

ISRAEL (INCLUDES WEST BANK AND GAZA) 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The country's laws and Supreme Court rulings protect the freedoms of conscience, faith, religion, and worship, regardless of an individual's religious affiliation. The 1992 Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty describes the country as a "Jewish and democratic state." The 2018 Basic Law: Israel – The Nation State of the Jewish People determines, according to the government, that "the Land of Israel is the historical homeland of the Jewish people; the State of Israel is the nation state of the Jewish People, in which it realizes its natural, cultural, religious and historical right to self-determination; and exercising the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish People." In September, the Lod District Court sentenced Zion Cohen to three years in prison for carrying out a series of 2020 arson bombings of religious courts. On June 9, according to press reports, police arrested 12 protesters who threw heavy objects towards them in a protest by a small ultra-Orthodox sect near Bar-Ilan Street in Jerusalem against the construction of part of the city's light rail through an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood. Clashes broke out in April and May with "Day of Rage" demonstrations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem against Israeli actions in Sheikh Jarrah, the Damascus Gate, and the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem. On April 13, on the evening of the first day of Ramadan, media and officials from the Jordanian Waqf in Jerusalem, which administers the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, reported that the Israeli National Police entered the site and disconnected loudspeakers used for the call to prayer after the Waqf's call to prayer disrupted an official Memorial Day service for fallen soldiers attended by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin in the adjacent Western Wall Plaza. During the last Friday of Ramadan on May 7 and again on May 10, Israeli police entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount using teargas, stun grenades, and rubber tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians they said were throwing rocks. While the government stated it was rare for any individual to be barred entry to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, human rights and civil society organizations said Israeli authorities periodically banned individual Palestinian residents of the occupied territories, and Arab/Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel from the site. The government reiterated that non-Islamic prayer was not allowed on the grounds of the site, but non-Muslim visitors were allowed. Some religious minority groups said the police were not interested in investigating attacks on members of their communities. The Chief Rabbinate continued not to recognize as Jewish some citizens who self-identified as Jewish, including Reform and

Conservative converts to Judaism and others who could not prove Jewish matrilineage to the satisfaction of the Chief Rabbinate. As a result, the government prohibited those individuals from accessing official Jewish marriage, divorce, and burial services in the country. Some Jewish individuals and groups performed religious acts such as prayers and prostration on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount despite the longstanding historical norms against overt non-Islamic prayer there. On July 8, the Supreme Court, by a vote of 10-to-one, rejected 15 petitions challenging the Basic Law of Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People (Nation State law). The government maintained its policy of not accepting new applications for official recognition from religious groups but stated that members of unrecognized religious groups remained free to practice their religion. Members of some religious minorities said that the government did not provide the same service and benefits to them as to the country's majority Jewish population.

During a one-week period in May, amid tensions in Jerusalem and violence in Gaza, ethnic-based violence and civil unrest broke out in a number of mixed Jewish-Arab cities in the country, leading to multiple deaths and injuries. The violence during the unrest included gunfire, stone throwing by protesters (both Jewish and Arab/Palestinian citizens), arson attacks on synagogues, desecration of Muslim gravestones, and vandalism of automobiles. The Israel National Police (INP) made approximately 1,550 arrests during and after the unrest with the overwhelming majority of the arrestees being Arab/Palestinian citizens. On May 12 in the mixed Jewish-Arab town of Lod, Jews shot and killed Moussa Hassouna in clashes between residents. Later on May 12, Arab/Palestinian citizens in Lod stoned the car of Jewish resident Yigal Yehoshua who died on May 17 after being hit in the head with a thrown brick. In the northern city of Acre on May 11, Arab/Palestinian citizens set fire to a hotel leading to the death of 84 year-old retiree Aby Har-Even on June 6. On May 19, teenager Mohammed Mahamid Kiwan died after he was shot on May 18 at the Mei Ami junction on Route 65. His family said police were responsible. In April, during the period leading up to the unrest, Palestinian youths in Jerusalem physically attacked ultra-Orthodox individuals and posted videos of the attacks on the social media app TikTok. On July 1, police arrested Palestinian Jerusalemites for defiling graves in the Har Hamenuhot Cemetery while filming themselves on TikTok. Jewish individuals and groups continued to engage in nationalist violent hate crimes against Palestinians and their property in the West Bank and Arab/Palestinians in the country, (which the attackers called "price tag" attacks to exact a "price" for actions taken by the government against the attackers' interests). Tension continued between the ultra-Orthodox community and other citizens, including concerns related to service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), housing, public

transportation, participation in the workforce, and adherence to COVID-19 regulations. In its annual *Israel Religion and State Index* poll of 800 adult Jews published in September, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Hiddush reported that 65 percent of respondents identified as either secular (48 percent) or traditional not religious (17 percent), the same result as in the 2020 poll.

In meetings with Israeli government officials, the Ambassador, Charge d’Affaires, and other U.S. embassy officials stressed the importance of religious pluralism and respect for all religious groups. Numerous high-level U.S. officials made formal stops at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust remembrance site, to keep a public spotlight on antisemitism and highlight religious tolerance. Senior U.S. officials spoke publicly about the importance of maintaining the historic status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and conveyed this message in meetings with government officials. Throughout the year, embassy officials used social media platforms to express U.S. support for tolerance and the importance of openness to members of other religious groups. Embassy-supported initiatives focused on interreligious dialogue and community development and advocated a shared society for Arab and Jewish populations. The embassy also promoted the reduction of tensions between religious communities and an increase in interreligious communication and partnerships by bringing together representatives of many faith communities to advance shared goals and exchange knowledge and experience, and through engagements aimed at greater integration of the Arab minority into the broader national economy, especially the high-tech sector.

This section of the report covers Israel within the 1949 Armistice Agreement line as well as Golan Heights and East Jerusalem territories that Israel occupied during the June 1967 war and where it later extended its domestic law, jurisdiction, and administration. The United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 and Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights in 2019. Language in this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status issues to be negotiated between the parties to the conflict, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the borders between Israel and any future Palestinian state.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 8.8 million (midyear 2021). According to the country’s Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) classification system (2020 data), approximately 73 percent of the population is Jewish, 18 percent Muslim, 2 percent Christian, and 1.6 percent Druze. The remaining 5 percent

consists of those the CBS classifies as “other.” This includes those who identify as Jewish but do not satisfy the Orthodox Jewish definition of “Jewish” that the government uses for civil procedures, such as many immigrants from the former Soviet Union. There are also relatively small communities of Samaritans, Karaite Jews, Messianic Jews, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and members of the Baha’i Faith. The majority of non-Jewish citizens are of Arab/Palestinian origin. This includes approximately 77 percent of the country’s 182,000 Christians, according to the CBS as of December. Non-Arab/Palestinian Christians are mainly those who emigrated from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s as descendants of Jews or alongside Jewish family members and their descendants.

According to the annual religion and state poll conducted by religious freedom NGO Hiddush, 57 percent of Jewish citizens do not affiliate with any religious group, 19 percent are “Zionist Orthodox,” 11 percent “ultra-Orthodox,” 6 percent “Reform,” 5 percent “Conservative,” and 2 percent “National Orthodox.”

The Arab/Palestinian Muslim, Druze, and Christian communities are located throughout the country. In the Galilee region, some communities are homogenous, while others feature a mix of these groups. There are dozens of Muslim-majority communities in the Negev. In addition to an Alawite community in Ghajar, there are several Druze communities in the Golan Heights.

In 2019, the most recent year for which results are available, the CBS and the Jerusalem Institute estimated 563,200 Jews, 345,800 Muslims, and 16,150 Christians lived in the current municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, accounting for approximately 99 percent of the city’s total population of 936,400 as of 2019.

According to government and NGO data, there are approximately 330,000 foreign workers in the country, including 97,000 documented Palestinian workers; 31,000 undocumented Palestinian workers; 98,000 migrant workers with permits, 77,000 non-Palestinian undocumented workers (either migrant workers without a permit or tourists who overstayed their visa); and 31,000 asylum seekers, of whom an unknown number work. Foreign workers and asylum seekers include Protestants, Roman Catholics, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, Orthodox Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims. According to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Catholics among the foreign worker population include 19,000 Filipinos, 15,000 Indians, 5,655 Sri Lankans, 2,500 Colombians, and 1,100 individuals from other South American countries.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

Although the country has no constitution, a series of “Basic Laws” enumerate fundamental rights, which serve as the country’s constitutional foundation. The 1992 Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty describes the country as a “Jewish and democratic state” and references the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, which protects freedom to practice or not practice religious beliefs, including freedom of conscience, faith, religion, and worship, regardless of an individual’s religion. The law incorporates religious freedom provisions of international human rights covenants into the country’s body of domestic law, which applies to citizens and Palestinian residents.

The Basic Law: Israel – The Nation State of the Jewish People (Nation State Law)” recognizes “the exercise of the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel” as “unique to the Jewish People” and calls for promotion of “Jewish settlement” as a national value. The law recommends – but does not require – that judges use Jewish jurisprudence and heritage as a source of legal principles in cases in which there is no relevant legislation or judicial precedent.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel is the supreme religious authority in the country and the law provides its council with authorities to handle Jewish religious services and rule on matters involving *halacha* (Jewish religious law). The Council of the Chief Rabbinate consists of Orthodox rabbis chosen by an assembly of rabbis, local government leaders, government ministers, and laypersons appointed by the government.

Until March 1, the Chief Rabbinate retained the sole authority to issue certificates of conversion to Judaism within the country under Orthodox interpretations of Jewish law, although the government provided funding for both Orthodox and non-Orthodox conversion programs. Relatives of Jewish converts could not receive residency rights, except for the children of converts born after the parent’s conversion was complete. On March 1, the Supreme Court ruled that the government must recognize Conservative and Reform conversions performed in the country for the purpose of immigration, citizenship, and registration.

The Population and Immigration Authority of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) recognizes Conservative and Reform conversions in the country for the purpose of being registered as Jewish in the population registry. However, those who convert

through a non-Orthodox denomination, whether inside or outside the country, are not able to obtain such religious services as marriage, divorce, or burial in a Jewish cemetery. Descendants of Jews qualify for immigration under this law regardless of the religious beliefs under which they were raised. The law considers those who were eligible for immigration and converted as adults to another religious tradition, including Messianic Judaism, as no longer eligible for benefits under the Law of Return.

The Law of Return provides the right for any Jew, including those who converted to Judaism, or any child or grandchild of a Jew, to immigrate from a foreign country with his or her spouse and children. Under the law, the minor children of a grandchild of a Jew receive humanitarian status but are not automatically granted citizenship. Non-Jews who are not descendants of Jews do not have this route to immigration. Under this law, those who completed an Orthodox Jewish conversion inside or outside the country are entitled to immigration, citizenship, and registration as Jews in the civil population registry. Those who completed conversion to Judaism in a recognized community outside the country, regardless of affiliation, are eligible for these benefits even if they are not recognized as Jewish by the Chief Rabbinate; this would include Reform, Conservative, and other affiliations of Judaism.

The law recognizes only Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the Druze faith, and the Baha'i Faith. Christian religious communities recognized according to the adopted Ottoman *millet* (court) system include Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), Gregorian-Armenian, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Chaldean (Chaldean Uniate Catholic), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Evangelical Episcopal. The Anglican and Baha'i communities are recognized through a British Mandate-era law adopted by the government. The government does not recognize other religious communities, including major Protestant denominations with a presence in the country, as distinct religious communities. The two legal pathways to formal recognition, according to laws adopted from the British Mandate period, include petitioning either the Prime Minister's Office or the MOI. Groups may appeal rejected applications to the Supreme Court.

Recognized religious communities are exempt from taxation of places of worship and may have separate courts to apply their religion's personal status laws. Municipalities may levy property taxes on religious properties not used for prayer, such as schools, monasteries, pilgrim hostels, and soup kitchens.

Legislation establishes religious councils for Jewish communities and for the Druze. The Ministry of Religious Services (MRS) has jurisdiction over the country's 133 Jewish religious councils that oversee the provision of religious services for Jewish communities. The government finances approximately 40 percent of the religious councils' budgets, and local municipalities fund the remainder. The MOI Department of Non-Jewish Affairs has jurisdiction over religious matters concerning non-Jewish groups and oversees the religious council for the Druze. The Department of Non-Jewish Affairs annually convenes an interreligious council of all recognized religions, including Judaism, which serves as a discussion forum for recognized religious communities. The council did not meet in 2021 and 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic; the last meeting took place in 2019, and it is planned to convene again in 2022.

