF shootings of two Palestinian minors in Gaza. According to an Israeli military statement, an initial probe suggested the soldiers who shot and killed 18-year-old Abed Nabi in March and 15-year-old Othman Hellis in July during Gaza security fence protests did not adhere to open-fire regulations. According to the Israeli government, the investigation into the death of Nabi has been concluded and the findings were being reviewed by the MAG. In October an IDF soldier was charged with "disobeying an order leading to a threat to life or health" in the death of Othman Hellis, according to media reports. According to the government of Israel, the soldier was demoted and sentenced to 20 days of military labor and an additional 60 days' imprisonment on probation to be served over the course of four years.

Palestinian militants in Gaza launched more than 1,340 rockets and mortar shells toward Israel, killing five Israeli civilians according to the Israeli government. According to NGOs, media, and the Israeli government, Gaza-based militants fired rockets from civilian locations toward civilian targets. On May 4, a Palestinian Islamic Jihad rocket malfunctioned and landed inside Gaza, killing a pregnant woman and her 18-month-old niece.

In response to these attacks, the IDF launched 579 air strikes against targets in Gaza during the year that, along with tank shellings, killed 66 Palestinians,

including 10 minors, according to the United Nations. Nearly half of those killed did not participate in hostilities, according to B'Tselem. In early May, Israeli airstrikes killed at least 20 persons in Gaza, including a pregnant woman and a three-month-old baby, according to media reports and NGOs. Israeli authorities stated that in response to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) firing more than 400 rockets into Israeli towns on May 4, the IDF targeted Hamas and PIJ facilities, training bases, and weapons-manufacturing assets in Gaza and that results of an investigation would be submitted to the MAG for review. On November 14, an Israeli air strike in Gaza killed nine members of the same family, including five minors younger than 13. According to media reports, the family was mistakenly targeted. The IDF stated it was investigating the strike.

As of September 3, the MAG has ordered nine criminal investigations related to 17 separate instances of Palestinian fatalities, eight of which were continuing, according to the Israeli government. MAG investigations into the 2014 Gaza war have closed approximately 300 cases without criminal charges, with a few investigations still underway, according to the government of Israel. The MAG previously brought charges against three soldiers for looting. An August 2018 update addressed the IDF application of the “Hannibal Directive,” which calls for overwhelming firepower when an enemy captures an IDF soldier to prevent use of the soldier as a hostage. A March 2018 State Comptroller report on the war criticized the Hannibal Directive--which the IDF replaced in 2017--for failing to mention distinction and proportionality as well as for ambiguous wording that led to confusion about whether the IDF should risk killing its own soldier when attacking kidnappers to prevent a hostage situation. Human rights organizations continued to criticize the MAG for failing to find fault in hundreds of incidents that caused more than 1,000 Palestinian civilian deaths and for focusing on actions by individual soldiers who may have violated IDF rules or the law, rather than the conformity of IDF rules and policies with international law, including high-level orders regarding the use of force.

In Gaza, according to the United Nations, Hamas sentenced three persons to death for murder. The Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) previously noted a significant increase in application of the death penalty in Gaza since 2007, and Hamas “courts” did not provide minimum fair trial guarantees. By law the PA president must ratify each death penalty sentence, but Hamas has proceeded with executions without the PA president’s approval.

Also in Gaza, two militants conducted suicide attacks that killed three police officers on August 28, according to media. The Hamas de facto government arrested dozens of militants believed to be connected to the attackers.

b. Disappearance

In the West Bank, there were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities during the year. There was no new information on the disappearances in 2014 and 2015 of three Israeli citizens, Avraham Abera Mengistu, Hisham al-Sayed, and Juma Ibrahim Abu Ghanima, who crossed into Gaza and whom Hamas reportedly apprehended and held incommunicado.

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

The PA basic law prohibits torture or use of force against detainees; however, international and local human rights groups reported that torture and abuse remained a problem. According to a May update to a 2018 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, torture regularly occurred in detention centers in both Gaza and the West Bank by Hamas and PA security services, respectively. HRW reported systematic and routine abuse in PA prisons, particularly in the PA's Intelligence, Preventive Security, and Joint Security Committee detention facilities in Jericho. HRW reported practices including forcing detainees to hold painful stress positions for long periods, beating, punching, and flogging. In the 18-month period ending in April, 242 West Bank Palestinians complained of torture and mistreatment by Palestinian security forces, according to HRW.

Palestinian detainees held by the PASF registered complaints of abuse and torture with the Palestinian Authority's Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR). The PA Corrections and Rehabilitation Centers Department, under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, continued to maintain a mechanism for reviewing complaints of prisoner abuse in civil prisons. In May, HRW stated, "there have been no serious efforts to hold wrongdoers to account or any apparent change in policy or practice" from 2018 by the PA or Hamas. As of March the courts in Gaza had not convicted any prison employees for mistreatment of prisoners, and courts in the West Bank had convicted only one employee of mistreatment of prisoners and sentenced him to 10 days in prison, according to HRW.

In April human rights groups called for an investigation into the death of Mahmoud Rashad al-Hamlawi at the Bitonia police station west of Ramallah. According to the PCHR, Hamlawi was arrested on March 14 by the Preventive Security Service and died on March 27. A prison official told Hamlawi's brother that Hamlawi died of a stroke. The prison's forensic department later said he died of septic shock. The initial autopsy showed bruises on his chest and inner thighs, according to the PCHR.

According to rights groups, Hamas subjected dozens of Palestinians arrested for participation in the *Bidna Na'eesh* (We Want to Live) movement to torture and degrading treatment, including severe beating, breaking limbs, stripping their clothes off, and waterboarding them. In the 18-month period ending in April, 213 Palestinians in Gaza complained of torture and mistreatment by Hamas forces, according to HRW.

Human rights organizations such as the Public Committee against Torture in Israel (PCATI) reported that "special interrogation methods" used by Israeli security personnel against Palestinian security detainees in the West Bank 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. Female prisoners and detainees reported harassment and abuse in detention by the ISF. According to PCATI there was no investigation into these complaints.

The NGO HaMoked alleged that Israeli detention practices in the West Bank included prolonged solitary confinement, lack of food, exposure to the elements, and threats to demolish family homes. Military Court Watch (MCW) and HaMoked claimed Israeli security services used these techniques to coerce confessions from minors arrested on suspicion of stone throwing or other acts of violence. According to the government of Israel, detainees receive the rights to which they are entitled in accordance with Israeli law and international treaties to which Israel is a party and all allegations of abuse and mistreatment are taken seriously and investigated.

In March an Israeli court convicted four Israeli soldiers from Netzan Yehuda Infantry Battalion of aggravated abuse and another of abuse for their treatment of a detained Palestinian father and son. The court released a video of the incident in which the soldiers repeatedly hit the blindfolded and bound detainees on their heads and faces.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in PA prisons and detention centers in the West Bank were reportedly poor, largely due to overcrowding and structural issues.

Conditions of Hamas prisons in Gaza were reportedly poor, with overcrowding cited as a major issue.

NGOs reported all prisons in the West Bank and Gaza lacked adequate facilities and specialized medical care for detainees and prisoners with disabilities.

Physical Conditions: PA prisons continued to be crowded and lacked ventilation, heating, cooling, and lighting systems conforming to international standards. Authorities at times held male juveniles with adult male prisoners. Security services used separate detention facilities. Conditions for women were similar to those for men. The PA used several refurbished structures and buildings as prisons, some of which lacked necessary security accommodations.

On July 25, the PCHR called for an investigation into the death in a Gaza prison of Mohammed Mahmoud Sa'ed Baker. According to Baker's family, he was transferred to Al-Aqsa Hospital after his health deteriorated due to a heart attack. The hospital said Baker died due to a heart attack and pneumonia. The PCHR stated the Public Prosecution Office was negligent because it took no action after similar patient-health issues in the past.

Administration: According to HRW, mechanisms designed to hold employees and administrators accountable in both PA and Hamas detention facilities rarely, if ever, led to consequences for serious abuses.

Independent Monitoring: In the West Bank, the PA permitted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to detainees to assess treatment and conditions. The ICRC continued its regular visits to detention facilities, including interrogation centers, in accordance with its standard modalities, as in previous years. Human rights groups, humanitarian organizations, and lawyers indicated that, as in previous years, there were some difficulties in gaining access to specific detainees held by the PA, depending on which PA security organization managed the facility.

In Gaza, Hamas granted ICRC access to detainees to assess treatment and conditions. The ICRC continued its regular visits to detention facilities, including

interrogation centers, in accordance with its standard modalities, as in previous years. Human rights organizations conducted monitoring visits to some prisoners in Gaza, but Hamas authorities denied representatives permission to visit high-profile detainees and prisoners.

The Israeli government permitted visits by independent human rights observers. NGOs sent representatives to meet with Palestinian prisoners--including those on hunger strikes--and inspect conditions in Israeli prisons, detention centers, and some ISF facilities. Palestinian families and human rights groups reported delays and difficulties in gaining access to specific detainees from Israeli authorities. They also reported transfers of detainees without notice and claimed Israeli authorities at times used transfer practices punitively against prisoners engaging in hunger strikes.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

For information on the treatment of Palestinians in Israeli prisons as well as prison conditions in Israel, see the Israel report.

The Palestinian Basic Law, operable in the West Bank and Gaza, 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. There were reports the PA in the West Bank and Hamas de facto authorities in Gaza did not observe these requirements.

Israel prosecutes Palestinian residents of the West Bank under military law and Israeli settlers in the West Bank under Israeli criminal and civil law. Israeli military 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 military court, with broad exceptions for security-related offenses. There were reports the IDF did not observe these requirements and employed administrative detention excessively.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

PA law generally requires a warrant for arrest and provides for prompt judicial determination of the legality of detention. There are exceptions that allow for PA arrest without a warrant. PA law allows police to hold detainees for 24 hours if there is sufficient evidence to charge a suspect and for up to 45 days with court approval. PA law requires that a trial start within six months or authorities must

release the detainee. PA authorities generally informed detainees of the charges against them, albeit sometimes not until interrogation. Bail and conditional release were available at the discretion of judicial authorities. PA authorities granted detainees access to a lawyer. PA courts consistently afforded the right to counsel to indigents charged with felony offenses. Indigent defendants charged with misdemeanors often did not receive counsel, although NGO efforts to represent indigent juveniles and adults in misdemeanor cases were at times successful. Amnesty International and other NGOs reported that the PASF isolated some detainees from outside monitors, legal counsel, and family throughout the duration of interrogation, effectively holding them incommunicado. There were reports that prison administrators denied some detainees visits from family members.

The PA Military Intelligence Organization (PMI) operated without a service-specific mandate to investigate and arrest PA security force personnel and civilians suspected of “security offenses,” such as terrorism. The PMI conducted these activities in a manner consistent with the other PA security services.

In Gaza the Hamas de facto authority detained a large number of persons during the year without recourse to legal counsel, judicial review, or bail. Hamas regularly referred cases to the Hamas-run military judiciary in violation of the Palestinian Basic Law. There were also instances in which de facto Hamas authorities retroactively issued arrest warrants for Gaza residents already in custody.

Israeli military law applies to Palestinians in the West Bank. Israeli authorities detained inside Israel more than 80 percent of Palestinian prisoners arrested by the ISF in the West Bank. According to Israel Prison Service figures obtained by MCW, the monthly average number of minors in detention during the year was down from 2018 and at the lowest since 2014. Israeli authorities generally provided Palestinians held in Israeli military custody access to counsel, but detainees often obtained lawyers only after initial interrogations, according to NGOs. According to MCW, many Palestinian detainees saw their lawyer for the first time when they appeared before an Israeli military court. According to testimonies collected by MCW, only 31 percent of Palestinian minor detainees saw a lawyer prior to interrogation, a slight increase from 2018. In many cases, MCW reported, minors spoke with a lawyer very briefly over the telephone; in some cases the call was over speakerphone with the interrogator in the room.

Israeli authorities did not always inform Palestinian detainees of the reasons for arrest at the time of arrest, according to MCW. Israeli authorities stated their

policy was to post notification of arrests within 48 hours, but senior officers could delay notification for up to 12 days, effectively holding detainees incommunicado during the interrogation process. An Israeli military commander may request that a judge extend this period.

MCW and HaMoked said Israeli authorities in the West Bank frequently failed to inform Palestinian parents why their children were detained and where they were taken. Israeli authorities stated their policy was to provide written notification about the arrest to parents when they arrested a child at home; however, the NGOs argued this occurred only in 19 percent of cases. According to HaMoked and media outlets, the Israel Prison Service (IPS) prohibits Palestinian minors from calling their parents for months upon their initial detention. The IPS stated it would be rolling out a pilot program to provide regular telephone access for Palestinian minors, but few details on the plan have been provided, according to HaMoked.

Under Israeli military law, minors ages 16 and 17 can be held for 72 hours before seeing a judge. The law mandates audiovisual recording of all interrogations of minors in the West Bank but limits this requirement to non-security-related offenses. NGOs expressed concern that the ISF entered Palestinian homes at night to arrest or photograph minors.

MCW said data from more than 500 MCW detainee testimonials collected between 2015 and 2019 confirmed widespread physical mistreatment by Israeli authorities of Palestinian minor detainees in the West Bank. MCW reported that the majority of minor detainees were arrested in night raids and reported ISF use of physical abuse, strip searches, threats of violence, hand ties, and blindfolds. In August, in response to a petition to the Supreme Court regarding the blindfolding of detainees, the state prosecution clarified that “military orders and regulations forbid the blindfolding of detainees, and action to clarify the rules to the troops acting in the region has been taken and will continue to be taken on a continuous basis.” The government of Israel stated this policy applies to all detainees and blindfolds are only to be used as a rare exception. As of the end of September, approximately 93 percent of minor detainees arrested during the year reported the use of blindfolds upon arrest, according to MCW.

The government of Israel stated that an investigation responding to a formal complaint filed by 16-year-old Palestinian Ahed Tamimi found no evidence interrogators sexually harassed her or threatened her relatives with arrest after she was arrested in 2017 for slapping an Israeli soldier in the West Bank.

Israeli military law defines security offenses to include any offense committed under circumstances that might raise a suspicion of harm to Israel's security and which the ISF believes may link to terrorist activity. Under military law, the IPS may hold adults suspected of a security offense for four days prior to bringing them before a judge, with exceptions that allow the IPS to detain a suspect for up to eight days prior to bringing the suspect before the senior judge of a district court. Suspects between the ages of 12 and 14 can be held up to one day, with a possible one-day extension. Those between the ages of 14 and 16 can be held up to two days, with a possible two-day extension. Those between the ages of 16 and 18 can be held up to four days, with a possible four-day extension.

Under military law, Israeli authorities may hold adults suspected of a security offense for 20 days prior to an indictment, with the possibility of additional 15-day extensions up to 75 days. An Israeli military appeals court can then extend the detention up to 90 days at a time. Prior to an indictment on a security offense, authorities may hold minors for 15 days, with the possibility of 10-day extensions up to 40 days. An Israeli military appeals court can then extend the detention up to 90 days at a time. Israeli authorities granted or denied bail to Palestinians detained for security offenses based on the circumstances of each case, such as the severity of the alleged offense, status as a minor, risk of escape, or other factors, but in most cases bail was denied.

The Illegal Combatant Law permits Israeli 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 twice-yearly district court reviews and appeals to Israel's Supreme Court.

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

Human rights groups such as the PCHR reported families of imprisoned Palestinians, particularly Gazans, had only limited ability to visit prisoners detained inside Israel due to the difficulty of obtaining entry permits to Israel.

Arbitrary Arrest: According to the ICHR and HRW, the PA in the West Bank and Hamas de facto authorities in Gaza made arbitrary arrests based on political affiliation. The PA arrested individuals from areas known to support PA President Abbas' exiled Fatah rival Muhammad Dahlan, according to HRW. In many cases

detainees were held without formal charges or proper procedures. Hamas continued to charge that the PA detained individuals during the year solely due to their Hamas affiliation. The PA stated it charged many of these individuals with criminal offenses under PA civil or military codes.

There were numerous reports that the PA and Hamas improperly detained Palestinian journalists and arrested Palestinians who posted criticism of the PA (in the West Bank) or Hamas (in Gaza) online. Hamas also targeted those suspected of ties to Israel.

In October 2018 the PA in the West Bank arrested a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem allegedly involved in selling an apartment in the Old City's Muslim Quarter to a Jew, on charges of violating a law prohibiting "transferring positions to the enemy." In December 2018 a criminal court sentenced him to life in prison with hard labor. He was released in January, according to media reports.

Hamas practiced widespread arbitrary detention in Gaza, particularly of civil society activists, Fatah members, journalists, and those accused of publicly criticizing Hamas.

In March, Hamas security forces arrested thousands of Palestinians in Gaza in a major crackdown on the *Bidna Na'eesh* (We Want to Live) movement, a group of Palestinians protesting high prices and poor services in Gaza, according to rights groups. Those arrested included civil society activists, journalists, and human rights defenders. Hamas security forces in both civilian clothing and uniforms beat, interrogated, and tortured hundreds of the protesters.

According to human rights NGOs, including MCW, B'Tselem, and HaMoked, throughout the year there were reports that Israeli security forces in the West Bank arbitrarily arrested and detained Palestinian protesters and activists, particularly those participating in demonstrations against the security barrier or against killings of Palestinians.

Pretrial Detention: It was unclear how many Palestinians were held in pretrial detention in West Bank and Gaza prisons, but there were widespread instances of PA and Hamas detention without charge or trial. PA authorities held some prisoners detained by order of Palestinian governors in lengthy pretrial detention, according to complaints received by the ICHR. Some PA security forces reportedly detained Palestinians outside appropriate legal procedures, including

without warrants and without bringing them before judicial authorities within the required time.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court:

Palestinian detainees faced barriers to their ability to challenge in court the legal basis or arbitrary nature of their detention and to obtain prompt release and compensation if found to have been unlawfully detained. Detainees held in PA custody faced delays in the enforcement of court rulings regarding their detention, especially regarding the PA's obligation to release suspects who have met bail.

Palestinians held by Israeli military authorities in administrative detention have no right to trial and can only challenge their detention before a military court judge. In cases in which the evidence substantiating the charges against a detainee is classified, the detainee has no means of examining the evidence (nor, in some cases, to examine the charges) to challenge the detention.

Civil society organizations and some Israeli members of the Knesset continued to criticize the Israeli government for using administrative detention excessively, adding that the practice was undemocratic since there was no due process. In its 2017 submission regarding compliance with the UN Convention against Torture, Israel claimed it issued administrative detention orders "as a preventive measure where there is a reasonable basis to believe that the detention is absolutely necessary for clear security purposes. Administrative detention is not employed where the security risk can be addressed by other legal alternatives, especially criminal prosecution." The government further emphasized the role of military judges in reviewing administration detention orders.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The PA basic law provides for an independent judiciary. According to the ICHR, the PA judicial system was subject to pressure from the security agencies and the executive, undermining judicial performance and independence. PA authorities did not always execute court orders.

On July 18, President Abbas issued a decree lowering the mandatory retirement age of judges from 70 to 60, according to media reports. By issuing this decree, President Abbas forced into retirement at least 18 judges of the High Court and at least 50 additional judges in magistrate's courts, first instance (trial) courts, appeals courts and courts of cassation, according to rights groups. In September the Palestinian Constitutional Court found the decree lowering the mandatory

retirement age of judges unconstitutional. As of October it was unclear whether the judges who lost their jobs under the decree would be returned to their former positions.

President Abbas also issued a decree dissolving the existing High Judicial Council and establishing a transitional council for one year to reform the judicial system. The transitional council consists of seven members and is chaired by the former PA chief justice. The transitional council also includes two former High Court judges, in addition to the attorney general and the undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice.

Palestinians have the right to file suits against the PA but rarely did so. Seldom used administrative remedies are available in addition to judicial remedies.

In Gaza, Hamas did not respect fair trial guarantees or provide access to family and legal counsel to many detainees. Hamas-appointed prosecutors and judges operated de facto courts, which the PA considered illegal. Gaza residents can file civil suits. Rights groups reported Hamas internal security regularly tried civil cases in military courts.

Israeli law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected Israeli civil courts' independence and impartiality. The ISF tried Palestinian residents of the West Bank accused of security offenses in Israeli military courts.

Trial Procedures

PA law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right in the West Bank. Trials are public, except when the court determines PA security, foreign relations, a party's or witness' right to privacy, protection of a victim of a sexual offense, or an alleged "honor crime" requires privacy. If a court orders a session closed, the decision may be appealed to a higher PA court. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and the right to prompt and detailed information regarding the charges, with free interpretation as necessary, from the moment charged through all appeals. Amnesty International reported that PA political and judicial authorities sometimes failed to adhere to basic due process rights, including promptly charging suspects. PA law provides for legal representation, at public expense if necessary, in felony cases during the trial phase. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner during the trial, although during the investigation phase, the

defendant only has the right to observe. Defendants have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense. Suspects and defendants in the PA justice system have a right to remain silent when interrogated by the prosecutor according to the law. Defendants also have a legal right to counsel during interrogation and trial. They have the right to appeal. PA authorities generally observed these rights.

Hamas authorities in Gaza followed the same criminal procedure law as the PA in the West Bank but implemented the procedures inconsistently.

Israeli authorities tried Israelis living in West Bank settlements under Israeli civil law in the nearest Israeli district court. Palestinians in the West Bank are tried in Israeli military courts. The same evidentiary rules used in Israeli criminal cases apply in both Israeli military and civilian proceedings; for example, Israeli authorities cannot base convictions solely on confessions. Indigent detainees do not automatically receive free legal counsel for military trials, but almost all detainees had counsel, in part because NGOs funded their representation. Israeli military courts use Hebrew, but Palestinian defendants have the right to simultaneous interpretation at every hearing. Various human rights organizations claimed the availability and quality of Arabic interpretation was insufficient. Defendants can appeal through the Military Court of Appeals and petition Israel's High Court of Justice (HCJ). According to NGO reports, Israeli military courts rarely acquitted Palestinians charged with security offenses although they occasionally reduced sentences on appeal.