The law criminalizes the damage, destruction, or desecration of religious sites (subject to seven years' imprisonment) and actions that "harm the freedom of access" of worshippers to religious sites (subject to five years' imprisonment). Certain religious sites considered antiquities receive further protection under the antiquities law. The Ministry of Tourism is responsible for the protection and upkeep of selected non-Jewish religious sites, while the MRS protects and maintains selected Jewish religious sites. The law also provides for up to five years' imprisonment for actions "likely to violate the feelings of the members of the different religions" regarding their religious sites. The law grants the government, not the courts, the authority to decide the scope of the right to worship at certain religious sites.

The law criminalizes willfully and unjustly disturbing any meeting of persons lawfully assembled for religious worship or assaulting someone at such a meeting. It also criminalizes intentionally destroying, damaging, or desecrating any object held sacred by any group of persons, with punishment of up to three years' imprisonment for violations. Government regulations recognize 16 sites as holy places for Jews, while various other budgetary and governmental authorities recognize an additional 160 places as holy for Jews.

The law criminalizes calling for, praising, supporting, or encouraging acts of violence or terrorism where such actions are likely to lead to violence, including calls for violence against religious groups. The law criminalizes statements demeaning, degrading, or showing violence toward someone based on race, but provides an exception for statements citing a religious source, unless there is proof of intent to incite racism. The infliction of "injury to religious sentiments" constitutes a criminal offense and is punishable by one year's imprisonment. Such

injury includes publishing or saying something that is liable to offend the religious sentiment or faith of others.

The law states that acts of enmity towards a person or a group due to religious affiliation with or membership in a religious group are considered offenses under aggravating circumstances, and penalties are set at double the penalty for the original offense or 10 years imprisonment, whichever is the lesser penalty.

The Jordanian Waqf in Jerusalem administers the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, while the Jordanian Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Holy Places supports maintenance and salary of the Waqf staff in Jerusalem.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled since 1993 that Jews have the right to pray on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, but police may restrict this right in the name of public order and safety. The court reiterated in 2019 that its precedent on this issue is nonintervention in government decisions, “except in highly unusual cases when the decision constitutes a major distortion of justice or is extremely unreasonable.” The court upheld this position again in a decision in 2020.

The 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 hundreds of thousands of Palestinians during the country’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.”

The law requires citizens to obtain a permit from the MOI or the Prime Minister for travel to countries with no diplomatic relations with Israel, including Hajj travel to Saudi Arabia; the government issues these permits in the vast majority of cases. Illegal travel is punishable by a prison sentence or fine if the traveler does not request prior approval.

It is illegal to proselytize to a person younger than 18 without the consent of both parents. The law prohibits offering a material benefit to potential converts while proselytizing.

The government provides separate public schools for Jewish and Arab/Palestinian children, with instruction conducted in Hebrew and Arabic, respectively. For Jewish children there are separate public schools available for religious and secular

families. Individual families may choose any public school for their children regardless of ethnicity or religious observance. Minor children have the right to choose a public secular school instead of a religious school regardless of parental preference. By law, the state provides the equivalent of public school funding to two systems of “recognized but not official” (a form of semiprivate) ultra-Orthodox religious schools affiliated with ultra-Orthodox political parties, the United Torah Judaism-affiliated Independent Education System and the Shas-affiliated Fountain of Torah Education System.

Churches receive partial government funding to operate “recognized but not official” schools. Palestinian residents in Jerusalem may send their children to one of these church schools or a private school operated by the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf; both include religious instruction. Some Israeli-funded public schools in Jerusalem use the Palestinian Authority (PA) curriculum. Religious education is part of the PA curriculum for students in grades one through six in these schools, with separate courses on religion for Muslims and Christians. Students in these schools may choose which class to take but may not opt out of religion courses.

The Chief Rabbinate determines who may be buried in Jewish state cemeteries, limiting this right to individuals considered Jewish by Orthodox Jewish standards. The law provides for the right of any individual to burial in a civil ceremony and requires the government to establish civil cemeteries in various areas around the country. The law criminalizes the intentional desecration of, or trespass on, places of burial, which is punishable by three years’ imprisonment.

Laws inherited from the Ottoman Empire and British Mandate periods establish the legal authority of religious courts operated by officially recognized religious communities over their members in matters of marriage, divorce, and burial. The law allows for civil registration of two persons as a married couple outside of the religious court system only if they married outside the country or if the partners are of different religions and their respective religious courts do not object to a civil registration, or if both partners are listed as “lacking religion” in the population registry. A law mandating women’s equality contains language that explicitly exempts matters of marriage, divorce, and appointments to religious positions.

The only domestic marriages with legal standing and that may be registered are those performed according to the religious statutes of recognized religious communities. Marriages performed outside of the country may be registered with the MOI. Members of some unrecognized groups may process their personal

status documents, including marriage licenses, only through the authorities of one of the recognized religious communities, if those authorities agree.

The law imposes a two-year prison sentence for persons who conduct a marriage or are married in a Jewish wedding or divorce outside the Chief Rabbinate's authority in the country.

Religious courts have exclusive jurisdiction over divorce cases when the husband and wife are registered with the same recognized religion. Members of religious groups not permitting divorce, such as Catholics, may not obtain a divorce. Paternity cases among Muslim citizens are the exclusive jurisdiction of sharia courts. Civil courts have jurisdiction over personal status cases when religious courts lack jurisdiction, as in cases of interfaith and same-sex couples.

Matters stemming from divorce proceedings, including alimony, child support, child custody, guardianship, and property division, are under the parallel jurisdiction of religious and civil courts. The first court to receive a case acquires exclusive jurisdiction over it. The Jordanian Waqf administers Islamic courts in Jerusalem for Muslim residents, with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in Jordan having appellate authority.

In accordance with halacha, a Jewish woman whose husband refuses to give her a *get* (Jewish legal writ of divorce) may not legally remarry in the country. While a rabbinical court may order a husband to give a *get*, it does not have the power to terminate the marriage if he refuses. In such cases, rabbinical courts may impose community-based punishments on the husband, including avoiding financial dealings with a *get*-refuser, excluding him from community activities, and advertising these decisions to the public. The law permits rabbinical courts to hear cases of *get* refusals in which the spouses are not Israeli citizens, if certain other conditions are met (for example, if the couple lives abroad in a location where there is no rabbinical court).

Secular courts have primary jurisdiction over questions of inheritance, but parties may file such cases in religious courts by mutual agreement. Decisions by these bodies are subject to Supreme Court review. The rabbinical courts, when exercising their power in civil matters, apply religious law, which differs from civil law, including in matters relating to the property rights of widows and daughters. A child born to a woman still married to another man is considered a *mamzer* (child of an unpermitted relationship) under Jewish law, which restricts the child's future marriage prospects in the observant Jewish community.

Military service is compulsory for Jewish citizens, male Druze citizens, and male Circassian citizens (Muslims originally from the northwestern Caucasus region who migrated in the late nineteenth century). The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) do not consider conscientious objection on the basis of religious belief as a reason for exemption from military service.

Religious Jewish women and ultra-Orthodox men may request an exemption from military service. For most ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Druze religious students, military service is postponed for several years, after which they receive an exemption. A petition on the conscription of ultra-Orthodox men was pending at the Supreme Court as of the year's end. Arab Muslims and Christians as well as Druze and Circassian women receive a de-facto exemption by not being called for military service. Those exempt from military service may volunteer for it or for national civil service. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses are not eligible for the national civil service program.

Membership in a recognized religion is recorded in the National Registry and generally passed from parents to children unless a person changes it through a formal conversion to another recognized religion. Religious identification is listed in the National Registry but not on official identity cards.

All citizens who meet the Chief Rabbinate's criteria as "Jewish" under Jewish religious law are recorded as Jewish, whether Orthodox or not (unless they convert to another religion). Approximately 450,000 citizens who identify as Jewish but do not meet the Chief Rabbinate's criteria as "Jewish" as well as members of religious groups that are not recognized are recorded as "lacking religion." The vast majority are immigrants from the former Soviet Union and their children, who gained citizenship under the Law of Return but are not recognized as Jewish by the Chief Rabbinate because they cannot prove they meet the Orthodox definition of Jewish through matrilineal descent.

The Law of Citizenship and Entry, first passed in 2003 and renewed annually, explicitly prohibited residence status for non-Jewish Iranians, Iraqis, Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, including those who are spouses of Israeli residents or citizens, unless the MOI makes a special determination, usually on humanitarian grounds.

The law declares in the context of labor rights that Shabbat and Jewish holidays are national days of rest, while permitting non-Jewish workers alternate days of rest.

The law criminalizes (up to one month imprisonment) employers who open their businesses and employ Jews on Shabbat, except those who are self-employed. There are exceptions for essential infrastructure and the hospitality, culture, and recreation industries. The law instructs the Minister of Labor and Welfare to take into account “Israel’s traditions,” among other factors, when considering whether to approve permits to work on Shabbat. The law prohibits discrimination against workers who refuse to work on their day of rest based on their religion and regardless of whether they are religiously observant.

The law prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation, including against employees, contractors, or persons seeking employment based on age, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, and disability.

The law states that public transportation operated and funded by the national government may not operate on Shabbat, with exceptions for vehicles bringing passengers to hospitals, remote localities, and non-Jewish localities and for vehicles essential to public security or maintaining public transportation services.

The Chief Rabbinate has sole legal authority to issue certificates of kashrut (i.e., complying with Jewish dietary laws), which certify a restaurant or factory’s adherence to Jewish dietary laws. Businesses are allowed to display a declaration regarding the kashrut standards they observe and the organization that supervises those standards but may not use the words “kosher” or “certificate” without a kashrut license from the rabbinate. The Chief Rabbinate has the authority to indicate businesses that violate this law.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with a reservation stating that matters of personal status are governed by the religious law of the parties concerned and the country reserves the right to apply that religious law when inconsistent with its obligations under the covenant.

Government Practices

Because religious and national identities were often closely linked, it was often difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

In September, the Lod District Court sentenced Zion Cohen to three years in prison for carrying out a series of bomb attacks on rabbinical courts; it also ordered him to pay a 10,000-shekel (\$3,200) fine. Authorities arrested Cohen in 2020 in connection with the attacks. Cohen confessed and said his aim was to prevent the

courts providing religious services to the secular public to further his goal of separating religion and state.

On June 9, according to press reports, police arrested 12 demonstrators who threw heavy objects towards them in a protest by a small ultra-Orthodox sect near Bar-Ilan Street in Jerusalem; the group was protesting the construction of part of the city's light rail system through an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood. On August 24, approximately 300 ultra-Orthodox demonstrators gathered at the Bar-Ilan junction intersection, blocking the road, to protest the light rail line's construction. Police used water cannons to disperse the crowd. Authorities said that they arrested four individuals for disturbing the peace and that one police officer was injured by pepper spray. According to press, the protesters said the construction of the rail line was a "decree of expulsion and annihilation" aimed at Jerusalem's ultra-Orthodox community.

Clashes broke out in April and May with "Day of Rage" demonstrations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem against Israeli actions in Sheikh Jarrah, Damascus Gate, and the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Palestinian National and Islamic Factions in the West Bank called on Palestinians across West Bank cities, villages, and refugee camps to participate in a "Day of Rage" on May 11 to protest actions by Israeli security forces and Israelis living in East Jerusalem against Palestinians at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound and in Sheikh Jarrah.

According to press and NGO monitors, multiple events related to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount contributed, along with other factors, to escalations resulting in unrest and conflict across Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. On April 13, on the evening of the first day of Ramadan, media and Waqf officials reported that the Israeli National Police entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and disconnected loudspeakers used for the call to prayer after the Waqf's call to prayer disrupted an official Memorial Day service for fallen soldiers attended by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin in the adjacent Western Wall Plaza.

On June 17, the government charged a police officer, whose name was not released, with reckless homicide in the 2020 killing of Iyad Halak, an autistic Palestinian man, in Jerusalem's Old City. Following an investigation, the Ministry of Justice said that Halak had not posed any danger to police. At Halak's funeral, the press reported that mourners chanted, "Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews, the army of [the Prophet] Mohammed will return," a taunt referring to the seventh century Muslim massacre and expulsion of the Jews of Khaybar.

During the last Friday of Ramadan on May 7, Israeli police entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount using teargas, stun grenades, and rubber tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians they said were throwing rocks. Media reported that in the aftermath, Palestinians stockpiled stones on the compound for use against the police and far-right Israeli nationalists planning to march through the Old City. On May 10, Israeli police entered the compound again and used stun grenades, teargas, and rubber tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians. The Palestinian Red Crescent said that more than 300 individuals suffered injuries. In an attempt to ease tensions and reduce potential for clashes, Israeli police temporarily barred non-Muslims from visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

On December 13, authorities released Raed Salah, the head of the outlawed northern branch of the Islamic Movement, from Megiddo Prison, where he served 17 months of a 28-month sentence for incitement to terrorism in 2019 when he preached at the funeral for three terrorists who were involved in the killing of police officers at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. A crowd of approximately 1,000 supporters greeted Salah upon his return to his home in Umm al-Fahm. On December 20, Knesset member (MK) Mazen Ghnaim, a member of the Ra'am Party and the ruling coalition, met with Salah, which caused opposition politicians to state that Ghnaim was "supporting terrorism."