Human rights lawyers also argued that the structure of military trials--which take place in Israeli military facilities with Israeli military officers as judges, prosecutors, and court officials, and with tight security restrictions--limited Palestinian defendants' rights to public trial and access to counsel. MCW reported that 78 percent of Palestinian minors were shown or made to sign documentation written in Hebrew, a language most Palestinian minors could not read, at the conclusion of their interrogation. Israeli authorities disputed these findings, asserting that interrogations of Palestinians took place only in Arabic and that authorities submitted no indictments based solely on a confession written in Hebrew.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

NGOs reported the PASF arrested Palestinians for political reasons in the West Bank. There was no reliable estimate of the number of political prisoners the PA

held in the West Bank. Palestinian security forces arrested businessman Salah Abu Mayala following his participation in an international conference in Bahrain in June. He was released the next day. PA security forces also razed the houses of three other participants in the conference. Ashraf Jabari, founder of the Reform and Development Party, confined himself to his home in the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron to avoid arrest by the PA after attending the Bahrain conference. Jabari alleged the PA retaliated against him in ways that affected his business. Other sources reported that the PA was targeting the individuals for criminal behavior.

In Gaza, Hamas detained thousands of Palestinians due to political affiliation, public criticism of Hamas, or suspected collaboration with Israel and held them for varying periods. Hamas alleged that they arrested Fatah members on criminal, rather than political charges, although many of the arrests occurred after Fatah anniversary celebrations in Gaza that Hamas would not sanction. Observers associated numerous allegations of denial of due process with these detentions. The ICRC and NGOs had limited access to these prisoners.

Some human rights organizations claimed Palestinian security prisoners held in Israel were political prisoners. The Israeli government described security prisoners as those convicted or suspected of “nationalistically motivated violence.”

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

A Palestinian resident of the West Bank can file suit against the PA, including on matters related to alleged abuses of human rights, but this was uncommon.

A Palestinian resident of Gaza can file suit against de facto Hamas authorities, including on matters related to alleged abuses of human rights, but this was also uncommon.

Palestinian residents of the West Bank can file suit against the government of Israel. Residents of Gaza are not able to seek redress or compensation from the Israeli government for damage to property or bodily harm due to Gaza’s classification as an “enemy territory” under the Civil Wrongs (State Liability) Law.

Property Restitution

The Israeli government conducted multiple demolitions of Palestinian property in the West Bank, including Area A, for various reasons, including lack of Israeli-

issued permits, construction in areas designated for Israeli military use, location of structures within the security barrier's buffer zone, and as punishment for terrorist attacks. Human rights NGOs claimed that Israeli authorities often placed insurmountable obstacles against Palestinian applicants for construction permits in Israeli-controlled Area C, including 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 often unavailable municipal works.

In the West Bank, Israeli authorities, including the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA), a part of Israel's Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of the Interior demolished 419 Palestinian structures, displacing 567 persons, including 275 minors, according to the United Nations. The demolished structures included homes, water cisterns, farm buildings, storehouses, and other structures, more than 93 percent of which were demolished on the basis that they lacked construction permits. The ICA approved 66 Palestinian construction permits out of 3,354 filed from January 2009 to July 2016, according to the Israeli government's response to a freedom of information request from Peace Now.

The ICA periodically demolished unpermitted Israeli structures in the West Bank, including the April 30 destruction of the entire Maoz Esther outpost and the May 21 demolition of three structures in Tapuah West.

The Palestinian Bedouin community Khan al-Ahmar, slated for Israeli demolition since 2009 due to lack of building permits and land proof ownership, remained standing at year's end. On June 16, Israeli authorities informed Israel's HCJ that Khan al-Ahmar's demolition would be postponed until at least December, citing Israel's September 17 national election and government formation process for the delay. Approximately 170 residents live in the community, in an area adjacent to a highway, with unpermitted, makeshift electrical and water connections. In May 2018, after nearly 10 years of litigation, the HCJ ruled that the ICA's demolition orders against the structures in Khan al-Ahmar were valid, which provided the ICA legal justification to demolish the village. Residents were not able to receive permits, as the Israeli government has not approved a master plan for the area. Following the ruling the HCJ issued a temporary injunction to delay the demolition pending a series of petitions from the PA and Khan al-Ahmar residents. On September 5, the HCJ convened a panel of judges to review these petitions. The panel ultimately rejected the petitions and upheld the HCJ's decision, which terminated the temporary injunction. In an effort to resolve the Khan al-Ahmar dispute, the government constructed an alternative site for the residents that

included electric and water connections and a school building for the community's children. Khan al-Ahmar residents rejected the alternative site proposal, arguing the site was unsuitable for their herding lifestyle. The United Nations estimated there are an additional 46 Palestinian Bedouin communities, with approximately 8,170 residents, located in Area C that are also subject to pending demolition orders.

On July 22, Israeli authorities demolished several buildings in Areas A and B on the Jerusalem side of the security barrier, according to rights groups and media reports. The PA called the demolitions a “grave escalation” and a violation of the Oslo Accords, according to media reports. The buildings had PA building permits but were built inside a no-construction zone instituted by Israeli authorities in 2011 next to the security barrier, and therefore, after a lengthy legal process, Israel's HCJ deemed the construction a security threat and illegal under Israeli law.

Israeli authorities sometimes charged demolition fees for demolishing a home; this at times prompted Palestinians to destroy their own homes to avoid the higher costs associated with Israeli demolition. Palestinians had difficulty verifying land ownership in Israeli courts. According to the government, all land ownership cases are assessed individually by an administrative committee, which is subject to judicial review, and decisions are made according to the evidence provided.

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

The PA penal procedure code generally requires the PA attorney general to issue warrants for entry and searches of private property; however, PA judicial officers may enter Palestinian houses without a warrant in case of emergency. NGOs reported it was common for the PA to harass family members for alleged offenses committed by an individual.

Hamas de facto authorities in Gaza frequently interfered arbitrarily with personal privacy, family, and home, according to reporting from local media and NGO sources. Hamas authorities searched homes and seized property without warrants. They targeted critics of their policies, journalists, Fatah loyalists, civil society members, youth activists, and those whom Hamas security forces accused of criminal activity. Hamas forces monitored private communications systems, including telephones, email, and social media sites. They demanded passwords and access to personal information and seized personal electronic equipment of detainees. While Hamas membership was not a prerequisite for obtaining housing,

education, or Hamas-provided services in Gaza, authorities commonly reserved employment in some government positions, such as those in the security services, for Hamas members. In several instances Hamas detained individuals for interrogation and harassment, particularly prodemocracy youth activists, based on the purported actions of their family members.

In response to reported security threats, the ISF frequently raided Palestinian homes, including in areas designated as under PA security control by Oslo-era accords, according to media and PA officials. These raids often took place at night, which the ISF stated was due to operational necessity. Only ISF officers of lieutenant colonel rank and above can authorize entry into Palestinian private homes and institutions in the West Bank without a warrant, based upon military necessity.

According to B'Tselem, the Israeli military compelled various communities throughout the Jordan Valley to vacate their homes. On January 13, the Israeli Civil Administration ordered 13 Jordan Valley families to vacate their homes overnight for the fourth time in a month to allow for military training operations, according to B'Tselem. On February 6 and February 13, the Israeli Civil Administration ordered more than 50 families in the Jordan Valley, numbering 291 individuals, including 154 children, to vacate their homes overnight for more military training exercises, according to B'Tselem. According to the Israeli government, these families and others in the Jordan Valley live in a declared military firing zone and are sometimes evacuated for their safety following relevant regulations.

Israeli authorities froze family unification proceedings for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in 2000. In 2018, HaMoked filed petitions to Israel's HCJ on behalf of Palestinian residents of the West Bank and their foreign spouses, requesting that the Israeli government permit foreign spouses to legalize their status through a family unification procedure. HaMoked claimed the military's refusal to review requests of foreign citizens for family unification is contrary to Israeli law and to Israeli-Palestinian interim Oslo-era agreements. HaMoked claimed the IDF rejected family unification requests based on a broad policy and not on the facts of the individual cases brought before it, and as such the practice does not appropriately balance relevant security needs and the right of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza--protected persons under international humanitarian law--to family life. According to the government of Israel, as of October there were 2,290 pending family unification cases for persons from Gaza and the West Bank.

Israeli authorities reportedly permitted children in Gaza access to a parent in the West Bank only if no other close relative was resident in Gaza. Israeli authorities did not permit Palestinians abroad during the 1967 War or whose residency permits the Israeli government subsequently withdrew to reside permanently in the West Bank or Gaza.

Israeli authorities demolished 11 homes and three water cisterns belonging to Palestinians who had allegedly carried out attacks on Israelis. These actions sometimes rendered nearby structures uninhabitable, according to rights groups. Punitive demolitions displaced 36 Palestinians, including 13 children, according to the United Nations. NGOs, such as Amnesty International, HRW, and several Palestinian and Israeli NGOs, widely criticized punitive demolitions as collective punishment. Some punitive demolitions occurred before the trial of the alleged attacker, according to media reports. The Israeli government asserted such demolitions had a deterrent effect on would-be assailants.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The PA basic law generally provides for freedom of expression but does not specifically provide for freedom of the press. The PA enforced legislation that NGOs claimed restricted press and media freedom in the West Bank, including through PASF harassment, intimidation, and arrest.

In Gaza, Hamas restricted press freedom through arrests and interrogations of journalists, as well as harassment and limitations on access and movement for some journalists. These restrictions led many journalists to self-censor. During the March *Bidna Na'eesh* (We Want to Live) protests, Hamas arrested 23 journalists, according to rights groups.

Israeli civil and military law provides limited protections of freedom of expression and press for Palestinian residents of the West Bank. NGOs and Palestinian journalists alleged that Israeli authorities restricted press coverage and placed limits on certain forms of expression--particularly by restricting Palestinian journalists' movement, as well as through violence, arrests, closure of media outlets, and intimidation, according to media reports and the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms. The Israeli government stated it allows

journalists maximum freedom to work and investigates any allegations of mistreatment of journalists.

Freedom of Expression: Although no PA law prohibits criticism of the government, media reports indicated PA authorities arrested West Bank Palestinian journalists and social media activists who criticized or covered events that criticized the PA.

On February 24, the PASF detained photojournalist Mohammad Dweik while he filmed a protest against the National Social Insurance Law, according to media reports; he was later released after deleting the content from his camera.

The law restricts the publication of material that endangers the “integrity of the Palestinian state.” The PA 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. Websites blocked during 2018 continued to be blocked throughout the year.

According to HRW, the PA arrested 1,609 individuals between January 2018 and April 2019 for insulting “higher authorities” and creating “sectarian strife.” HRW stated these charges “criminalize peaceful dissent.” The PA arrested more than 750 persons during this period for social media posts, according to data provided to HRW.