On February 2, former Yitzhar settlement Yeshiva Rabbi Yosef Elitzur was convicted of incitement to violence for publishing articles in 2013 calling on Jews to rise up against Palestinian violence and calling on authorities not to arrest those who committed violent hate-filled attacks against Palestinians in what the attackers called "price tag" attacks (attacks with the stated purpose of exacting a "price" for actions by the government contrary to the attackers' interests). According to the prosecution, Elitzur was also one of the authors of a book stating the killing of non-Jews is permitted according to halacha. On March 18, Elitzur was sentenced to four months' probation and a fine. On May 5, the prosecution appealed the sentence, and demanded a sentence of nine months' imprisonment. The appeal was pending as of the year's end.

The government continued to allow controlled access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The government expressed continued support for the post-1967 status quo pertaining to the site to allow non-Muslim visitors but prohibit non-Islamic worship there, while stating that Israel respected Jordan's "special role" at the site, as reflected in the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty. The Waqf said that Israeli authorities continued to interfere in the Waqf's administration of the

site, including delaying longstanding maintenance and restoration work. Israeli officials and activists again stated the Waqf sometimes attempted to conduct repairs without coordinating with Israeli authorities. In addition to the police banning individual Waqf staff members from the site, the Waqf said that it had a reduced capacity to administer the site because Israeli authorities refused to grant permits to new staff hired to work there, leaving the Waqf seriously understaffed.

On October 5, the Jerusalem Magistrate Court ruled that “silent Jewish prayer” on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount did not violate existing police rules on the site. The ruling was in response to a case involving a 15-day administrative restraining order against a man whom police had removed from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount on September 29 on grounds that he disturbed public order by engaging in Jewish prayer. The judge ruled that silent prayer “does not in itself violate police instructions,” which prohibit “external and overt” non-Islamic prayer on the site. *Al-Monitor* said the Magistrate’s Court’s ruling was “unprecedented” and “seem[ed] to question the status quo that has prevailed over the site.” The Jerusalem District Court overturned the lower court’s ruling on October 8, ruling that the INP had acted “within reason,” and “the fact that there was someone who observed [him] pray is evidence that his prayer was overt.” Minister of Public Security Omer Bar-Lev supported the appeal, saying “a change in the status quo will endanger public security and could cause a flare-up.” The Waqf said the lower court’s ruling was “a flagrant violation” of the complex’s sanctity and a “clear provocation” for Muslims.

In April during the beginning of Ramadan, Israeli authorities restricted the number of Palestinians allowed to enter Jerusalem from the West Bank for the purpose of traveling to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount to 10,000 vaccinated persons because of “high morbidity rates” from coronavirus in the West Bank. Israeli military authorities said the measures were to allow freedom of worship and religion, while also preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the area.

In December, the press reported that a religious extremist group had invoked halachic law in calling for the killing of Religious Affairs Minister Matan Kahana. *Haaretz* said the exact identity of the group was unknown, but other sources stated it was “a religious extremist fringe group.” According to the newspaper, sources tied the threats to Kahana to several religious reforms he promoted, including regarding conversions, kashrut certification, a compromise with non-Orthodox Jewish movements on an egalitarian (mixed gender) prayer space at the Western Wall, and his participation in a government that excluded ultra-Orthodox parties. The country’s security service, Shin Bet, stated it viewed the threat as an

immediate danger to Kahana and ordered bodyguards and security for the Minister as soon as the threat was discovered.

On June 22, Channel 13 News reported that Minister of Public Security Omer Bar Lev (Labor) and Chair of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Ram Ben Barak (Yesh Atid) requested assistance from the Attorney General and the Minister of Defense in defining as a terror organization Lehava (an acronym for “prevention of assimilation in the Holy Land,” which also translates as “flame”), described by press as a radical right-wing Jewish supremacist group. These officials further asked the Minister of Defense and the Attorney General to outlaw Lehava as well as the registered NGO that funds it, The Fund for Saving the People of Israel. According to the Anti-Terrorism Law, the Minister of Defense, with the approval of the Attorney General, has the authority to designate an organization as a terrorist group. On September 12, a group of prominent rabbis, described in the press as religious Zionist and ultra-Orthodox, signed a petition protesting this initiative, stating that Lehava was within its rights to protest intermarriage, acted in accordance with the law and the Torah, and was not involved in violence or illegal activity. Following the petition, NGO Tag Meir, an umbrella of Jewish groups working to monitor and counter hate crimes and religion-based racism in the country, urged the government to declare Lehava a terrorist organization.

Due to elections in March and the change in government in June, the Supreme Court postponed until January 6, 2022, the implementation of a 2017 verdict that struck down the exemption of ultra-Orthodox men from military service. This was the 10th time the court postponed the implementation. On August 22, the Ministerial Committee for Legislation approved a draft bill calling for the gradual increase in the number of ultra-Orthodox men serving in the IDF. The bill includes yearly benchmarks for ultra-Orthodox serving in the military and a deduction in government support for yeshivas if those benchmarks are not achieved.

While some ultra-Orthodox communities stated that mandatory conscription was a violation of the right to conscientious objection on the basis of religious beliefs, the Ministry of Defense rejected this argument. The IDF reported increasing numbers of ultra-Orthodox recruits since at least 2011, mainly into dedicated ultra-Orthodox units such as the Netzah Yehuda Battalion.

Authorities continued to allow use of a temporary platform south of the Mughrabi Bridge and adjacent to the Western Wall, but not visible from the main Western Wall Plaza, for non-Orthodox “egalitarian” (mixed gender) Jewish prayers. Authorities designated the platform for members of the Conservative and Reform

movements of Judaism, including for religious ceremonies such as bar and bat mitzvahs. On November 4, the Supreme Court criticized the government for its lack of progress upgrading the area to a more permanent egalitarian prayer space. On December 7, the government told the Supreme Court it intended to continue to upgrade the egalitarian plaza but did not mention steps it would take towards further equality and recognition included in the 2016 Western Wall Agreement. The 2016 agreement was a compromise between Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities, which the government “froze” in 2017, that included the construction of a permanent plaza for mixed gender prayer managed by non-Orthodox groups, and a merged entry to all prayer spaces adjacent to the Western Wall. The government requested to update the court on developments within six months.

The Supreme Court case was a combination of lawsuits against the government, some dating back to 2013, that would allow prayer for all religious streams of Judaism at the Western Wall. It resulted in the 2016 Western Wall Agreement. In 2018, a special government committee approved expansion of the temporary platform for members of the Conservative and Reform movements. The non-Orthodox Jewish movements stated that upgrading the prayer space alone would not fulfill their 2016 agreement with the government. In addition, observers stated that scaffolding prevented visitors from touching the sacred wall in the egalitarian prayer space since a rock fell there in 2018. Over the same period, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation managed large construction projects in the main plaza, making routine inspections for loose rocks at the main plaza without blocking access to the wall.

On September 2, the Supreme Court rejected a petition by female rabbis demanding structural improvements to prevent collapse of the Mughrabi Bridge (the only entrance for non-Muslims to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, that crosses over the women’s section of the main Western Wall Plaza); the court accepted the state’s argument that it was taking action to restore the wooden beams on metal bases which support the bridge. The court added, “in a place like the Temple Mount, where any change could lead to political or security turbulence, the decision of state institutions to not change the existing situation on the ground is a practical and reasonable decision in which there is no room to intervene.”

In November and December, the press reported that despite the government’s declared intention to create an egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall, the proposal appeared to be losing support within the ruling coalition. Minister of Religious Affairs Kahana said the vast majority of Jews in Israel were Orthodox

and that it would not be right to give control of parts of the space to the Conservative and Reform streams. Kahana said the issue “must be studied, to see how we resolve the [religious] wars.” Other members of the cabinet continued to publicly support the plan. According to *Haaretz*, the two key components of the proposal were creating a new and enhanced space on the southern side of the Western Wall for egalitarian prayer and providing official recognition to the Conservative and Reform movements at the site. The newspaper reported that “the disagreements [were] about that second component.” Under the government’s original plan, a new authority would have been created to govern the egalitarian space and representatives of the Reform and Conservative movements would sit on its board. However, *Haaretz* reported that two Orthodox members of the cabinet, Kahana and Housing Minister Ze’ev Elkin, found this unacceptable and suggested that the egalitarian prayer space continue to operate under the auspices of the Prime Minister’s Office or, alternatively, be handed over for supervision to the Jewish Agency. Leaders of the non-Orthodox movements rejected that plan. At year’s end, the government had taken no action to move the proposed changes forward.

Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site, including Jewish activists believed to have violated the status quo understanding prohibiting non-Islamic prayer, Muslims believed to have verbally harassed or acted violently against non-Muslim visitors to the site or incited others to violence, and public figures whose presence authorities feared would inflame tensions. Banned individuals included Waqf guards and administrative and maintenance staff and imams delivering sermons at the site, as well as prominent activists. The Israeli government said that some individuals – including both Muslims and Jews – were prevented access to the site during the year because they could have caused disturbances and riots. The government said Israeli security prevented access to the site for 389 Muslims and 99 Jews during 2021 due to previous incidents of public disorder at the site, including assaulting or interfering with police, or based on intelligence information. The Wadi Hilweh Information Center reported that Israeli authorities banned 357 individuals from the site during the year.

While the government stated it was rare for any individual to be barred entry to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, human rights and civil society organizations said Israeli authorities banned some Palestinian residents in the occupied territories, and Arab/Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel from the site. Palestinian civil society organizations said that, in a practice that began in 2020, police continued to check the identify cards of individuals entering the Old City to visit the site for

Friday prayers and would bar from entry those with West Bank identity cards and return them to the West Bank. In May, media reported that Israeli police blocked several buses of Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel outside of Jerusalem from visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Police said they stopped the buses because they had intelligence indicating some of the passengers were planning to riot at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

At the main Western Wall Plaza, the place of Jewish worship nearest the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and Judaism's holiest site, the government continued to prohibit the performance of any "religious ceremony that is not in accordance with the customs of the place, [or] which harms the feelings of the public towards the place." Authorities interpreted this prohibition to include mixed-gender Jewish prayer services, over the objections of the Jewish Conservative and Reform movements. The organization Women of the Wall, whose membership is composed of mostly Reform and Conservative Jewish women and whose goal is to secure the official right for women to pray at the Western Wall, stated that their monthly presence at the wall for more than 30 years had established them as part of the "customs of the place."

Authorities continued to prohibit visitors from bringing private Torah scrolls to the main Western Wall Plaza and women from accessing the public Torah scrolls or giving priestly blessings at the site. Authorities, however, permitted women to pray with *tefillin* and prayer shawls pursuant to a 2013 Jerusalem District Court ruling stating it was illegal to arrest or fine them for such actions. On several occasions, MK Gilad Kariv (Labor) used his parliamentary immunity to bring Torah scrolls for the use of Women of the Wall and referred to the prohibition as illegal.

Within COVID-19 limitations, authorities allowed Women of the Wall to hold its monthly service in a barricaded portion of the women's area of the main Western Wall Plaza. Ultra-Orthodox protesters harassed and attacked Women of the Wall members repeatedly during their monthly services by throwing coffee or bottles at them, screaming, cursing, blowing whistles, or pushing them.

Representatives of Women of the Wall said police or ushers from the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, which administers the main Western Wall Plaza and which is ultra-Orthodox-run, were reluctant to intervene when ultra-Orthodox women and men disrupted the women's monthly prayer service with screaming, whistling, and pushing. Ahead of a November 5 service held by Women of the Wall, tension rose when former Shas MK Aryeh Deri called MKs and the public to

attend the service and prevent MK Kariv from bringing Torah scrolls to the women's section, which Deri said would be a "desecration of the Western Wall." The Western Wall Heritage Fund announced it would not take responsibility for maintaining public order at the plaza, leading to increased INP presence the day of the service. With President Isaac Herzog's intervention, and his promise to hold a meeting on non-Orthodox prayer at the Western Wall, most MKs refrained from attending the service at the Western Wall on November 5. MK Ben Gvir of the Religious Zionist Party still attended to protest against the Women of the Wall, expressing outrage that police confronted protesters who attempted to reach the women who were conducting services at the site. According to the NGO Israel Religion Action Center (IRAC), INP and the Western Wall Heritage Fund guards confronted Women of the Wall during the service. The President held a meeting on pluralistic prayer at the Western Wall on December 1.

A 2017 petition to the Supreme Court by Women of the Wall asking that ushers and police prevent disruption of their services was pending at year's end.

In May, the Jerusalem Municipality opened a parking lot on property it had leased from the Armenian Church in 2020. In July, the Church signed a new contract with the Jerusalem Municipality extending the lease for 99 years, and the municipality announced that a Jewish-Australian developer would construct a new hotel on the property. Palestinians widely criticized the Church for leasing the property to the municipality, including public statements by PA figures. PA Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Riyad Malki raised the transaction with his Armenian counterpart and asked for Armenian Foreign Ministry assistance in pressuring the Church to cancel the lease. Malki characterized the deal as opening the door for "the gradual encroachment of Israel's settler-colonialism into the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem," and said it "risks accelerating the obliteration of the Palestinian, Muslim, and Christian character of Jerusalem."

On February 24, the Supreme Court ordered the government to answer a series of questions by April 22 regarding its plan to build an aerial cable car over a Karaite (a Jewish religious movement) cemetery in Jerusalem. This order was in response to petitions filed by the Karaite community, the NGO Emek Shaveh, and the NGO Israel Union for Environmental Defense from 2019 and 2020. According to the Karaite community, the cable car would desecrate the cemetery, thus preventing its further use. The government stated the cable car was meant to solve accessibility problems to holy sites such as the Western Wall, but some NGOs said the project was meant to specifically promote Jewish touristic sites in East Jerusalem and to reinforce the country's claims of sovereignty over the area. Despite respective

statements by Transportation Minister Merav Michaeli and Environmental Protection Minister Tamar Zandberg on November 26 and December 13 opposing the project, the government told the Supreme Court on December 28 that it supported the construction of the cable car. The petition was pending at year's end.

In October, Palestinian demonstrators sporadically clashed with the INP after the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority began landscaping work on public land adjacent to the Islamic al-Yusufiya Cemetery and unearthed human remains in a shallow grave. The cemetery, which is hundreds of years old, is affiliated with the Islamic Waqf. Multiple graves and headstones are located in the disputed area adjacent to the cemetery, some dating from Jordanian control of Jerusalem and others allegedly from recent burials conducted without authorization. According to an October 11 report in *Haaretz*, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority said, “This territory is a national park and open public space, outside the Muslim cemetery. The Muslim Waqf, unlawfully and in violation of court orders, placed several graves there. During works with the Jerusalem Development Authority to develop the open public space, a shallow dig was uncovered with several bones in it. The matter is being investigated. The works at the site are ongoing under court orders.” On October 17, the Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court rejected requests submitted by the Committee for the Care of Islamic Cemeteries in Jerusalem to suspend bulldozing and exhuming graves on the site. However, the court restricted construction activity to only light work, such as covering ground, placing grids, and gardening, and prohibited demolition, excavation, casting, or drilling. Authorities did not allow construction that would impact any graves at the site. On October 28, Israeli authorities fenced the walls surrounding the area and installed surveillance cameras. On October 29, police deployed stun grenades and tear gas to disperse demonstrators who threw rocks at the site. The PA President’s advisor for religious and Islamic affairs described the bulldozing as an ongoing crime against the cemetery, while the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem stated that “no tomb was damaged during the works, and there is no intention to displace any grave, even if built illegally.”

Some former mosques and Islamic cemeteries remained sealed and inaccessible, including to Muslims. These sites belonged to the defunct pre-state Waqf (distinct from the current Jordanian-administered Waqf in Jerusalem) until confiscated by the state after the 1948 War of Independence. Other former mosques continued to be used for secular purposes.

Government restrictions on gathering for prayer varied due to the COVID-19 pandemic and included limitations on the number of worshippers at the Western

Wall as well as requiring a “Green Pass,” which indicated a person’s vaccination status, to enter synagogues.

In June, before taking office as Minister of Finance, Avigdor Lieberman said that raising the number of ultra-Orthodox Jews in the workforce would be one of his main goals. In particular, he said bringing ultra-Orthodox men into the labor force would be a major challenge. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, at the beginning of 2020, approximately 53 percent of ultra-Orthodox men were employed, compared with more than 85 percent of non-ultra-Orthodox men. According to Reuters, those ultra-Orthodox men who did not work in paid employment were devoted full-time to religious studies and relied on government allowances and handouts from donors. Lieberman said, “We will do everything to provide them [the ultra-Orthodox] an education and enable them to learn a profession and stand on their own two feet, as opposed to [depending on] charity and all the stipends.”

On July 7, in office as Finance Minister, Lieberman revoked the eligibility of fathers studying full-time in yeshivas for childcare subsidies, a move which, according to press coverage, enraged ultra-Orthodox political leaders. According to the decision, to be eligible for such subsidies, fathers would need to work or study in a nonreligious educational institute for at least 24 hours a week, which would preclude full-time yeshiva study. Lieberman said the changes were designed to prioritize “those who work and pay taxes.” United Torah Judaism party leader Moshe Gafni called Lieberman “an evil man” for the policy change, while Shas party chairman Deri described the decision as “destructive and wicked.” In response, Lieberman said, “Those who are harming the Haredi [ultra-Orthodox] community are the MKs of Shas and United Torah Judaism. They want to leave the entire Haredi public without a living, so that they will remain dependent on handouts and financial assistance all their lives.” After the new policy was formally announced in August, lawyers and ultra-Orthodox organizations filed court petitions against the policy shift as discriminatory against the ultra-Orthodox. The implementation of the plan was initially delayed until November and then until the new year. On November 10, a Supreme Court panel rejected the ultra-Orthodox organizations’ request for an interim order on the policy itself but issued an interim order that required the government to explain the basis for its authority to change the rules regarding subsidies for ultra-Orthodox childcare after the school year had already started in September. The case remained pending at year’s end.

The security barrier that divided the majority of the West Bank from the rest of the country also divided some communities in Jerusalem, affecting residents’ access to

places of worship. The government stated that the barrier was needed for security reasons.

Several groups, including religious minorities and human rights NGOs, continued to criticize the Nation State Law. On July 8, the Supreme Court, by a vote of 10-to-one, rejected 15 petitions challenging the Nation State Law. According to the court's opinion, the law should be interpreted in a way that does not detract from individual or cultural rights at the subnational level and the provisions of the Nation State Law do not diminish "the components of the state's democratic identity that are anchored in other Basic Laws." The ruling further stated that, although some of the provisions of the law raise "difficulties," it should be interpreted in light of the country's other basic laws, in particular the basic laws on the Knesset, on human dignity and liberty, and on freedom of occupation, which specifically address the dual character of the country as a Jewish and democratic state. *Haaretz* reported that the law had been "lambasted for the absence of the words 'equality' and 'democracy' in the text." Justice Minister Gideon Saar said that the court recognized "the essence and character of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people." The Adalah Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights said the decision "enshrined Jewish supremacy and racial segregation as founding principles of the Israeli regime."

On November 4, the Knesset approved the state budget, which included 40 million shekels (\$12.91 million) for Conservative and Reform Judaism for 2022, to be managed through a new department for Progressive Judaism at the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs. While Progressive Judaism organizations welcomed the funding, the NGO Jewish Pluralism Watch of the Conservative Judaism movement stated the department managing the funds should have been placed in the Ministry of Religious Services, stating that the latter should stop serving Orthodox Judaism only.

In March, NGOs Emek Shaveh and the Arab Culture Association filed a petition with the Supreme Court against the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage, demanding that criteria for funding heritage sites by the ministry not exclude non-Jewish sites. In response, on August 9, the ministry stated it was only responsible for the conservation of Jewish-related heritage while other offices were funding heritage sites of minority populations. The petition was pending at the year's end.

In a November 29 meeting with Communications Minister Yoaz Hendel, a delegation of representatives of the ultra-Orthodox community asked to discuss "kosher phones," a special phone service widely used by their community, despite

its announced boycott of the government, which does not include ultra-Orthodox members. The “kosher cellphones” are configured only for calls and text messages, with no Internet access or apps. Unlike other users, owners of kosher phones are not able to change their provider while keeping their number. A story in *Haaretz* said, “But this is not just about numbers. It’s about the rabbis controlling the free flow of information into their communities. Without that control, their power over their followers is greatly diminished.” The *Jerusalem Post* reported that Hendel had pointed out that “kosher phones” were a sort of fiefdom within Israeli telecommunications; unlike other phone numbers, since “kosher” numbers could not be moved from one company to another, severely limiting competition.

Following the March elections, Gilad Kariv, former head of the national Reform movement, became the first Reform rabbi member of Knesset. In his first speech in the Knesset on May 5, Kariv said that the “Jewish pluralist renewal,” including his election, elevated the principles of “tolerance, equity, and most importantly, the recognition that there is more than one way to be a Jew.” He stated that “heavy obstacles” had been put in the way of this renewal, especially “the monopoly over Israeli Judaism that had been given to one particular stream and institution,” a reference to Orthodoxy and the Chief Rabbinate.

On June 28, MK Meir Porush (United Torah Judaism) responded to the appointment of Kariv as the Chair of the Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, by comparing him as a Reform Jew to a pig pretending to be kosher. MK Itamar Ben Gvir (Religious Zionism) responded by saying Kariv is the number one enemy of halacha.

On May 4, Rabbi David Yosef of the Har Nof neighborhood of Jerusalem announced he was retiring following a 2020 Women of the Wall and IRAC petition demanding a disciplinary hearing against him, after his repeated alleged incitement against Women of the Wall. Yosef served as rabbi in a public servant position in which the office holder is required to act in accordance with the civil service regulations.

In 2019, six Orthodox women halacha students and NGOs petitioned the Supreme Court to permit women to take the halacha examinations used to ordain rabbis. While Orthodox women cannot become rabbis, passing the examinations is equal to receiving a bachelor’s degree and grants an advantage when applying for certain public sector positions. On October 21, in its response to the petition, the state offered a compromise whereby the Religious Services Ministry would establish

“an alternative, independent examination framework” for women and men. The petitioners opposed the compromise, arguing it further strengthened the existing discrimination against women and constituted a waste of resources. The petition was pending at the year’s end. On June 30, Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef threatened that the rabbinate would not conduct any exams to ordain state-authorized rabbis, including for men, if the court ruled that women could be ordained in contradiction to halacha.

The government employed an “appropriate representation” policy for non-Jewish minorities in the civil service. The percentage of Arab/Palestinian employees in the public sector was 13.2 percent (61.5 percent of them entry-level), according to the Civil Service Commission. The percentage of Arab/Palestinian employees in the 62 government-owned companies was approximately 2.5 percent; however, during the year Arab/Palestinian citizens held 12 percent of director positions in government-owned companies, up from 1 percent in 2000, and Arab/Palestinian workers held 13.2 percent of government positions, up from 5 percent in 2000, according to Sikkuy-Aufoq, an NGO that supports full equality between Jewish and Arab/Palestinian citizens. Of the 13.2 percent, 68 percent were employed in government health services.

Women’s rights and religious freedom NGOs filed a petition with the Supreme Court on May 12 against the Ministry of Religious Services, demanding appropriate representation for women on religious councils. According to the petitioners, only eight women served on religious councils nationwide, despite an Attorney General directive from 2016 and a 2017 Ministry of Religious Service directive requiring a minimum representation of 20-33 percent. According to the petitioners, 80 percent of the councils had no women members. In August, the government responded to the court, stating the Minister of Religious Affairs was working to promote appropriate representation for women in religious councils. The petition was pending at year’s end.

According to the *Jerusalem Post*, Minister of Foreign Affairs Yair Lapid, in remarks on July 14 to the Global Forum on Combatting Antisemitism, said that antisemitism was part of a broad family of hatreds and that antisemites start by attacking Jews but “always” move on to focus their hate and violence on other groups as well. After pointing to the slave trade, the massacre of Tutsis in Rwanda, the deaths of Muslims at the hands of Muslim extremists, and fatal attacks on members of the LGBTQI+ community, Lapid said, “The antisemites are all those who persecute people not for what they’ve done, but for what they are, for how they were born... Antisemitism isn’t the first name of hatred, it’s the family

name; it's all those consumed by hatred to the point that they want to murder and destroy and persecute and banish people just because they're different." According to the *Times of Israel*, Lapid's comments "ignited a firestorm of criticism and a fierce left-right dustup in the Hebrew-language media." The website reported that "right-wingers, led by opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu," said that Lapid's comments were "scandalous and irresponsible, warping history and emptying the concept of antisemitism of all content." In a July 26 article in *Haaretz* defending his statement, Lapid wrote, "The State of Israel is in need of a dramatic and fundamental change in direction in its fight against antisemitism, and it must acknowledge that in recent years, it has abjectly failed in that battle."

The MOI continued to rely on the sole discretion and approval of the Jewish Agency, a parastatal organization, to determine who qualified to immigrate as a Jew or as a descendant of a Jew. The government continued to deny applications from individuals, including those holding Messianic or other Christian beliefs, whom the government said became ineligible when they converted to another religion.