In Gaza, Hamas authorities arrested, interrogated, seized property from, and harassed Palestinians who publicly criticized them. Media practitioners accused of publicly criticizing Hamas, including civil society and youth activists, social media advocates, and journalists, faced punitive measures, including raids on their facilities and residences, arbitrary detention, and denial of permission to travel outside Gaza. In January, Hamas arrested the Palestinian comedian Ali Nassman after he released a song on YouTube mocking a Hamas policy, according to media. He was released later that day. In April, Hamas arrested Palestinian comedian Hussam Khalaf for mocking the same Hamas policy, and he was released the next day.

Press and Media, Including Online Media: Independent Palestinian media operated under restrictions in the West Bank and Gaza. The PA Ministry of Information requested that Israeli reporters covering events in the West Bank register with the ministry. According to the PA deputy minister of information, the ministry provides permits to Israeli journalists only if they do not live in a

settlement. While officially the PA was open to Israeli reporters covering events in the West Bank, at times Palestinian journalists reportedly pressured Israeli journalists not to attend PA events.

Hamas de facto authorities permitted broadcasts within Gaza of reporting and interviews featuring PA officials. Hamas allowed, with some restrictions, the operation of non-Hamas-affiliated broadcast media in Gaza. For example, the PA-supported Palestine TV continued to operate in Gaza.

On May 26, the Hamas de facto government Ministries of Interior and Information in Gaza prevented PA-owned newspaper *Al Hayat Al Jadida* from distributing its paper based on the claim that the outlet published provocative material that incited violence and disrupted the civil peace.

In March, Hamas security arrested Rafat al-Qedra, the general manager of Palestine TV in Gaza. According to media outlets, they confiscated his mobile telephone and personal laptop before releasing him.

In areas of the West Bank to which Israel controls access, Palestinian journalists claimed Israeli authorities restricted their freedom of movement and ability to cover stories. The ISF does not recognize Palestinian press credentials or credentials from the International Federation of Journalists. Few Palestinians held Israeli press credentials.

There were reports of Israeli forces detaining journalists in the West Bank, including the August 6 detention in Burqin of Muhammed Ateeq, who was held for 10 days, and the August 29 detention of photojournalist Hasan Dabbous in his village near Ramallah. According to Israeli authorities, Ateeq was arrested on suspicion of endangering the security of the area.

On June 10, an Israeli military court indicted Palestinian journalist Lama Khater, who was arrested alongside five other journalists in July 2018, for incitement to violence through her writing and sentenced her to 13 months in prison, including time already served, according to media reports. She was released on July 26. Khater claimed she was mistreated during interrogation, including being chained to a chair for 10 to 20 hours a day for more than a month, according to media reports. According to Israeli authorities, Khater admitted to membership in Hamas, an illegal organization, and was sentenced as part of a plea bargain.

Violence and Harassment: There were numerous reports that the PA harassed, detained (occasionally with violence), prosecuted, and fined journalists in the West Bank during the year based on their reporting.

The PA occasionally obstructed the West Bank activities of media organizations with Hamas sympathies and limited media coverage critical of the PA.

The PA also had an inconsistent record of protecting Israeli and international journalists in the West Bank from harassment by Palestinian civilians or their own personnel.

In Gaza, Hamas at times arrested, harassed, and pressured, sometimes violently, journalists critical of its policies. Hamas reportedly summoned and detained Palestinian journalists for questioning to intimidate them. Hamas also constrained journalists' freedom of movement within Gaza during the year, attempting to ban access to some official buildings.

Throughout the year there were reports of Israeli actions that prevented Palestinian or Arab-Israeli journalists from covering news stories in the West Bank and Gaza. These actions included alleged harassment by Israeli soldiers and acts of violence against journalists. Palestinian journalists also claimed that Israeli security forces detained Palestinian journalists and forced them to delete images and videos under threat of violence, arrest, or administrative detention. On August 2, ISF detained AP photojournalist Eyad Hamad for several hours while he was reporting on house demolitions in the Wadi al-Hummous area of East Jerusalem, according to rights groups and media reports. The government of Israel stated it could find no record of this incident.

On July 24, Reporters without Borders alleged the IDF was intentionally targeting the media after five Palestinian journalists were injured in the span of four days while covering events in the West Bank and Gaza. At least two of the injured journalists were wearing vests marked "press" when the IDF allegedly fired at them with live rounds, according to media reports. One of the journalists, Sami Misran of Al-Aqsa TV, allegedly lost the use of an eye, according to the *Times of Israel*. The IDF stated it does not target journalists. According to the government of Israel, allegations of misconduct regarding the Gaza protests were being examined by the Fact Finding Assessment Mechanism, which will be reviewed by the MAG to determine whether there are reasonable grounds for criminal investigations.

On May 4, the Israeli air force shelled and destroyed a Gazan building that included the offices of local and regional media agencies and institutes, including the Turkish Anadolu Agency, the Prisoners Media Center, the Hala Media Training Center, and the Abdullah Hourani Studies Center, according to media reports. The IDF stated it targeted the building because it housed other offices related to Hamas and that it did not intend to destroy the media offices.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The PA prohibits calls for violence, displays of arms, and racist slogans in PA-funded and -controlled official media. There were no confirmed reports of any legal action against, or prosecution of, any person publishing items counter to these PA rules. Media throughout the West Bank and Gaza reported practicing self-censorship. There were reports of PA authorities seeking to erase images or footage from journalists' cameras or cell phones.

According to media reports, the PASF confiscated equipment from journalist Thaeer Fakhouri in Hebron and arrested him for posting "incitement information" on social media platforms. He was held for four days and obliged to pay a fine before being released.

In Gaza civil society organizations reported Hamas censored television programs and written materials, such as newspapers and books.

The Israeli government raided and closed West Bank Palestinian media sources, primarily on the basis of allegations they incited violence against Israeli civilians or security services. Acts of incitement under military law are punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment. NGOs and other observers said Israeli military regulations were vaguely worded and open to interpretation. The ISF generally cited two laws in its military orders when closing Palestinian radio stations--the 1945 Defense Emergency Regulations and the 2009 Order Concerning Security Provisions. These laws generally define incitement as an attempt to influence public opinion in a manner that could harm public safety or public order.

Libel/Slander Laws: There were some accusations of slander or libel against journalists and activists in the West Bank and Gaza.

A case continued in Ramallah Magistrate's Court in which London-based *al-Arabi al-Jadeed* disputed a 2016 closure order by the PA following an investigative report about torture in PA prisons.

HRW reported that Gazan authorities charged journalist Hajar Harb with slander for an investigative piece she wrote in 2016 accusing doctors in Gaza's health ministry of writing false reports to allow healthy people to leave Gaza for treatment in return for payment. She was convicted in absentia in 2017. She returned to Gaza in 2018 and was granted a new trial. In March she was acquitted on appeal.

National Security: Human rights NGOs alleged that the PA restricted the activities of journalists on national security grounds.

Internet Freedom

Internet was generally accessible throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Frequent power outages in Gaza interrupted accessibility.

The PA blocked access to at least 59 news sites sympathetic to Hamas or political factions critical of Abbas. The PA monitored social media actively, pressuring and harassing activists and journalists. There were instances when the PA arrested or detained Palestinians because of their posts on social media.

According to media reports, on January 6, the PASF arrested journalist Mahmoud Hreish at his house in Betunia city and detained him for 23 days. The PASF interrogated him about a Facebook post in which he criticized the PA's insufficient response to Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians.

Gaza-based Palestinian civil society organizations and social media practitioners stated Hamas de facto authorities monitored the internet activities of Gaza residents and took action to intimidate or harass them. On April 13, Hamas intelligence detained and interrogated journalist Hamza Hammad, according to media reports. He was reportedly released after 24 hours after signing a pledge to no longer post on Facebook about the political and economic situation in Gaza.

According to HRW, between January 2018 and March 2019, both the PA and Hamas arrested dozens of persons based on social media posts on charges of "harming revolutionary unity" and "misuse of technology." The PA arrested and brought to trial Palestinian human rights activist Issa Amro for a social media post critical of the PA's arrest of a Palestinian journalist, according to media reports.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The PA did not restrict academic freedom in the West Bank, and there were no known reports of PA censorship of school curricula, plays, films, or exhibits. Palestinian law provides for academic freedom, but individuals or officials from academic institutions reportedly self-censored curricula. Faculty members reported PA security elements were present on university campuses among the student body and faculty, which may have contributed to self-censorship. HRW claimed that authorities closely monitored criticism of the PA by university students and professors.

Public schools as well as UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools in Gaza followed the same curriculum as West Bank schools. Palestinians in Gaza reported interference by Hamas in public schools at the primary, secondary, and university levels. Hamas reportedly interfered in teaching methodologies or curriculum deemed to violate Islamic identity, the religion of Islam, or “traditions,” as defined by Hamas. Hamas also interfered if there were reports of classes or activities that mixed genders. UNRWA reported no Hamas interference in the running of its Gaza schools.

Students and faculty from Gaza participating in certain cultural and education programs (including programs sponsored by foreign governments and international organizations) faced questioning from de facto Hamas authorities. On February 19, Hamas’ General Intelligence Service arrested the head of the Birzeit University Center for Development Studies, Ghassan Abu Mata, for conducting a survey on “youth reality” in Gaza without a permit from the Hamas-led Ministry of the Interior, according to the PCHR and the al-Mezan Center for Human Rights.

Israeli restrictions on movement (see section 2.d.) adversely affected academic institutions and access to education and cultural activities for Palestinians.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Authorities in the West Bank and Gaza limited and restricted Palestinian residents’ freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

PA law permits public meetings, processions, and assemblies within legal limits. It requires permits for rallies, demonstrations, and large cultural events. Both the PA and Hamas security forces selectively restricted or dispersed peaceful protests and demonstrations in the West Bank and Gaza during the year.

After a new social security law was passed and published in the official gazette, the United Movement against the Social Security Law called for a commercial strike in Hebron on January 15 in opposition to the law, according to the Human Rights and Democracy Media Center (SHAMS) and media reports. PA police arrested and investigated several of the protesters and held them overnight, according to SHAMS.

According to a Hamas decree, any public assembly or celebration in Gaza requires prior permission. Hamas used arbitrary arrest to prevent some events from taking place, particularly the *Bidna Na'eesh* (We Want to Live) protest (see section 1.d., Arbitrary Arrest) and political events affiliated with Fatah. Hamas also attempted to impede criticism of Hamas policies by imposing arbitrary demands for the approval of meetings on political or social topics.

A 1967 Israeli military order stipulates that a “political” gathering of 10 or more persons requires a permit from the regional commander of military forces, which Israeli commanders rarely granted. The penalty for a breach of the order is up to 10 years’ imprisonment or a heavy fine. Israeli military law prohibits insulting a soldier, participating in an unpermitted rally, and “incitement” (encouraging others to engage in civil disobedience). Palestinian human rights activist Issa Amro faced 16 charges in a trial underway in an Israeli military court that began in 2016. The charges include participation in a march without a permit, assaulting a soldier, and incitement, according to rights groups. Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International stated Amro’s actions during these incidents were consistent with nonviolent civil disobedience. The latest hearing in his case took place in September. *Ha’aretz* reported the IDF detained Amro at least 20 times at various checkpoints from May to July 2018. In August, IDF soldiers detained Amro at a checkpoint in Hebron and released him two hours later with no explanation, according to rights groups.