A group of Orthodox rabbis continued to operate a private conversion court for children of families whom the state or rabbinical courts did not recognize as Jews. The Chief Rabbinate and MOI continued not to recognize non-Orthodox converts to Judaism as Jews, although they remained eligible for immigration under the Law of Return if they converted outside the country.

After the Supreme Court's March 1 decision that the government must recognize Conservative and Reform conversions performed in the country, the *Jerusalem Post* reported that Chief Sephardic Rabbi Yizhak Yosef said, "What Reform and Conservative call 'conversion' is nothing but a forgery of Judaism." The *Times of Israel* reported that Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi David Lau said that those who undergo Reform or Conservative conversions "are not Jews." Saying the decision "was mainly symbolic," the *New York Times* cited a report by the Israel Religious Action Center that only 30 or 40 foreigners convert each year. In a December 6 article, *Haaretz* stated that of the approximately 80 non-Orthodox converts who applied for citizenship since the ruling, only three had been approved by the Ministry of Interior. Rabbi Andrew Sacks, the director of the Rabbinical Assembly for the Conservative-Masorti movement, said that the ministry was "slow-walking the implementation of the conversion process."

The court's decision became an issue in the campaign for the March 23 election. Then Prime Minister Netanyahu reposted a tweet that said, the decision [about recognizing conversions] should be left to "the people and the Knesset." Then Interior Minister Deri, leader of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, promised to introduce legislation to ensure only Orthodox conversions would be recognized in the country. Leaders of both Shas and the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party said they would not join a government coalition that was not committed to overturning the court's decision. During the campaign, United Torah Judaism posted a video showing pictures of dogs wearing prayer shawls and kippahs, with a voiceover, "The Supreme Court says they're Jewish." Finance Minister Lieberman, then a candidate to replace Netanyahu, said he and his party would "continue to fight against religious coercion and preserve the character of Israel as a Jewish, liberal, Zionist state." Yair Lapid, then head of the Knesset opposition said, "Israel must have complete equality of rights for all streams of Judaism – Orthodox, Reform, or Conservative."

In July, Kan News reported that Minister of Religious Services Kahana planned to introduce legislation to liberalize conversions to Judaism. In December, Kahana outlined the framework for his proposed changes, which he said he planned to introduce in Knesset legislation. As part of Kahana's proposed framework, municipal rabbis would be able to establish conversion courts to allow them to convert citizens of Jewish descent who were not considered Jewish according to religious law. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, Kahana's legislation would grant the chief rabbis and the Council of the Chief Rabbinate the power, under certain circumstances, to revoke the appointment of a rabbinical judge on the new conversion courts. On December 29, the government postponed a vote on the legislation after determining it lacked sufficient support to advance the bill. On the same day, Chief Rabbi David Lau, whose authorization is required for all conversions in the country, wrote the Prime Minister saying if the bill moved forward, "I will be forced to declare myself no longer responsible for anything to do with conversions." He added that the reforms had the potential to cause an "irreparable" split among the Jewish people: "two states for two peoples, divided Judaism instead of united Judaism." Finance Minister Lieberman said that Lau's threat to freeze conversions "is not appropriate to the status of the chief rabbi and may lead to proceedings being taken to end his term." Minister of Communications Yoaz Hendel said, "A public servant should fulfill the government's decisions, and if he does not do so, he should not be in office."

On October 6, Minister Kahana said that although he believed marriage is a religious construct, he believed there should be legal alternatives for those unable

to marry in the country's religious institutions. He said, "I believe that every citizen needs to be able to actualize their partnership in a legal manner. I think that marriage is a religious term which should remain 'according to the religion of Moses and Israel.' There are enough rabbis, much wiser than me in Judaism and Jewish law, who have outlines for [legal, nonreligious partnerships]." A member of the opposition Shas party responded by saying, "Kahana is not the minister of religious services, he is the minister of destroying religion and the destruction of Jerusalem." In a November interview with the *Times of Israel*, while declining to offer specific proposals, Kahana said, "I am opposed to civil marriage. I believe that the concept of marriage, the sacred connection between a man and a woman, in the State of Israel, must remain in the province of halachic Judaism."

On July 20, the Supreme Court approved an agreement to halt the practice of the Chief Rabbinate using information collected during Jewish status investigations (used to verify individuals' Jewish status) to question the validity of third parties claiming Jewish ancestry. The agreement was a result of a 2017 petition by NGOs and individuals affected by the practice.

In February, KAN News reported that the Ashkelon Rabbinical Court conducted Jewish status investigations during two cases of divorce involving Jewish Ethiopian-Israelis and refused to give a writ of divorce prior to the confirmation of the couples' Jewish status, even though they married in the country in accordance with the rules of the Chief Rabbinate.

In November, the Rabbinate granted ultra-Orthodox music and film entertainer Shuli Rand permission to marry TV personality Zufit Grant despite his wife's refusal to accept a *get* from him, thus denying him a divorce. After his first wife refused to agree to a divorce, Rand reportedly received an exemption signed by 100 rabbis that allowed him to remarry. NGOs including Mavoi Satum, an organization that aids women who have been refused a Jewish divorce by their husbands, and The Center For Women's Justice continued to criticize the inequality facing women who cannot remarry because they are unable to obtain a *get* from their ex-husbands and who consequently are denied similar permission to marry again.

In August, a Tel Aviv rabbinical court "canceled" the 18-year marriage of a couple, following claims of abuse, after the husband refused a *get*. In November, the same court overturned its decision, following pressure from ultra-Orthodox public figures, according to *Haaretz*.

On October 6, Alon Tal, a Conservative Jewish member of Israel's governing coalition, criticized the then-pending bill opening the kashrut-certification market, saying he was "hugely disappointed" to discover that the reform plans were "intent on excluding anybody that is not Orthodox." On October 28, before passage of the bill, the two chief rabbis of the country issued a joint declaration that stated, "The decision on the new kashrut outline is the destruction of kashrut and reflects a trend towards the displacement of Judaism of Israel, another step in making Israel a state of all its citizens." The statement also said that changing the kashrut system could lead to "conversion and marriage outside the framework of the Chief Rabbinate, which will inevitably lead to the separation of communities in Israel." They also said Israeli rabbis should refuse to cooperate with the reform efforts and refrain from granting certification to any establishment without the authorization of the Chief Rabbinate Council.

On November 4, the Knesset passed a law opening the kashrut-certification market to competition. According to the law, beginning on January 1, 2022, religious councils would be able to award kashrut certification anywhere in the country, not only in the cities to which they belong. Then, from January 1, 2023, both private organizations and religious councils would be able to award kashrut certificates, while the Rabbinate would go from certifying food as kosher to performing a regulatory function, certifying others to certify food as kosher. The new law does not allow for non-Orthodox kashrut certificates.

According to *Haaretz*, after the kashrut-certification bill was passed, Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef organized a conference of rabbinical judges opposing the reforms regarding kashrut certification and conversion. After the conference, Yosef issued a statement saying that he "utterly rejects the ... dangerous initiatives to destroy Kashrut and Judaism in Israel." After reviewing the statement, the judicial ombudsman, retired Supreme Court Justice Uri Shoham, asked the Minister of Religious Affairs to consider dismissing Yosef from his position on the Grand Rabbinical Court.

At a December 6 meeting of ultra-Orthodox religious parties, MKs discussed a range of options, including boycotts and mass protests, to oppose various reforms impacting the ultra-Orthodox that were under consideration by the government. One Shas MK said that the government was seeking to establish "a nation of all its citizens in place of a Jewish and democratic state." Another participant said the government was waging a "culture war against the ultra-Orthodox" and that the country was engaged in "a real war" over the future of the Jewish people.

In August, NGOs Hiddush and Secular Forum, in a letter to the IDF Chief of Staff, protested Military Rabbinate orders published during the year that restricted the use of kitchenette facilities during Shabbat, or for preparing nonkosher foods, following complaints from soldiers. According to the NGOs, the Military Rabbinate was not authorized to order restrictions on food not served by the IDF, and its actions constituted “religious coercion.”

During a June 8 press conference, MK Yaakov Litzman of United Torah Judaism called on soon-to-be Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to “take off his yarmulke, for he disgraces it.”

Yitzhak Pindrus of United Torah Judaism said in the Knesset on June 28 that the Minister of Religious Services should follow the path of a biblical character who killed people who intermarried, referring to such marriages as “miscegenation.”

On October 13, MK Bezalel Smotrich (Religious Zionism) directed his comments from the Knesset plenary’s podium towards Arab MKs, referring to them as “anti-Zionists,” “terror supporters,” and “enemies.” He also said: “You’re here by mistake, it’s a mistake that Ben-Gurion didn’t finish the job and didn’t throw you out in 1948.”

The website Al-Monitor reported that there were varied opinions within the country about the Muslim political party Ra’am becoming the first Arab party to join a government. Members of then Prime Minister Netanyahu’s party protested in front of the homes belonging to members of Prime Minister Bennett’s Yamina party to pressure Yamina from joining a coalition that included Ra’am. A member of the Ra’am party told Al-Monitor that the “responses [in the street] to the move are positive and give us credit,” adding that joining the government was the first step in “a long journey.”

Members of some religious minorities said that the government did not provide the same service and benefits to them as to the country’s majority Jewish population and in many jurisdictions made it difficult for members of minority groups to obtain permits needed for new construction. In January, the Druze and Circassian mayors’ forum chairman demanded that the problem of urban planning be addressed in those local council districts facing high fines for illegal construction.

The MRS listed 21 dedicated cemeteries in Israel and West Bank settlements for burial of persons the government defined as “lacking religion,” and 33 cemeteries for civil burial, but only three were available for use by the general public

regardless of residence, and one had been full for several years. The state permitted other cemeteries located in agricultural localities to bury only “residents of the area.” This, according to Hiddush, left the majority of the country’s population deprived of the ability to exercise its right, as mandated by law, to be buried in accordance with secular or non-Orthodox religious views. The two MRS-administered cemeteries in West Bank settlements were available only for the burial of Israeli citizens. On September 12, the Supreme Court rejected a 2019 petition by Hiddush that demanded civil burial in agricultural localities for individuals who were not local residents and who did not have another alternative. According to the government, the existing issues regarding civil burial could not justify burial outside of place of residence, as the law mandates. The court invited Hiddush to submit a new petition regarding a specific locality, rather than a principled petition.

According to Hiddush, an absolute majority of the MRS licenses for civil burial are held by Jewish Orthodox NGOs and religious councils and some of these organizations conducted a “less religious burial” rather than a secular one, did not allow burial in a coffin, and stated on their websites that their services were only for non-Jews.

Those exempt from compulsory military service continued to have the option to join the National Service, a civilian alternative in which volunteers work for two years to promote social welfare in schools, hospitals, or NGOs. According to government officials and NGOs, this alternative was more popular among women from Jewish Orthodox backgrounds than other exempt groups.

According to representatives of the ultra-Orthodox Eda Haredit community, some of their members did not receive an exemption from military service because its yeshivas were not recognized by the state and young men studying in those yeshivas did not submit draft exemption applications. As a result, dozens of them were arrested every month, community members said.

According to the Karaite community’s NGO, during the year the IDF requested religious Karaite women who sought to be exempted from military service to declare their status as religious women at a rabbinical court; the Karaite community said this would be contrary to its beliefs. Up until 2020, Karaite women were able to submit a letter from a Jewish Karaite court to the IDF to prove their status. On March 21, three Karaite women petitioned the Supreme Court concerning this matter and as a result, the IDF announced on June 6 that it

exempted them from military service. Due to the IDF's action, the women's petition was "deleted" on June 10.

According to the website of Brigham Young University's Jerusalem Center, the government maintained an agreement with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that no member of the Church "will engage in proselytizing of any kind" within Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza as a condition to lease land for its campus on the Mount of Olives. Some other unrecognized Christian communities reported that the MOI Department of Non-Jewish Affairs discouraged them from proselytizing or holding large public gatherings outside their houses of worship.

The Center of Scientology Israel reported that it was targeted by the NGO Israeli Center for Victims of Cults using derogatory labels on their website and categorizing it as a cult. The NGO Yad L'Achim paid for a campaign to target Scientology online.

The government maintained its policy of not accepting applications for official recognition from unrecognized religious groups, including evangelical Christian churches and Jehovah's Witnesses, but stated that no religious community applied for recognition during the year. The government stated some leaders of unrecognized religions were invited to and participated in official events and ceremonies, along with the leaders of recognized religions.

After the Supreme Court ordered the government on April 29 to explain why it would not discuss a 2017 application by the Jehovah's Witnesses for recognition, the government told the court on December 29 that it had tasked the Ministerial Committee on Internal Affairs to review the request. The government asked the committee to submit an update to the court within 90 days.

On June 15, the Supreme Court ruled that the Knesset Finance Committee had no authority to reject the application for tax-deductible status submitted by the Messianic Jews' NGO Yachad Ramat HaSharon, and ordered that the NGO be granted tax-deductible status. A similar petition by the Jehovah's Witnesses NGO Watchtower Association was pending at the year's end. In 2020, the Finance Committee rejected applications for tax-deductible status by the two NGOs despite objections from legal advisors in the Ministry of Justice and the Tax Authority. On December 8 and 13, the Knesset Finance Committee discussed the Watchtower Association's application and decided on a Tax Authority audit of the group to take place in 2022 due to concerns raised by Shas MK of alleged missionary activity directed at minors.

Separate public and semipublic school systems varied widely in educational quality around the country, according to NGOs and international organizations. During the year, Arab/Palestinians including Christians, Muslims and Druze, as well as ultra-Orthodox students, passed the matriculation exam at lower rates than their non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish counterparts. The government continued educational and scholarship programs to benefit Arab/Palestinian students. Between the academic years of 2009-10 and 2020-21, the percentage of Arab/Palestinian students enrolled increased significantly: in undergraduate programs from 13 percent to 19 percent, in master's degree programs from 7 percent to 15 percent, and in doctoral programs from 5 percent to 7 percent, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

According to the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), the gap in funding for Jewish students and Arab/Palestinian students in elementary and middle schools continued to narrow, but the largest gap in funding was found in high schools. According to IDI, the gap was not solely a result of differences in the Ministry of Education budget, but was also influenced by local government funding and parental contributions.

According to the Secular Forum, growing “religionization” (*hadata*) of the education system continued, including in textbooks and through programs in schools taught by Orthodox NGOs. On April 7 the Supreme Court ruled that government funding previously granted to pluralistic Jewish organizations’ activities in secular schools must be “reexamined” after the government cancelled this funding in 2019. Prior to the ruling, the state only granted such funding to Orthodox organizations, some of which promoted a pro-settler agenda, according to the NGO Molad – The Center for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy. According to *Haaretz*, in November, the Ministry of Education reissued its previous policy on funding Jewish organizations’ activities in secular schools and did not comply with the court’s ruling. The Israel Religious Action Center said the ministry’s actions ignored the court’s ruling and sought to continue a policy that was rejected by the High Court. The ministry told *Haaretz* it has begun acting to fulfill the court’s ruling.

Public Hebrew-language state schools taught Jewish history, culture, and some basic religious texts. Many ultra-Orthodox religious schools in the “recognized but not official” category continued not to offer a basic humanities, mathematics, and science curriculum. The government, however, included a basic curriculum for public ultra-Orthodox schools. Public Arabic-speaking schools continued to teach

religion classes on the Quran and the Bible to both Muslim and Christian Arab students. A few independent mixed Jewish-Arab schools also offered religion classes. For example, the curriculum at the nonprofit school Hand-in-Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education, which received a third of its funding from the government, emphasized commonalities in the holy writings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The government funded approximately 34 percent of the budget of Christian school systems in the “recognized but not official” category, in which schools had autonomy over hiring teachers, admitting students, and the use of school property, according to church officials. The government repeated its offer made in previous years to fully fund Christian schools if they became part of the public school system, but churches rejected this option, stating that, unlike in Orthodox schools, they would lose autonomy over hiring, admitting students, and use of property. Church leaders criticized the disparity between government funding for their schools and those affiliated with the ultra-Orthodox political parties United Torah Judaism and Shas, which were also categorized as “recognized but not official” but received full government funding.

On August 28, the *Jerusalem Post* said that, according to a report by the Shores Institute, 50 percent of children from the country’s fastest growing sectors (including 43 percent from the ultra-Orthodox and Arab communities) “are getting a third-world education that will not be able to support a first world economy.” The author of the Shores report, Dan Ben-David, said that these and broader challenges facing the country’s school system “turn the national education picture into a ticking time bomb.”

Seventh-day Adventists and others who worshipped on Saturday stated they faced difficulty traveling to their houses of worship in cities in which public transportation was unavailable on Shabbat, including Jerusalem.

Some unrecognized religious groups, including Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists, received a property tax exemption on their houses of worship, although others, such as Buddhists and the Church of Scientology, did not.

In an October 26 meeting, Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked announced that the northern Druze town of Mughar would receive city status, making it the country’s first majority-Druze city. Shaked noted that her decision was proof of the “courageous and strong ties between the Druze and Jewish people.” According to the press, the elevation to status as a city would make various planning, economic,

and organizational processes easier and would provide greater authority to local officials. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, 57.5 percent of the residents of Mughar were Druze while 21.4 percent were Muslims and 21.1 percent Christians.

Christian leaders reported little difficulty obtaining visas for clergy to serve in the country, except for Christian clergy from Arab countries, some of whom reported long delays for, and periodic denials of their visa applications. The government stated Christian clergy from Arab countries were subject to the same entry laws and similar security procedures as clergy from other parts of the world and that any visa delays or denials were due to security reviews. The government also said there were some “unavoidable delays” in cases of applicants from countries that did not have diplomatic relations with Israel. Church officials noted that the clergy visas did not allow the bearer access to basic social benefits such as disability insurance or national health insurance, even for those who had served in the country for more than 30 years.

The MOI appointed and funded approximately half of the Druze and Muslim clerics in the country and continued to train Druze and Muslim clerical employees of the state on how to work with government ministries. Muslim leaders criticized the MOI for appointing non-Muslims – mostly Druze former military officers – to head the Muslim Affairs Department at the ministry. Muslim leaders again said the MOI routinely monitored and summoned for “talks” those whom the ministry suspected of opposing government policies. The government said it did not monitor clerics, but government employees of all faiths were “expected not to incite against the state in their official capacities.” The government stated the remaining Druze and Muslim clerics were not state employees due to either the preference of the local community or lack of MOI budgetary resources. Muslim leaders stated sharia court judges, who were Ministry of Justice employees, were their preferred religious representatives.

No Islamic seminaries remained in the country, and students of Islam traveled elsewhere, primarily to Jordan or the West Bank, to study. The government stated there were “Islamic colleges” in Umm al-Fahm, Baqa’a al-Gharbia, and Kfar Baraa. Muslim leaders continued to reject this assertion and stated that none of those institutes was an Islamic seminary.

The government continued to promote measures to encourage increased Jewish-Israeli residence and economic development in the thinly populated Negev Desert in the south of the country, including development plans for military industries,

railways, the expansion of Road 6, and a phosphate mine. Civil society organizations criticized government plans, stating they could lead to the displacement of 36,000 Bedouins. The government made more funding available for government-approved Bedouin cities and towns to relocate Bedouins displaced by economic expansion.

On October 21, Minister of Interior Shaked announced that the government planned to establish 11 new localities in the Negev, including removing planning obstacles regarding the Jewish town of Hiran.

In reports on its website, the NGO Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel continued to state that the government discriminated against the Bedouin residents of the Negev in several ways, including charging those in unrecognized villages the highest water prices in the country; refusing to classify camels as “farm animals”; preventing Bedouin herders from using the grazing land in the region; not addressing overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in local schools; and displacing residents to allow for the expansion of primarily Jewish towns and the relocation or expansion of government military facilities.

In a June 3rd report to the UN Human Rights Council’s Special Rapporteur on the Right Adequate Housing, Adalah stated that the government pursued two main policies discriminating against Bedouin citizens living in the Negev: “denying their historical land rights and instead labelling them as trespassers” and forcibly displacing and ...urbanizing them by concentrating them into a limited number of urban/semi-urban townships and recognized villages.”

On October 20, the Supreme Court rejected a petition against the State Attorney's decision asking that the government reopen an investigation against police officers involved in the 2017 shooting of teacher Yaqub Musa Abu al-Qian. Police shot Abu al-Qian during an operation to demolish homes in the unrecognized village of Umm al-Hiran, which was scheduled to be replaced by the Orthodox-only Jewish town of Hiran. In 2020, Adalah and the NGO Public Committee Against Torture in Israel filed the petition with the Supreme Court on behalf of Abu al-Qian’s family. The court ruled that the State Attorney's decision and the preliminary investigation procedure conducted by the Department for Investigation of Police Officers indicated that they made their decision after an in-depth examination and extensive collection of evidence, and that there was no need for the court to intervene in the decision. The NGOs’ petition disputed the details of the government’s account of the incident.

Bedouin residents in Umm al-Hiran continued to not fulfill their obligations, under the 2018 Development and Settlement of Bedouin in the Negev Agreement with the government, to demolish their structures and relocate to vacant plots in the Bedouin town of Hura. Jewish families sponsored to move into Hiran by the OR Movement, an organization dedicated to expanding the Jewish Israeli population of the Negev and Galilee regions, remained in the forest outside Umm al-Hiran, living in mobile homes donated by the Jewish National Fund, while waiting for village land vacated by Bedouins to become available for them.

In November, the cabinet approved a draft resolution to legalize three unrecognized Bedouin villages in the southern Negev: Rakhma, Hashm al-Zena, and Abda. The NGO Negev Coexistence Forum said approximately 4,000 Bedouin lived in the villages. NGOs subsequently wrote the Labor Ministry asking that it change the text of the government's resolution, because it included problematic conditions that would "doom it to failure." On November 3, the government also said it would establish a new planned Bedouin community in the south. On December 6, the Knesset completed the first reading of a bill to enable thousands of homes constructed without permits in Arab communities in the Negev and elsewhere to be connected to the country's electrical grid.

An August 4 report by the State Comptroller said that the Arab/Palestinian Bedouins of the Negev were the most impoverished community in the country, lagging far behind all the others. The report also noted that, despite the planned investment of billions of shekels over the years, gaps between Bedouin settlements and their neighbors in the Negev continued to grow. State Comptroller Matanyahu Engelman stated that basic municipal and regional infrastructure for Bedouin communities such as sanitation, water, and electricity as well as sidewalks and roads lagged far behind and that the government "is responsible for increasing governance in the Negev." He also said that blame did not lie with local and state authorities alone, but that the Bedouin community shared responsibility for compounding these problems. The Arab/Palestinian Muslim Ra'am Party demanded greater investment in Bedouin communities.

On May 26, *Haaretz* reported that the Tel Aviv-Jaffa planning and building committee gave its approval to a plan to legalize the Tasso Muslim cemetery in Jaffa, the only Islamic cemetery in the city. According to the report, the zoning plan required the approval of the district planning and building committee before it could take effect.

The IDF continued to have only Orthodox Jewish chaplains. The government employed civilian clergy of different faiths, including Muslim imams, as chaplains at military burials when non-Jewish soldiers died in service.

In some ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, private organizations posted “modesty signs” demanding women obscure themselves from public view to avoid distracting devout men. The Beit Shemesh municipality received several extensions from the Supreme Court, which ordered it to remove such signs in 2018. On July 1, because Beit Shemesh had not removed the signs, the Supreme Court ordered the Attorney General to develop a national enforcement policy within 90 days that would allow the implementation of the court’s verdict, due to the failure at the local level to remove such “modesty signs.” The court ruled that 30 days after the new policy was in place, fines would be imposed on municipalities for lack of enforcement.

Women’s photos were regularly vandalized in cities with large ultra-Orthodox populations. The AP reported in October that vandals “widely believed to be ultra-Orthodox extremists” defaced the photograph of a 94-year-old female Holocaust survivor five times since the April start of the outdoor exhibit that included the photo. According to media reports, due to failed local law enforcement, companies did not include women in their advertisements, to prevent them from being vandalized. In a December 2020 Knesset hearing, the police stated it had opened 21 investigations following the vandalizing of women’s photos in public spaces between 2018-2020; police closed 19 of these investigation files without charges and transferred one for prosecution.

On January 10, the Supreme Court denied the Chief Rabbinate’s request to hold an additional hearing on a petition by NGOs Adalah and the Secular Forum against a ban on bringing foods forbidden to Jews during Passover (foods with grains or leavening agents, known as *hametz*) into public hospitals during the holiday. The court ruled in 2020 that hospitals must allow nonkosher food for those that wanted it during Passover. On March 10, Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef asked the Attorney General to postpone the ruling’s implementation due to “insufficient preparation time” and to handle the matter by means of legislation. According to the Secular Forum, most hospitals adhered to the Supreme Court ruling and made nonkosher food available during Passover for staff and patients who wanted it. However, during March, the Secular Forum wrote two hospitals in Jerusalem and Netanya threatening them with contempt of court charges because they continued to ban hametz in their facilities during Passover, despite the court’s ruling. In December, the Secular Forum submitted another petition to the Supreme Court demanding to

stop a similar ban on allowing external food into military bases during Passover. The petition was pending at year's end.