The IDF Central Command declared areas of the West Bank to be “closed military zones” in which it prohibited Palestinian public assembly. It maintained the same designation on Fridays for areas adjacent to the security barrier in the Palestinian villages of Bil’in and Ni’lin during hours when Palestinian, Israeli, and international activists regularly demonstrated there. There were frequent skirmishes between protesters and ISF personnel.

Freedom of Association

PA law allows freedom of association. PA authorities sometimes imposed limitations in the West Bank, including on labor organizations (see section 7.a.). NGOs said a regulation subjecting “nonprofit companies” to PA approval prior to receiving grants impeded their independence and threatened the ability of both local and international nonprofits to operate freely in the West Bank.

In Gaza, Hamas attempted to prevent various organizations from operating. These included some it accused of being Fatah-affiliated, as well as private businesses and NGOs that Hamas deemed to be in violation of its interpretation of Islamic social norms. The Hamas de facto Ministry of Interior claimed supervisory authority over all NGOs, and its representatives regularly harassed NGO employees and requested information on staff, salaries, and activities.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement

PA law provides for freedom of internal movement within the West Bank, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, with some exceptions.

Hamas authorities restricted some foreign travel into and out of Gaza and required exit permits for Palestinians departing through the Gaza-Israel Erez crossing. Hamas also prevented some Palestinians from exiting Gaza based on the purpose of their travel or to coerce payment of taxes and fines. There were some reports unmarried women faced restrictions on travel out of Gaza.

Citing security concerns and frequent attempted terrorist attacks, Israel imposed significant restrictions on Palestinian movement in the West Bank and between the West Bank and Jerusalem. Israeli authorities often prohibited travel between some or all Palestinian West Bank towns and deployed temporary checkpoints for that purpose. Palestinians who lived in affected villages stated that “internal closures” continued to have negative economic effects, lowering their employment prospects, wages, and days worked per month. During periods of potential unrest, including on some major Israeli, Jewish, and Muslim holidays, Israeli authorities enacted “comprehensive external closures” that prevented Palestinians from leaving the West Bank and Gaza. For example, Israeli authorities enacted a

comprehensive closure for the West Bank and Gaza for eight days during Pesach from April 19-26, according to B'Tselem. B'Tselem reported 13 such days in total during the year.

The Israeli travel permit system restricts Palestinians' ability to travel from Gaza to the West Bank, including travel to pursue higher education opportunities. Palestinian higher education contacts reported that permits for Gazans to attend West Bank universities were seldom granted.

Israel has declared access restricted areas (ARAs) on both the coastal and land borders around Gaza, citing evidence that Hamas exploited these areas at times to conduct attacks or to smuggle weapons and goods into Gaza. The lack of clear information regarding the ARAs created risks for Palestinians in Gaza who lived or worked either on the Mediterranean Coast or near the perimeter fence. No official signage indicating the line of demarcation exists, and official policy changed frequently. Likewise, the permitted maritime activity area for Palestinians along the coastal region of Gaza changed between zero and 15 nautical miles 19 times throughout the year, according to the Gisha, an Israeli organization that focuses on Palestinian freedom of movement. Human rights NGOs asserted this confusion led to multiple instances of Israeli forces firing upon farmers and fishermen. According to the United Nations, regular electrical outages often made it necessary for Gazan farmers to work their fields after dark; in some instances, IDF soldiers shot at farmers near the ARA while they irrigated their fields at night.

On February 20, Israeli naval forces arrested five fishermen and confiscated three boats off the Gaza coast, according to the PCHR. The Israeli forces used live fire during the arrests, damaging one of the boats, and one of the fishermen was injured when an Israeli naval vessel hit him after he jumped off his boat when it was fired on. Also on February 20, Israeli naval forces allegedly shot Gaza fisherman Khader al-Saaidy with rubber-coated bullets in the face and chest at close range, and he lost sight in both eyes as a result. According to the government of Israel, the case was referred to the MAG to determine whether there were reasonable grounds for a criminal investigation.

A key barrier to Palestinian movement was the security barrier that divides the majority of the West Bank from Israel, including Jerusalem, and some parts of the West Bank. Israeli authorities constructed the barrier to prevent attacks by Palestinian terrorists. In some areas it divides Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Jerusalem. At its widest points, the barrier extends 11 miles (18 kilometers) into the West Bank. B'Tselem estimated that 27,000 Palestinians

resided in communities west of the barrier who were required to travel through Israeli security checkpoints to reach the remainder of the West Bank. Other significant barriers to Palestinian movement included internal ISF road closures and Israeli restrictions on the movement of Palestinian persons and goods into and out of the West Bank and Gaza. Major checkpoints, such as Container and Za'tara, caused major disruptions in the West Bank when closed, according to media reports. When Container (near Bethlehem) is closed, it cuts off one-third of the West Bank population living in the South, including Bethlehem and Hebron, from Ramallah and the North. Similarly, Za'tara checkpoint blocks traffic in and out of the entire northern part of the West Bank, including Nablus, Tulkarem, and Jenin, according to media reports. UNOCHA reported there were 705 permanent obstacles throughout the West Bank, a 3 percent increase from their previous survey in 2016. Israeli restrictions on movement affected virtually all aspects of Palestinian life, including attendance at weddings and funerals, access to places of worship, employment, access to agricultural lands, schools, and hospitals, as well as the conduct of journalism and humanitarian and NGO activities. There were also reports of patients dying in traffic before reaching hospitals and ambulances en route to accidents or scenes of attacks being stopped by the IDF for hours at a time. In October the Israeli government denied a travel request for an Amnesty International employee from the West Bank to accompany his mother to a chemotherapy treatment in Jerusalem citing "security concerns," according to Amnesty.

Israeli officials imposed restrictions on movement of materials, goods, and persons into and out of Gaza based on security and economic concerns. Amnesty International and HRW reported difficulties by foreign workers in obtaining Israeli visas, which affected the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the West Bank and Gaza. Amnesty International and HRW also reported that the Israeli government denied their employees permits to enter Gaza from Israel. The United Nations and several international NGOs reported that the Israeli government denied their local Gazan staff permits to exit Gaza into Israel, and UNOCHA reported that more than 130 local UN staff were under travel bans prohibiting them from exiting Gaza. The Israeli government stated all Gaza exit requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis in accordance with security considerations arising from Hamas's de facto control of Gaza.

PA-affiliated prosecutors and judges stated that ISF prohibitions on movement in the West Bank, including Israeli restrictions on the PA's ability to transport detainees and collect witnesses, hampered their ability to dispense justice.

UNRWA reported its West Bank Headquarters staff lost 79 workdays during the year, mostly due to increased Israeli demands to search UNRWA vehicles at checkpoints between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

In-country Movement: Hamas authorities did not enforce routine restrictions on internal movement within Gaza, although there were some areas of Gaza to which Hamas prohibited access. Pressure to conform to Hamas's interpretation of Islamic norms generally restricted movement by women.

The ISF routinely detained for several hours Palestinians residing in Gaza who had permits to enter Israel for business and subjected them to interrogations and strip searches at Israeli-controlled checkpoints, according to rights groups. UNOCHA and several NGOs working on freedom of movement issues noted that frequently changing protocols and unofficial, unwritten policies at checkpoints have resulted in the forfeiture of personal property including money, electronics, and clothing of those attempting to exit Gaza with valid travel permits.

Israeli authorities allegedly damaged Palestinian property in the West Bank while conducting raids, sealed off entries and exits to homes and other buildings, and confiscated vehicles and boats. The Israeli government stated that it imposed collective restrictions only if an armed forces commander believed there was a military necessity for the action and that the imposition on the everyday lives of Palestinian civilians was not disproportionate.

Restrictions on access to Jerusalem had a negative effect on Palestinian patients and medical staff trying to reach six hospitals in East Jerusalem that offered specialized care unavailable in the West Bank. According to the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), IDF soldiers at checkpoints at times harassed and delayed ambulances from the West Bank or refused them entry into Jerusalem, even in emergency cases. The PRCS and World Health Organization reported hundreds of such actions impeding humanitarian services during the year. Most included blocking access to those in need, preventing their transport to specialized medical centers, or imposing delays at checkpoints lasting up to two hours. According to the Israeli government, security considerations and lack of advanced coordination on the part of Palestinian medical teams often caused delays.

Israeli authorities restricted or prohibited Palestinian travel on 29 roads and sections of roads (totaling approximately 36 miles) throughout the West Bank, including many of the main traffic arteries, according to B'Tselem. The ISF also imposed temporary curfews confining Palestinians to their homes during ISF arrest

operations. During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Israeli authorities eased restrictions on Palestinians entering Israel, including Jerusalem, allowing West Bank Palestinians to use Ben Gurion Airport, to visit family, and visit the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for religious services. Israeli authorities did not issue permits to Palestinians in Gaza to visit Jerusalem.

Israeli authorities extended the security barrier in the Cremisan Valley near Bethlehem and began land clearing to extend the barrier through Walajah village, also near Bethlehem. Israel continued to restrict movement and development near the barrier, including access by some international organizations. In response to a freedom of information act request from HaMoked in 2018, the IDF reported that during the year it had denied 72 percent of permit requests by Palestinian farmers to access their land blocked by the security barrier, of which 1 percent of the denials were for security reasons. HaMoked asserted many of these refusals were due to arbitrary claims by Israeli authorities that the farmer's land was too small to cultivate.

Private security companies employed by the Israeli government controlled many points of access through the security barrier. International organizations and local human rights groups claimed these security companies did not respond to requests to allow movement of goods or NGO representatives through the barrier.

Palestinian farmers continued to report difficulty accessing their lands in Israeli-controlled Area C of the West Bank. NGOs and community advocates reported numerous Palestinian villages owned land rendered inaccessible by the barrier. A complicated Israeli permit regime (requiring more than 10 different permits) prevented these Palestinians from fully using their lands.

Israeli restrictions allowed fishing only within three nautical miles of Gaza land during specific periods. The Israeli government stated these restrictions were necessary for security reasons. Israeli and Egyptian naval forces regularly fired warning shots at Palestinian fishermen entering the restricted sea areas, in some cases directly targeting the fishermen, according to UNOCHA. Israeli armed forces confiscated fishing boats intercepted in these areas and detained the fishermen. In August the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories returned 22 seized fishing boats to their owners; all the boats had holes in them and the fishermen were forced to pay the cost of moving the boats from government of Israel custody back to the docking area, according to the United Nations.

In the West Bank, Israeli military authorities continued to restrict Palestinian vehicular and foot traffic and access to homes and businesses in downtown Hebron, citing a need to protect several hundred Israeli settlers resident in the city center. The ISF continued to occupy rooftops of private Palestinian homes in Hebron as security positions, forcing families to leave their front door open for soldiers to enter. In response to these reports, the Israeli government stated that freedom of movement is not an absolute right but must be balanced with security and public order.