On July 6, the coalition government failed to renew the Law on Citizenship and Entry, resulting in its expiration and paving the way for family reunification of some 3,000 Palestinians and their Israeli citizen spouses. Under the law, non-Jewish spouses of Israelis from certain countries and the West Bank and Gaza had been denied residency without a special determination from the MOI. Although the law lapsed, Interior Minister Shaked ordered the ministry to continue functioning as though the law were in place. On September 14, three NGOs, including HaMoked, petitioned the Court for Administrative Affairs demanding that the MOI respect the consequences brought about by the expiration of the law. On November 11, the government responded, supporting Shaked's continued handling of Palestinians' requests in accordance with the now-expired regulations, stating that Shaked could implement "interim procedures and regulations" until a new law was passed. No new procedures were published by year's end, however. On November 15, the court rejected the three NGOs' request for an injunction prohibiting the handling of requests based on the expired law. As a result, the petitioners appealed to the Supreme Court on November 17. At year's end, both the petition and new legislation remained pending.

According to the NGO HaMoked, there were approximately 10,000 Palestinians living in the country, including in Jerusalem, on temporary stay permits because of the citizenship and entry law, with no legal guarantee they could continue living with their families. When the previous citizenship and entry law was not renewed and expired in July, HaMoked petitioned the Supreme Court to direct the Ministry of Interior to adjudicate reunification applications. HaMoked and Israeli media reported that the Ministry of Interior refused to deal with these applications, and as of December, there were 1,680 such applications waiting to be reviewed. There were also cases of Palestinian spouses of Palestinian residents living in East Jerusalem without legal status. Some Palestinian residents moved to Jerusalem neighborhoods outside the security barrier to live with their nonresident spouse and children while maintaining Jerusalem residency. According to Christian religious leaders, this situation remained an especially acute problem for Christians because of their small population and consequent tendency to marry Christians from the West Bank or elsewhere (Christians who hold neither citizenship nor residency). A Christian religious leader expressed concern that this was a significant element in the continuing decline of the Christian population, including in Jerusalem, which negatively affected the long-term viability of their communities.

According to NGOs, community members, and media commentators, several factors contributed to Christian emigration. These included political instability, the inability to obtain residency permits for spouses due to the (now expired) 2003 Law of Citizenship and Entry, the limited ability of Christian communities in the Jerusalem area to expand due to building restrictions, the difficulties Christian clergy experienced in obtaining Israeli visas and residency permits, the loss of confidence in the peace process, and economic hardships created by the construction of the security barrier and the imposition of travel restrictions. The government stated such difficulties stemmed from the “complex political and security reality” and not from any restrictions on the Christian community itself.

The law continued to prevent the Israel Land Authority (ILA), which administered the 93 percent of the country in the public domain, to lease land to foreigners. In practice, however, foreigners were allowed to lease if they could show they would qualify as Jewish under the Law of Return. This public land included approximately 12.5 percent owned by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose statutes strictly prohibit sale or lease of land to non-Jews. The application of ILA restrictions continued to limit the ability of Muslim and Christian residents of Jerusalem who were not citizens to purchase property built on state land, including in parts of Jerusalem. In recent years, however, an increasing number of Palestinian citizens in Jerusalem have acquired property built on ILA-owned land. During the year, Arab/Palestinian citizens were allowed to place bids on JNF land, but sources stated that the ILA granted the JNF another parcel of land whenever an Arab/ Palestinian citizen of the country won a bid. Despite a 2018 Supreme Court ruling that the ILA Executive Council must include an Arab/ Palestinian citizen, Druze, or Circassian member to prevent discrimination against non-Jews, there were no members from these groups on the council at year’s end.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate continued its legal efforts to block the transfer of properties in Jerusalem’s Old City to Ateret Cohanim, a Jewish organization that signed a 99-year lease for the properties in 2004. Courts previously ruled in favor of Ateret Cohanim, and in 2020 the district court ruled against reopening the case to hear new evidence brought forward by the Church. A Supreme Court hearing is set for 2022 to determine if the case should be reopened based upon the new evidence.

On December 12, 13 heads of Christian communities in Jerusalem issued a joint statement entitled, “The Current Threat to the Christian Presence in the Holy Land,” that said, “Christians have become the target of frequent and sustained attacks by fringe radical groups. Since 2012 there have been countless incidents of

physical and verbal assaults against priests and other clergy, attacks on Christian churches, with holy sites regularly vandalized and desecrated, and ongoing intimidation of local Christians who simply seek to worship freely and go about their daily lives. These tactics are being used by such radical groups in a systematic attempt to drive the Christian community out of Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land.” The statement acknowledged “the declared commitment of the Israeli government to uphold a safe and secure home for Christians in the Holy Land” but said, “It is therefore a matter of grave concern when this national commitment is betrayed by the failure of local politicians, officials and law enforcement agencies to curb the activities of radical groups who regularly intimidate local Christians, assault priests and clergy, and desecrate Holy Sites and church properties.” The appeal continued, “The principle that the spiritual and cultural character of Jerusalem’s distinct and historic quarters should be protected is already recognized in Israeli law with respect to the Jewish Quarter. Yet radical groups continue to acquire strategic property in the Christian Quarter, with the aim of diminishing the Christian presence, often using underhanded dealings and intimidation tactics to evict residents from their homes, dramatically decreasing the Christian presence, and further disrupting the historic pilgrim routes between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.”

Haaretz reported that the statement marked the beginning of a campaign that included a dedicated website and articles in the media. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the allegations made by the Christian leaders were “baseless and distort the reality of the Christian community in Israel” and that the Christians’ joint statement “could lead to violence and bring harm to innocent people.” In an editorial, *Haaretz* stated, “The Christian leadership in Jerusalem may be exaggerating the sense of threat against them, to draft support from communities throughout the world... However, this does not justify the government’s irresponsible behavior toward the Christian public. The government must recognize that the Christian congregations have an important place in Jerusalem’s human mosaic. The government must pay attention to the needs and problems of Christian communities.”

On December 29, at an annual New Year’s reception for the spiritual and lay leaders of Christian churches and communities, President Herzog affirmed his commitment to freedom of worship and religion in the country. Herzog said that each of the Christian groups was “a blessing and an integral part” of the country’s mosaic. He explicitly rejected all forms of racism, discrimination, and extremism as well as any threat to Christian communities in the country. Interior Minister

Shaked also made remarks, saying that the new year offered an opportunity to build new bonds of friendship and cooperation among all religions.

In December, an interministerial team approved a proposal by Minister of Interior Shaked to exempt tourist groups that fell into the category of “Jewish tourism” from entry restrictions associated with the omicron variant of COVID-19. According to the press, Christian organizations said the decision was unfair especially given the impending Christmas holidays. According to a lead editorial in *Haaretz*, “this is a discriminatory exception, not to say a bigoted one.” In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said, “These unfounded allegations of discriminatory conduct are outrageous, false, and dangerous.”

In April, the news website Al-Monitor reported that then Minister of Tourism Orit Farkash-Hacohen said that after the signing of the Abraham Accords normalizing relations between Israel and four Arab states, “Israel’s tourist branch began preparing for Muslim tourism.” Senior ministry officials said the ministry was expecting tens of thousands of Muslim tourists in the upcoming months and that the ministry was mapping religious Islamic sites throughout the country.

In a December Hebrew-language press interview, Arab Muslim MK and member of the governing coalition Mansour Abbas told journalist Mohammad Magadli, “The State of Israel was born as a Jewish state, and the question is how we integrate Arab society into it.” Responding to Magadli’s comment that no Arab MK ever said such a thing before, Abbas replied: “I was at a demonstration against the Nation State Law, and I don’t want to mislead anyone. The question is: ‘What is the status of an Arab citizen in the Jewish state of Israel?’ That’s the question. So the challenge now is not just for Mansour Abbas, but for the Jewish public and the Jewish citizen.” According to *Haaretz*, Abbas’s remarks resulted in an immediate backlash. Masoud Ghanim, former head of the United Arab List (UAL), the bloc of parties that traditionally represented Arab constituencies in the Knesset, said “We in the movement and the party do not recognize the state as Jewish. Of course, we do not deny the reality in which the State of Israel defines itself as Jewish, but we do not accept or recognize this reality.” Ayman Odeh, the chairman of the Joint List, which served as an umbrella group for four Arab parties until the UAL left the group in January, said, “This is our homeland, citizens by right, and we will work for the state to be egalitarian and democratic.”

Under the Israeli Antiquities Law, excavations within a sacred site require the approval of a ministerial committee, which includes the Ministers of Culture, Justice, and Religious Affairs. The government stated that Israel Antiquities

Authority (IAA) researchers “have greatly intensified their research on ‘non-Jewish’ periods in the history of the land of Israel, [including] the Prehistoric, Early Bronze, Byzantine, Muslim, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods.” Palestinian residents of Jerusalem and Muslim leaders continued to protest archaeological excavations and construction work done at the City of David National Park in the Silwan neighborhood outside the Old City, and in the Old City near the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, including an elevator for persons with disabilities being installed at the rear of the Western Wall Plaza. Some NGOs monitoring archaeological practices in Jerusalem continued to state the IAA emphasized archaeological finds that bolstered Jewish claims while minimizing historically significant archaeological finds of other religions. Archeologists from Emek Shaveh continued to dispute the government’s representation of the “Pilgrimage Road,” a tunnel dug by the IAA and inaugurated in Silwan in 2019 as being historically part of the pilgrimage route to the Jewish Second Temple. Emek Shaveh said the excavation method did not establish with certainty the date and purpose of the road. NGOs such as the City of David Foundation (EL-AD) and the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies continued to concur with the government’s position.

According to *Haaretz*, an interagency meeting in the spring organized by the Justice Ministry’s director general found that the government was not adequately enforcing a ban on polygamy among the Bedouin population. A presentation at the meeting said that hundreds of polygamous men were detected in recent years, without consequences. The director of the country’s sharia courts, Iyad Zahalka, said all polygamous marriages must be registered in a sharia court.

At year’s end, the 120-member Knesset had 13 members from religious minorities (nine Muslims, three Druze, and one Christian), compared with 18 religious minority members (11 Muslims, five Druze, and two Christians) in the previous Knesset. There was one Muslim member of the cabinet, but no Druze or Christians. In June, then Jewish Agency Chairman Herzog appointed Gadeer Kamal-Mreeh, a Druze woman and former MK, to be the senior representative for the Jewish Agency in Washington, D.C.

President Herzog hosted Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Druze, and Baha’i leaders to issue a joint call for worldwide vaccination against COVID-19. In a joint statement, the leaders said that “saving the life of any human being – all created in the image of God – is the greatest religious obligation of all” and, “it is manifestly clear that the mass vaccination of entire populations is our primary tool for defeating this terrible pandemic.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Because religious and national identities were often closely linked, it was often difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

In September, authorities charged Muad Hib with murder for killing his mother and hiding her body in August, after she converted from Islam to Orthodox Christianity. Prosecutors stated that her conversion was the motive for the killing.

Amid tensions in Jerusalem and violence in Gaza, ethnic-based violence and civil unrest broke out during a one-week period in May in a number of mixed Jewish-Arab cities in the country, including Lod, Acre, Jaffa, Haifa, and Ramle. Incidents of violence included automobile vandalism; gunshots fired at a group of Jewish individuals, stone throwing by both Jewish and Arab protestors; arson attacks on synagogues; and desecration of Muslim gravestones. Armed Jewish Israelis clashed with Palestinians in East Jerusalem neighborhoods. Responding to the violence, the government reassigned additional security personnel, including border police from the West Bank, to augment INP personnel. The INP reported it made approximately 1,550 arrests, with the overwhelming majority of the arrestees being Arab/Palestinian citizens. Security officials said the arrested Jewish citizens were predominately “middle-aged nationalist extremists.”

On May 12 in the mixed Jewish-Arab town of Lod, Jews shot and killed Moussa Hassouna in clashes between residents. Later on May 12, Arab/Palestinian citizens in Lod stoned the car of Jewish resident Yigal Yehoshua who died on May 17 after being hit in the head with a thrown brick. In the northern city of Acre on May 11, Arab/Palestinian citizens set fire to a hotel leading to the death of 84 year-old retiree Aby Har-Even on June 6. On May 19, teenager Mohammed Mahamid Kiwan died after he was shot on May 18 at the Mei Ami junction on Route 65. His family said police were responsible.

According to the Lod Municipality, Arab/Palestinian citizens perpetrated five arson attacks against four synagogues in the city, and shattered windows of two additional synagogues. Media reported that Jewish individuals threw stones at worshippers at the Lod Dahmash Mosque on May 12 during prayer time and shattered the windows of the mosque. On May 13, unknown individuals desecrated an Islamic Cemetery in Lod, tried to set it on fire, and broke 10 of its gravestones.

In the aftermath of the civil unrest, the state filed indictments against 150 persons. Some NGOs said most were against Arab/Palestinian citizens and expressed concern that the INP disproportionately targeted Arab/Palestinian citizens. A significant number of demonstrations calling for calm and coexistence were held in multiple cities after the civil unrest.