The Israeli government, citing security concerns, continued to impose intermittent restrictions on Palestinian access to certain religious sites, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Israeli officials cited security concerns when imposing travel restrictions, including limiting access to Jerusalem during major Jewish holidays as well as continuing construction of Israel's security barrier, which impeded the movements of Palestinian Muslims and Christians in the West Bank.

UNOCHA reported Palestinians in Gaza considered areas up to 984 feet (300 meters) from the perimeter fence to be a "no-go" area, and up to 3,280 feet (1,000 meters) to be "high risk," which discouraged farmers from cultivating their fields. UNOCHA estimates nearly 35 percent of the Gaza Strip's cultivable land is in these areas.

Foreign Travel: Hamas authorities in Gaza occasionally enforced movement restrictions on Palestinians attempting to exit Gaza to Israel via the Erez Crossing and to Egypt via the Rafah Crossing. Palestinians returning to Gaza were regularly subject to Hamas interrogations about their activities in Israel, the West Bank, and abroad.

Citing security concerns, Israeli authorities often denied or did not respond to Palestinian applications for travel permits through the Erez Crossing. Israel largely limited entry and exit from Gaza at the Erez Crossing to humanitarian cases and limited permits to businesspersons and day laborers working in Israel. These limitations prevented some Palestinians from transiting to Jerusalem for visa interviews; to Jordan (often for onward travel) via the Allenby Bridge; and to the West Bank for work or education. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated there were no new restrictions on items that could be brought through Erez into Israel, but Gazans reported additional restrictions, including not being allowed to carry phone chargers or more than one pair of shoes. Israel approved 40 percent of exit permit requests from Gaza to Jordan, 56 percent from Gaza to Israel and the

West Bank, and 50 percent from the West Bank to Israel, according to the Israeli government.

During the year the Israeli Supreme Court continued to uphold with few exceptions the ban imposed in 2000 on students from Gaza attending West Bank universities. Students in Gaza generally did not apply to West Bank universities because they understood Israeli authorities would deny permits.

Delays in permit approvals by Israeli officials caused some Palestinians to miss the travel dates for exchange programs abroad, and for matriculation in foreign universities. In some cases authorities asked students to submit to security interviews prior to receiving permits. Israeli authorities detained some students indefinitely without charge following their security interview, which caused other students to refuse to attend these interviews for fear of detention.

Egyptian authorities regularly opened the Rafah Crossing to pedestrians five days per week, and there were 146,061 combined exits and entrances through the Rafah Crossing during the year. The United Nations and several international NGOs reported that obtaining permission from the Hamas de facto government in Gaza and the Egyptian government to travel through Rafah was extremely difficult for Palestinians in Gaza and often required paying between \$1,500 and \$3,000 in bribes to local authorities.

According to Gisha, Israel denied some exit permit applications by residents of Gaza on the grounds that the applicants were “first-degree relative[s] [of] a Hamas operative.” UNOCHA reported that some of their staff members were denied exit permits out of Gaza due to security blocks because UNOCHA coordinates with Hamas as the de facto government in Gaza to facilitate the entry, exit, and transportation of UN personnel.

e. Internally Displaced Persons

UNOCHA estimated that during the year 700 persons in Gaza were displaced by three instances of hostilities between armed Palestinian groups and Israel. Additional persons in Gaza remained displaced due to the destruction caused by the 2014 war.

UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations provided services to IDPs in Gaza and the West Bank, with some limitations due to Israeli restrictions on movement and border access.

f. Protection of Refugees

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: Israeli security operations in the West Bank led to 11 Palestinian UNRWA beneficiary fatalities, three of whom were killed allegedly while conducting an attack on the ISF or Israeli civilians. Israeli use of live ammunition caused most injuries. There were 62 Palestinians reported injured by Israeli authorities in West Bank refugee camps, according to UNRWA, of whom live ammunition injured 17, including four UNRWA beneficiary minors.

The most recent fatality in Deheisha refugee camp south of Bethlehem was in July, when the ISF fatally shot 14-year-old Arkan Thaer Mizher. According to the Israeli government, the investigation has concluded and the MAG was reviewing the findings.

UNRWA provided education, health care, and social services to areas of Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza; however, the agency continued to experience funding shortfalls throughout the year. During the year Israel's ambassador to the United Nations urged international donors to suspend funding to the agency amid a UN Office of Internal Oversight Services investigation into allegations of corruption and mismanagement by UNRWA's senior management team. Several international and Israeli NGOs called for the UN to strengthen oversight of UNRWA and improve transparency to address the allegations.

Access to Basic Services: Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza were eligible to access UNRWA schools and primary health care clinics, although in some cases, movement restrictions limited access to UNRWA services and resources in the West Bank (see section 1.d.).

All UNRWA projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip required Israeli government permits, but UNRWA does not apply for permits in refugee camps.

The deterioration of socioeconomic conditions during the year in Gaza severely affected refugees. UNRWA reported that food security continued to be at risk.

Israeli import restrictions on certain commodities considered as dual use continued to impede humanitarian operations in Gaza, including those directed toward refugees. In 2016 Israeli authorities introduced a requirement whereby approval of UNRWA projects remained valid for one year. As project implementation

timelines often exceeded one year, this requirement necessitated applications for reapproval of projects, which hampered implementation and increased transaction costs for multiple UNRWA projects.

g. Stateless Persons

According to NGOs, 40,000 to 50,000 Palestinians in Gaza lacked identification cards recognized by Israel. Some were born in Gaza but never recognized by Israel as residents; some fled Gaza during the 1967 war; and some left Gaza for various reasons after 1967 but later returned. A small number lacking recognized identification cards were born in the Gaza Strip and never left, but had only Hamas-issued identification cards. Under the Oslo Accords, the PA administers the Palestinian Population Registry, although status changes in the registry require Israeli government approval. The Israeli government has not processed changes to the registry since 2000.

There was no process for foreign spouses or foreign-born children of Palestinians to obtain permanent legal status in the West Bank. As a result many Palestinian children and young adults, especially those born abroad, are without legal status in the region where they have spent most or all of their lives. In September a court granted 24-year-old Maen Abu Hafez a one-year visitor's permit to stay in the West Bank. Abu Hafez reportedly lived in the Jenin refugee camp since he was three, when he moved there with his Palestinian father and Uruguayan mother. His family reunification request has been on hold for several years. In 2017 he was detained at a checkpoint and was held for more than two and one-half years in an Israeli prison for illegal aliens in Ramle. The Israeli government sought to deport him to Brazil, where he was born, although he has no ties there and does not speak Portuguese.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The PA basic law provides Palestinians the ability to choose their government and vote in periodic free and fair elections held by secret ballot and based on universal, equal suffrage. The PA has not held national elections in the West Bank or Gaza since 2006, effectively preventing Palestinians from being able to choose their own government or hold it accountable. Civil society organizations in Gaza, which has been under Hamas control since 2007, stated Hamas and other Islamist groups did not tolerate public dissent, opposition, civic activism, or the promotion of values contrary to their political and religious ideology.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: There have been no national elections in the West Bank and Gaza since 2006. In December 2018 President Abbas announced that the PA Constitutional Court had issued a decision dissolving the PLC and calling for PLC elections within six months. As of the end of the year, no date was set for national or municipal elections in the West Bank or Gaza.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The PA allowed a limited range of political parties to exist in the West Bank and limited the ability of Hamas members to campaign and organize rallies. Activists linked to the new Reform and Development Party in the West Bank claimed PA security agencies pressured them not to organize. The PA reportedly detained one party member for several hours with no explanation. In Gaza, Hamas allowed other political parties but restricted their activities, primarily in the case of Fatah. According to HRW, the PA and Hamas arbitrarily arrested each other's supporters solely because of their political affiliation or expression of views. Hamas arrested more than 1,000 Fatah leaders and members in Gaza during the year, according to media reports.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No PA laws limit participation of women or members of minorities in the political process, and they did participate. Legally women and minorities can vote and participate in political life, although women faced significant social and cultural barriers in both the West Bank and Gaza. There are three women and four Christians in the 22-member PA cabinet.

Hamas generally excluded women from leadership positions in the de facto ministries in Gaza.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

PA law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but little was done in practice to prosecute corrupt officials.

Corruption: Allegations of corrupt practices among Fatah officials continued, particularly related to favoritism and nepotism in public-sector appointments, which were rarely advertised publicly.

In August, Finance Minister Shukri Bishara returned more than \$81,000 in secret bonuses in response to public outrage after leaked documents revealed that in 2017 President Abbas approved a measure to give his cabinet a 67 percent raise,

retroactive to 2014 when the cabinet was formed, according to media reports. The PA said other ministers would also return bonuses. Media reports alleged only those bonuses taken retroactively would be returned. The same month President Abbas also announced he was firing “all of his advisors,” according to the PA’s official Wafa news agency and other media reports. President Abbas reportedly took the action as an austerity measure in light of the PA’s budget shortfall following the government of Israel’s decision in February to withhold \$138 million in tax transfers to the PA, corresponding to Israel’s record of PA payments to the families of jailed Palestinian militants.

In Gaza local observers and NGOs alleged instances of Hamas complicity in corrupt practices, including preferential purchasing terms for real estate and financial gains from tax and fee collections from Gazan importers. Hamas de facto authorities severely inhibited reporting and access to information.

Local business representatives in Gaza alleged the PA Ministry of Civil Affairs, which submits applications for the entry of restricted materials into Gaza to Israeli authorities, engaged in nepotism and gave preferential treatment to Gaza-based importers close to the ministry.

Financial Disclosure: PA ministers are subject to financial disclosure laws, but there was little accountability for nondisclosure. The PA publicized financial disclosure documents from public-sector employees, including ministers, via the PA Anticorruption Commission. De facto Hamas authorities in Gaza did not require financial disclosure.

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

Palestinian human rights groups and international organizations reported some restrictions on their work in the West Bank. Some of these organizations reported the PASF and PA police harassed their employees and pressured individuals and organizations not to work with them. Several PA security services, including General Intelligence and the Palestinian Civil Police, appointed official liaisons who worked with human rights groups.

Israeli and Palestinian human rights NGOs operating in the West Bank, Gaza, or both, including B’Tselem, Rabbis for Human Rights, and Breaking the Silence, reported harassment from Israeli settlers and anonymous sources. B’Tselem, Rabbis for Human Rights, Yesh Din, HRW, and Breaking the Silence reported

some of their employees were subjected to intimidation, death threats, or physical assault. NGOs claimed these behaviors increased during periods in which government officials spoke out against their activities or criticized them as enemies or traitors for opposing government policy.

Gaza-based NGOs reported that Hamas representatives appeared at their offices to seek tax payments, demand beneficiary lists and salary information, and summon NGO representatives to police stations for questioning. On March 17, Hamas security forces assaulted and injured Jamil Sarhan, the director of the ICHR Gaza office, and Bakr al-Turkmani, an ICHR employee, while they were performing human rights monitoring duties. Hamas detained other human rights workers in March, prompting Amnesty International to state on March 18 that it was “clear that Hamas security forces are trying to stop human rights defenders from carrying out the vital work of document and reporting” on Hamas abuses.

Humanitarian organizations continued to raise concerns about the shrinking operational space for international NGOs in Gaza, including a significant increase in Israeli travel bans affecting their Gaza-based staff. Israeli authorities increased scrutiny of both nongovernmental and diplomatic visitors to Gaza following the February 2018 arrest of a French consulate employee who admitted to smuggling weapons from Gaza to the West Bank in official diplomatic vehicles. In April the Be'er Sheva District Court sentenced him to seven years in prison.

Palestinian, Israeli, and international NGOs monitored the Israeli government's practices in the West Bank and Gaza and published their findings.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: PA and Israeli officials generally cooperated with and permitted visits by representatives of the United Nations and other international organizations. There were numerous reports Hamas harassed members of international organizations.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The ICHR continued serving as the PA's ombudsperson and human rights commission. The ICHR issued monthly and annual reports on human rights violations within PA-controlled areas; the ICHR also issued formal recommendations to the PA. The ICHR was generally independent but faced resource shortages that limited its ability to work effectively. Local and international human rights NGOs cooperated with the ICHR.

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

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is illegal under PA law, but the legal definition does not address spousal rape. Punishment for rape is five to 15 years in prison. While the PA repealed a law that relieved a rapist of criminal responsibility if he married his victim, neither the PA nor de facto Hamas authorities enforced laws pertaining to rape effectively in the West Bank and Gaza. In previous years there were reports police treated rape as a social and not a criminal matter, and authorities released some accused rapists after they apologized to their victims.

According to the PA's Central Bureau of Statistics, one in five Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza reported at least one incident of physical abuse from their husbands. Women in Gaza were twice as likely to be a victim of spousal abuse as women in the West Bank. PA law does not explicitly prohibit domestic violence, but assault and battery are crimes. PA and de facto Hamas authorities did not enforce the law effectively in domestic violence cases in the West Bank and Gaza. NGOs reported Palestinian women were frequently unwilling to report cases of violence or abuse to the PA or de facto Hamas authorities due to fear of retribution or little expectation of assistance. HRW in previous years reported that PA authorities prosecuted few domestic violence cases successfully.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: The law precludes "family honor" as protection for perpetrators in "honor killing" crimes. In 2018 the PA amended the law to prohibit the practice of judges giving lighter sentences for crimes against women and children versus crimes against men. NGOs claimed the amended law was not sufficiently enforced. According to SHAMS, there were 20 honor killings in the West Bank and Gaza through October. On September 21, the PA attorney general charged three male family members with murder in the death of Israa Ghrayeb in an alleged honor killing, according to media reports. The case continued at year's end.

Sexual Harassment: No PA law specifically relates to sexual harassment, which was a significant and widespread problem in the West Bank and Gaza. Some women claimed that when they reported harassment, authorities held them responsible for provoking men's harassing behavior.

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

Discrimination: Inheritance for Muslims in the West Bank and Gaza falls under Palestinian Basic Law, which is based on sharia. Under Palestinian Basic Law, women have a right to inheritance but, in practice, generally received less than men. According to rights groups, in some cases women have been attacked by male family members for asserting their right to an inheritance. While recognized Christian communities have separate civil court systems, there is no separate civil law for Christians, so those communities also utilize Palestinian Basic Law. Men may marry more than one wife. Women may add conditions to marriage contracts to protect their interests in the event of divorce and child custody disputes but rarely did so. Local officials sometimes advised such women to leave their communities to avoid harassment.

Hamas enforced a conservative interpretation of Islam in Gaza that discriminated against women. Authorities generally prohibited public mixing of the sexes. In Gaza premarital sex was considered a crime punishable by imprisonment.

According to press and NGO reports, in some instances teachers in Hamas-run schools in Gaza sent girls home for not wearing conservative attire, although enforcement was not systematic. Reports of gender-based employment discrimination in Gaza against women are common, and factories often do not hire pregnant or newly married women in order to avoid the need to approve maternity leave.

Children

Birth Registration: The PA registers Palestinians born in the West Bank and Gaza, and Israel requires the PA to transmit this information to the ICA. The PA cannot determine citizenship. Children of Palestinian parents can receive a Palestinian identity card issued by the ICA if they are born in the West Bank or Gaza to a parent who holds a Palestinian identity card. The PA Ministry of Interior and the ICA both play a role in determining a person's eligibility for that card.

Education: In Gaza primary education is not universal. UNRWA, de facto Hamas authorities, religious institutions, and private foundations all provided instruction. In addition to the PA curriculum, UNRWA provided specialized classes on human rights, conflict resolution, and tolerance. There were reports Hamas offered courses on military training in its schools during youth summer camps, to which school-age children could apply for admission.

According to the United Nations, there were 199 documented instances of “interference of education” by Israeli forces in the West Bank through September, 30 percent of which involved the firing of tear gas canisters or stun grenades in or near schools. The H2 area of Hebron was the most highly affected area with 74 incidents. A video from March shows armed IDF soldiers entering a school in Hebron and attempting to detain a nine-year-old and his seven-year-old brother for allegedly throwing stones at soldiers. Under Israeli military law, the age of majority is 12. According to the Israeli government, the incident was precipitated by a group of 10 school students throwing stones at soldiers and ultimately resulted in no arrests.

In the West Bank, Palestinian government officials and Palestinian university officials accused the ISF of disrupting university campuses, especially in areas close to Israeli settlements. Officials from the al-Quds University’s Abu Dis campus in the West Bank continued to accuse Israeli soldiers of harassing Palestinian university students on campus and attempting to provoke students. There were occasional low-level skirmishes near the entrance to al-Quds University between the IDF and youths unaffiliated with the university.

According to HRW, the difficulty of obtaining permits to build new schools and the Israeli destruction of schools built without permits made it difficult for many West Bank Palestinian children to get an education. Israeli restrictions on construction in Area C of the West Bank also affected Palestinian students’ access to education. At the end of the year, 43 Palestinian schools in Area C were under pending demolition orders.

Child Abuse: Child abuse was reportedly widespread. PA law prohibits violence against children; however, PA authorities and de facto authorities in Gaza rarely punished perpetrators of family violence.

Early and Forced Marriage: President Abbas issued a presidential decree declaring a marriage legal only if both parties enter into the marriage willingly and both are 18 years old, but the decree provides an exception for minors if a judge agrees the marriage is in “the best interest of both parties.” Child marriage did not appear to be widespread in the West Bank and Gaza, according to NGOs including the Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counseling.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The PA considers statutory rape a felony, based on the Jordanian penal code. Punishment for rape of a victim younger than 15 includes a minimum sentence of seven years. In Gaza, under the rule of de facto

Hamas authorities, suspects convicted of rape of a victim younger than 14 are eligible for the death penalty. There were reports that societal norms led to underreporting to the de facto authorities in Gaza of sexual exploitation of children.

Child Soldiers: There were reports Hamas trained children as combatants.

Displaced Children: Conflict and demolition orders (see section 2.d.) displaced Palestinian children in the West Bank and Gaza.

Anti-Semitism

Israeli settlements in the West Bank had approximately 427,800 Jewish residents. The Jewish population in Gaza, aside from foreign nationals, was nonexistent.

Some Palestinians and Muslim religious leaders used anti-Semitic rhetoric and engaged in Holocaust denial. Anti-Israel sentiment was widespread in public discourse and sometimes crossed the line into anti-Semitism, including expressions of longing for a world without Israel and glorification of terror attacks on Israelis. On March 23, after the IDF killed Omar Abu Laila, who attacked and killed IDF soldier Gal Keidan and Rabbi Achiad Ettinger, Fatah deputy chairman Mahmoud al-Aloul praised Abu Laila on the official Fatah Facebook page, saying, “We are extremely proud, this is Omar Abu Laila...he represents all of you, represents all young Palestinians.” Media reported that Fatah closed its official Facebook page in September, so it may only be viewed by those expressly invited due to concerns that the site would be shut down due to its content. During times of heightened tensions between Israeli authorities and Palestinians, Palestinian press and social media sometimes circulated cartoons encouraging terrorist attacks against Israelis, and Official PA media outlets published and broadcast material that included anti-Semitic content.

In March the PA official daily newspaper *al-Hayat al-Jadida* published an opinion piece that made anti-Semitic remarks regarding foreign Jewish officials involved in Middle East peace negotiations, according to the National Council of Young Israel.

Civil society organizations alleged problematic content in Palestinian textbooks, including inappropriately militaristic examples directed against Israel as well as the absence of Judaism alongside Christianity and Islam when discussing religion. The NGOs PMW and IMPACT-se reported that PA schoolbooks for the 2017-2018 school year contained material that glorified terrorism and promoted violence.

In Gaza and the West Bank, there were instances in which media outlets, particularly outlets controlled by Hamas, published and broadcast material that included anti-Semitic content, sometimes amounting to incitement to violence.

Trafficking in Persons

No PA law specifically prohibits trafficking in persons, and small numbers of Palestinian children and adults reportedly experienced forced labor in both the West Bank and Gaza (also see section 7.b.).

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination due to a permanent or partial disability in physical, psychological, or mental capabilities. It does not mandate access to buildings, information, or communications. The ICHR reported a lack of accessible transportation in Palestinian areas across the West Bank. UNRWA's policy is to provide accessibility in all new structures in refugee camps.

Persons with disabilities continued to receive inconsistent and poor quality services and care in the West Bank and Gaza. The PA in the West Bank and de facto Hamas authorities in Gaza partially depended on UN agencies and NGOs to care for persons with physical disabilities, and both offered substandard care for persons with mental disabilities. Palestinians in Gaza reported little to no infrastructure accommodations for persons with mobility disabilities, as well as difficulty in importing wheelchairs and other mobility aids. Hamas de facto authorities were more likely to provide prostheses and mobility aids to people injured in Israeli airstrikes or in the protests at the Gaza fence than to those born with disabilities, according to NGOs.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

According to UNOCHA an estimated 27,500 Palestinian Bedouin lived in Area C of the West Bank. Many were UNRWA-registered refugees. Bedouins were often resident in areas designated by Israel as closed military zones or planned for settlement expansion. Demolition and forced displacement by the Israeli government of Bedouin and herding communities continued in Area C. Many of these communities lacked access to water, health care, education, and other basic services.

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

In the West Bank, PA law, based on the 1960 Jordanian penal code, does not prohibit consensual same-sex sexual activity. NGOs reported PA security officers and neighbors harassed, abused, and sometimes arrested people due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. In Gaza, under the British Mandate Penal Code of 1936, sexual acts “against the order of nature” are criminalized. NGOs reported Hamas security forces harassed and detained people due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

On August 19, PA police spokesperson Louay Arzeikat released a statement in which he declared that LGBT rights group al-Qaws was banned from holding events in the West Bank, according to rights groups and media reports. Arzeikat threatened to arrest members of the group, stated the organization’s work was contrary to the “values of Palestinian society,” and encouraged local communities to inform on the members, according to rights groups and media reports. Arzeikat released the statement after al-Qaws held a discussion on gender pluralism in Nablus on August 4, according to rights groups. On August 27, the PA police rescinded the statement following criticism from human rights groups. In October al-Qaws said increased persecution and restrictions continued even after the PA police rescinded their statement.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

While the PA Ministry of Health provided treatment and privacy protections for patients with HIV/AIDS, societal discrimination against affected individuals in the West Bank was common. Anecdotal evidence suggested societal discrimination against HIV/AIDS patients was also very common in Gaza.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

As of December 9, UNOCHA reported 101 incidents of Palestinians committing violent acts against Israeli civilians in the West Bank, primarily stone throwing, which represented a 49 percent decrease from 2018. Israeli police investigated 87 allegations of nationalistic-based offenses committed by Palestinians against Israelis in the West Bank through July, according to the Israeli government. On March 17, a Palestinian assailant stabbed and killed an Israeli soldier near the Ariel settlement in the West Bank before stealing the soldier’s rifle to kill an Israeli civilian and wound another Israeli soldier.

During the same timeframe, UNOCHA identified 330 incidents of settler attacks that resulted in Palestinian fatalities, injuries, or property damage, which represented an 18 percent increase from 2018. Israeli police investigated 31 allegations of nationalistic-based offenses committed by Israelis against Palestinians in the West Bank through July, two of which resulted in indictments, according to the government of Israel. In February the Lod District Attorney's Office publicized an Israeli civilian's conviction on 25 charges, including racially motivated assault and property destruction targeting Palestinians in the West Bank from 2013 to 2016. Israeli authorities arrested the perpetrator in 2016 but released him until sentencing since he was a minor when the crimes occurred, according to the media. NGOs alleged that some Israeli settlers used violence against Palestinians to intimidate them from using land that settlers sought to acquire. On May 17, B'Tselem released video footage of an off-duty Israeli soldier igniting a bush fire on Palestinian-owned farmland near Burin village. The IDF suspended the soldier from his combat unit, and according to media reports, the incident remained under Israeli police investigation. Various human rights groups, including Yesh Din, Rabbis for Human Rights, and B'Tselem, continued to claim Israeli authorities insufficiently investigated and rarely prosecuted settler violence. Palestinian residents were reportedly reluctant to report incidents due to fears of settler retaliation and because they were discouraged by a lack of accountability in most cases, according to NGOs.

Social services in Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including housing, education, and health care, were available only to Israelis. Israeli officials reportedly discriminated against Palestinians in the West Bank regarding employment and legal housing by denying Palestinians access to registration paperwork.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

PA law provides for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions and conduct legal strikes. The law requires conducting collective bargaining without any pressure or influence but does not include protections for employees and unions to engage effectively in collective bargaining. Antiunion discrimination and employer or government interference in union functions are illegal, but the law does not specifically prohibit termination or provide for reinstatement due to union activity.

The PA labor code does not apply to civil servants or domestic workers, although the law allows civil servants the right to form unions. The requirements for legal strikes are cumbersome, and strikers had little protection from retribution. Prospective strikers must provide written warning two weeks in advance of a strike (four weeks in the case of public utilities). The PA Ministry of Labor can impose arbitration; workers or their trade unions faced disciplinary action if they rejected the result. If the ministry cannot resolve a dispute, it can refer the dispute to a committee chaired by a delegate from the ministry and composed of an equal number of members designated by the workers and the employer and finally to a specialized labor court, although authorities had not established the court as required by labor legislation.

The government did not effectively enforce labor laws and subjected procedures to lengthy delays and appeals. Penalties and enforcement were insufficient to deter violations. The PA enforced the prohibitions on antiunion discrimination and employer interference in union functions, but it inconsistently enforced laws regarding freedom of association. The PA did not seek to enforce collective bargaining rights for unions, with the exception of those representing PA employees. Hamas continued to maintain de facto control of worker rights in Gaza, where the PA was unable to enforce labor law. Hamas continued to suppress labor union activities, including placing restrictions on celebrating Labor Day and suppressing public gatherings of labor unions.

The PA respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining in the West Bank, with some significant exceptions. Labor unions were not independent of authorities and political parties in the West Bank or Gaza. Two main labor unions in the West Bank (the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions and the Federation of Independent and Democratic Trade Unions and Workers) competed for membership and political recognition.

Israel applies Israeli civil law to Israeli settlements in the West Bank, but authorities did not enforce it uniformly. Despite a 2007 ruling by the HCJ requiring the government to apply Israeli law to Palestinian workers in Israeli settlements, the Israeli government did not fully enforce the ruling. Most Israeli settlements continued to apply the Jordanian labor law applicable prior to 1967 to Palestinian workers; that law provides for lower wages and fewer protections than does Israeli law.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

PA law does not expressly forbid forced or compulsory labor or human trafficking. Forced labor occurred in the West Bank and Gaza. Women working as domestic workers were vulnerable to forced labor conditions in both the West Bank and Gaza, since the PA and de facto Hamas authorities do not regulate domestic labor within households or in the large informal sector. There were reports of Palestinian children and adults subjected to forced labor in both the West Bank and Gaza.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

PA law prohibits the employment of minors younger than 15. PA law classifies children as persons younger than 18 and restricts employment for those between 15 and 18. The law permits hiring children between the ages of 15 and 18 for certain types of employment under set conditions. The law allows children younger than 15 to work for immediate family members under close supervision.

PA law prohibits children from working more than 40 hours per week; operating certain types of machines and equipment; performing work that might be unsafe or damage their health or education; and working at night, in hard labor, or in remote locations far from urban centers. A presidential decree includes provisions on child labor accompanied by explicit penalties for violations. PA authorities can penalize repeat offenders by having fines doubled or fully or partially closing their facility. Fines and enforcement were not sufficient to deter violations.

In 2018, the latest year for which data were available, PA officials found 169 cases involving child labor (younger than 15) and referred 10 cases to the courts. In recent years PA officials reported fining “numerous” persons after successful investigations conducted by the PA Ministry of Labor. The ministry inspected only businesses operating in the formal economy and was unable to conduct investigations in the Gaza Strip. It did not have access to Israeli-controlled Area C of the West Bank. Many cases of child labor in the West Bank reportedly occurred in home environments, for example on family farms, which were not open to labor ministry inspection.

In the second quarter of the year, 3 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 17 were employed--4 percent in the West Bank and 1 percent in Gaza. Palestinian child laborers deemed by the PA to be most vulnerable to forced labor or extreme weather conditions generally worked in shops, as roadside and checkpoint street

vendors, in car washes, in factories, in small manufacturing enterprises, or on family farms.

Hamas reportedly did not enforce child labor laws in Gaza, and the United Nations reported child labor was increasing in Gaza due to widespread economic hardship. Hamas reportedly encouraged children to work gathering gravel and scrap metal from bombsites to sell to recycling merchants and increased recruitment of youth for tunnel-digging activities. Children were also reported to be working informally in the automotive and mechanics sector, often changing tires and working as mechanics' assistants. There were also reports Hamas trained children as combatants.

The Israeli government stated it did not issue permits for Palestinian West Bank residents younger than 18 to work in Israeli settlements in the West Bank, except in the Jordan Valley where the law allows issuing permits to persons age 16 and older. There were reports during the year that some Palestinian children entered the settlements or crossed into Israel illegally, often smuggled, to seek work. The PA reported that Palestinian children engaged in child labor in Israeli settlements in the West Bank faced security risks, exploitation, and harassment, since they did not have access to legal protection or labor inspection.

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

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

PA laws and regulations do not prohibit discrimination regarding race, language, sexual orientation or gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, or social status. While PA laws prohibit discrimination based on gender and disabilities, penalties were insufficient to deter violations, and the PA did not effectively enforce those laws and regulations in the West Bank, nor did Hamas in Gaza. PA labor law states that work is the right of every capable citizen; however, it regulates the work of women, preventing them from employment in dangerous occupations.

There was discrimination in the West Bank and Gaza based on the above categories with respect to employment and occupation. Women endured prejudice and, in some cases, repressive conditions at work. The Palestinian female labor force participation rate was 20 percent in Gaza and 17 percent in the West Bank.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The PA's monthly minimum wage was significantly below the poverty line. The PA estimated 14 percent of residents in the West Bank and 53 percent of residents in Gaza lived below the poverty line.

According to PA law, the maximum official Sunday-to-Thursday workweek was 48 hours. The law also allows for paid official and religious holidays, which employers may not deduct from annual leave. Workers must be paid time and a half for each hour worked beyond 45 hours per week and may not perform more than 12 hours of overtime work per week.

The PA Ministry of Labor was responsible for setting occupational health and safety standards. Palestinian workers do not have the legal protection to remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. Mechanisms for lodging complaints were generally not utilized due to fear of retribution, according to NGOs.

The ministry reported that its enforcement ability on wage, hours of work, and occupational safety and health standards was limited, even in the West Bank, in part due to lack of staff. Penalties were also insufficient to deter violations. During the year the Ministry of Labor conducted periodic visits to the workplaces as mandated by the labor law. In 2018 the Ministry of Labor's Inspection Department visited larger business establishments and took legal actions against the establishments violating the law (e.g., warnings, partial shutdown, total shutdown, and referring to the court). The PA did not effectively monitor smaller worksites, which were at times below legal safety standards.

The ministry cannot enforce Palestinian labor law west of Israel's security barrier, or in Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Israeli authorities did not conduct labor inspections in Israeli settlements, where Palestinian workers constituted a significant part of the workforce. The lack of a competent labor authority in the settlements increased workers' vulnerability to exploitation. NGOs such as Kav LaOved stated that exploitative practices in Israeli settlements were widespread. The International Labor Organization estimated one-half of all such workers with permits continued to pay exorbitant monthly fees to brokers to obtain and maintain valid work permits. Approximately 130,000 Palestinians worked in Israel and Israeli settlements, mostly in construction, and an estimated 18,000 in seasonal agriculture. These workers were

more vulnerable to exploitation and were not eligible for worker benefits, such as paid annual and sick leave. Kav LaOved brought cases to Israeli labor courts on behalf of Palestinian workers employed by enterprises in Israel and West Bank settlements. Many of these cases related to nonpayment or misreporting of wages, inadequate medical care following workplace injury, and the settlement of subsequent health insurance claims within the Israeli system.

According to the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics *Labor Force Survey*, 30 percent of wage employees received less than the minimum wage in the second quarter of the year. In the West Bank, approximately 10 percent of wage employees in the private sector received less than the minimum monthly wage. In Gaza, 79 percent of wage employees in the private sector received less than the minimum monthly wage. Palestinians working in Israeli settlements reported they continued to receive wages lower than the Israeli minimum wage, despite a 2008 high court ruling that Israeli labor laws apply to relations between Palestinian workers and Israeli employers in settlements.

Respect for occupational safety and health standards in practice was poor. There were more than 20 workplace fatalities of Palestinian laborers during the year. The Israeli NGO Kav LaOved documented dozens of cases where employers instructed employees to return to the West Bank following workplace injury rather than provide for medical attention inside Israel.