On September 9, three minors attacked a worshipper and caused damage to a synagogue in Acre. The police later arrested and released the suspects to house arrest.

In April, during the period leading up to the civil unrest, Palestinian youth in Jerusalem physically attacked ultra-Orthodox individuals and posted the attacks on the social media app TikTok. The first video of a young Palestinian Jerusalemite slapping a Yeshiva student on the Jerusalem Light Rail was posted on the social network on April 15. According to the government, the police opened 14 investigations and arrested 31 suspects for being involved in such attacks. Four of the cases led to indictments, and one suspect was convicted and sentenced to 10 months imprisonment, six months probation and a fine of 2,500 shekels (\$810). On July 1, police arrested Palestinian Jerusalemites for defiling graves in the Har Hamenuhot Cemetery while filming themselves on TikTok.

Racial and religiously motivated attacks by Jewish individuals and groups continued to take place during the year against individuals – particularly Arab/Palestinian citizens of the country and Palestinians of the West Bank and their property – with the stated purpose of exacting a “price” for actions taken by the government against the attackers’ interests. The attacks occurred against both Christian and Muslim targets. The NGO Tag Meir continued to organize visits to areas where these attacks occurred and sponsored activities promoting tolerance in response to the attacks. On March 12, Jewish individuals set cars on fire and sprayed graffiti with a Star of David and the writing: “enough with intermarriage” in the village of Ein Naqquba in the central part of the country.

According to Tag Meir, the assailants also poured gasoline on the home of two families, including on the window of the room of a six-year-old and a seven-year-old, and tried to set it on fire. Tag Meir stated that “only a miracle” prevented a disaster similar to that of the 2015 Duma arson attack in the West Bank, which resulted in the death of a Palestinian couple and their infant child. The INP opened an investigation on March 12.

On March 25, unknown individuals spray-painted the words “deport or kill” on a car in the predominantly Arab town of Kfar Qasim. They also punctured the tires of dozens of cars and spray-painted Stars of David on them. Police opened an investigation into the case.

On March 1, unknown assailants set fire to the entrance of the monastery of the Romanian Church in Jerusalem near the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea Shearim. The local priest put out the fire quickly. According to Church officials, this was the fourth act of vandalism in 2021 that targeted the same monastery. Christian representatives said they believed religious Orthodox Jews were the probable assailants. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem said the arson was “a sign of hatred for the Christian religion” among some Israelis.

On April 5, arson attacks took place against two synagogues in Bnei Brak and Ramat Gan. On May 8, according to media reports, police arrested an individual from Rosh HaAyn for committing the attacks.

Swastikas were painted on synagogues several times during the year. On July 31, unknown individuals painted swastikas on the structures of two synagogues in Bnei Brak. The individuals also left photos of Shira Banki, a 16-year-old who was stabbed to death at the Jerusalem Pride Parade in 2015, at the sites. On August 26, individuals painted swastikas on the door of a Tel Aviv synagogue.

On November 6, ultra-Orthodox Rabbi Meir Mazuz said that Jews from the former Soviet Union and Reform Jews were nonbelievers who were destroying Judaism in the country.

Christian clergy and pilgrims continued to report instances of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem harassing or spitting on them.

During the year, ultra-Orthodox women attacked members of Women of the Wall during their monthly prayers at the Western Wall. For example, on June 11, ultra-Orthodox protesters shredded and desecrated dozens of prayer books belonging to Women of the Wall.

On July 17, during the Jewish holiday of Tisha B’Av, a day of fasting when Jews commemorate the destruction of the temples, activists of Liba Yehudit, a national-ultra-Orthodox NGO described by *Haaretz* as “ultra-extreme,” put up a makeshift partition in the middle of the egalitarian prayer area of the Western Wall Plaza, intended to divide those praying by gender, and yelled and cursed to disrupt those

praying there for the holiday. According to *Haaretz*, “hundreds of right-wing, Orthodox Jews, mostly teenagers” disrupted the reading of the Book of Lamentations by a female member of the Conservative movement, which organized the annual event. *Haaretz* described Liba as “an extreme right-wing group, which has been trying to prevent the non-Orthodox from having access to a new and revamped prayer plaza at the southern end of the site.”

On July 18, on Tisha B’Av, Prime Minister Bennett tweeted thanks to the Public Security Minister and the Israel Police Inspector General for “maintaining freedom of worship for Jews on the Mount.” On November 19, the Prime Minister’s Office said that the government’s policy regarding the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, which prohibits non-Islamic worship, had not changed and what Bennett actually meant was that both Jews and Muslims had “freedom of visitation rights.”

In March, during Passover, an unknown individual spread hametz outside of synagogues in Bnei Brak and Ramat Gan.

According to missionary organizations, societal attitudes toward missionary activities and conversion to other religions continued to be negative. Some Jews continued to oppose missionary activity directed at Jews, saying it amounted to religious harassment, and reacted with hostility toward Jewish converts to Christianity, such as Messianic Jews.

On June 2, according to Jehovah’s Witnesses, police closed an investigation of a 2019 complaint regarding an attack on two Jehovah’s Witnesses members during door-to-door activity in Bat Yam. The police stated there were no grounds for a further criminal investigation. After the initial complaint was filed, police summoned one of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and told her that the individual who had attacked her later submitted a complaint against her for making threats and trespassing in her efforts to convert him to Christianity.

According to media reports, members of the NGO Lehava used violence and incited violence against Palestinians and Arab/Palestinian citizens of the country during the period of civil unrest in May.

Lehava continued to criticize or assault Arab men who were in relationships with Jewish women and to harass “mixed” couples. On June 9, the police interrogated Lehava Director Ben-Zion Gopstein on suspicion of incitement to violence following posts in social media regarding intermarriage. A trial against Gopstein

for offenses of incitement to terrorism, violence, and racism, which began in 2020, was ongoing at year's end.

The NGO Yad L'Achim continued to disrupt instances of cohabitation between Jewish women and Arab men and viewed itself as a "Jewish rescue corps" which recovers Jewish women from "hostile" Arab villages, according to Yad L'Achim's website.

In October, the *Jerusalem Post* reported that police arrested several members of La Familia, often described in the press as an ultranationalist fan club for the Beitar Jerusalem soccer team, following the group's violent attack on a fan who was cheering the team's Muslim player. In May, a court agreed to a request by the team, which disavowed La Familia, to ban three of the group's leaders from attending the team's games.

There continued to be reports of ultra-Orthodox Jews in public areas of their neighborhoods harassing individuals who did not conform to Jewish Orthodox traditions, such as driving on Shabbat or wearing clothing that they perceived as immodest. The harassment included verbal abuse, spitting, and throwing stones, and kicking cars driving on Shabbat.

Tension continued between the ultra-Orthodox community and other citizens, including concerns related to service in the IDF, housing, public transportation, participation in the workforce, and adherence to COVID-19 regulations.

On April 30, a deadly stampede occurred at Mt. Meron during the annual pilgrimage to the tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai on the Jewish holiday of Lag BaOmer, with an estimated 100,000 persons in attendance. Press reports stated that 45 men and boys were killed, and approximately 150 were injured in the deadliest civil disaster in the country's history. Many commentators suggested the ultra-Orthodox community's extensive autonomy in the country was a major contributing factor to the catastrophe, with ultra-Orthodox MK Moshe Gafni (United Torah Judaism) calling for greater government control over the pilgrimage site. On June 20, the government approved the establishment of a state commission of inquiry into the event.

Although the Chief Rabbinate and rabbis of many ultra-Orthodox denominations continued to discourage Jewish visits to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site due to the ongoing *halakhic* (Jewish legal) debate about whether it is permissible or forbidden for Jews to enter the Temple Mount, some Orthodox rabbis continued

to say entering the site was permissible. Many among the self-identified “national religious” Zionist community stated they found meaning in visiting the site. Groups such as the Temple Institute and Yaraeh continued to call for increased Jewish access and prayer there as well as the construction of the third Jewish temple on the site. In some cases, Israeli police prevented individuals from praying and removed them; in other cases, reported by the Waqf, on social media, and by NGOs, police appeared not to notice the activity.

According to local media, some Jewish groups escorted by Israeli police performed religious acts such as prayers and prostration. Some Jewish visitors publicly noted that the INP was more permissive to them in permitting silent prayer.

NGOs reported that some LGBTQI+ minors who revealed their sexual orientation in religious communities faced expulsion from their homes and stigmatization by rabbis. NGOs noted reports of mental illness among the LGBTQI+ minor community because of this treatment, leading some to attempt suicide. Other NGOs noted that an increasing number of rabbis, educators, and community leaders in Orthodox Jewish communities were adopting a more inclusive approach to LGBTQI+ minors.

Several religious NGOs, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, conducted private, unrecognized religious services such as marriages and conversions, and issued unrecognized Kashrut certificates to provide an alternative to the Chief Rabbinate for Jews who could not or did not want to use the Rabbinate’s services. According to the NGO Panim, 2,486 weddings took place outside of the rabbinate’s authority in 2019, compared with 2,610 in 2018. These included unofficial Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and secular ceremonies.

According to Bar Ilan University’s Rackman Center for the Advancement of the Status of Women, thousands of Jewish women were trapped in various stages of informal or formal *get* refusals, especially in the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox communities. The Rackman Center stated that in some instances a woman’s husband made granting a *get* contingent on his wife conceding to extortionate demands, such as those relating to property ownership or child custody. According to the Center for Women's Justice, one in three Jewish women who divorced faced such demands.

NGOs, including Mavoi Satum and Itim, promoted the use of prenuptial agreements to prevent cases of *aginit* (in which a woman whose husband is

unwilling or unable to grant her a *get*). Such agreements provide financial incentives paid by a refusing spouse until the termination of the marriage.

Analysis by Natanel Fisher at the Sha'arei Mishpat Academic College of Law and Science based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics found that approximately 85,000 married couples in Israel, constituting 7 percent of all married couples in the country, involved a Jewish and a non-Jewish partner. In 90 percent of the cases, the non-Jewish partner was “without religious classification,” in most cases from the former Soviet Union, and while many of them consider themselves Jewish, the rabbinate did not recognize them as such. The article stated that nearly 60 percent, or 52,000 out of 87,000 such couples involve a woman who is not Jewish, which means that their children would not be considered Jewish either.

A variety of NGOs continued to try to build understanding and create dialogue among religious groups and between religious and secular Jewish communities, including Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam, the Abraham Fund Initiative, Givat Haviva, the Hagar and Hand-in-Hand integrated Jewish-Arab bilingual schools, Hiddush, Israeli Religious Action Center, Mosaica, Tag Meir, and Interfaith Encounter Association. For example, the number of children studying at integrated Yad BeYad Jewish-Arab schools in the school year beginning in September was 2,000, up from 1,800 in the previous year.

Despite the labor law, some foreign domestic workers stated that some employers did not allow their domestic workers to take off their weekly day of worship.

In April, the news website Al-Monitor reported that approximately 20 families from the Gur Hasidic community had bought apartments in the southern city of Dimona. In response, one resident wrote on social media, “It’s not suitable... An extreme group like this can only ruin it.” Dimona’s mayor, in a radio interview, suggested that the Gur Hasidim should go elsewhere.

In its annual *Israel Religion and State Index* poll of 800 adult Jews conducted in July and published in September, the NGO Hiddush reported that 65 percent of respondents, the same result as the 2020 poll, identified as either “secular” (48 percent) or “traditional-not-religious” (17 percent), with positions regarding public policy on religion and state close to the positions of secular Israelis. Of those surveyed, 81 percent supported freedom of religion and conscience, and 59 percent supported the separation of religion and state. Sixty-one percent supported equal status for the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform traditions. A large majority did

not see the need for religious conversion approved by the Chief Rabbinate as a condition for the state to recognize the Judaism of new immigrants, with 35 percent considering conversion via the Chief Rabbinate necessary, compared with 34 percent in the previous year. Thirty-five percent stated immigrants should be recognized as Jewish if they identify as such, and 35 percent stated immigrants should be recognized as Jewish if they undergo either an Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform conversion. Of those surveyed, 23 percent accepted the position of the ultra-Orthodox parties that yeshiva students should be exempted from military or civic service.

According to the Hiddush poll, 63 percent of the country's adult Jewish population supported recognition by the state of freedom of choice in marriage, doing away with the rabbinate's monopoly, and equally recognizing civil and non-Orthodox religious marriages. According to the same survey, 51 percent of the public stated that had they been allowed a choice, they would not have married in an Orthodox ceremony, compared with 35 percent who expressed the same sentiment in 2009, 39 percent in 2013, and 47 percent in 2016. Eighty-one percent supported freedom of religion and conscience while 59 percent supported separation of religion and state. According to the poll, the majority (73 percent) did not observe Shabbat according to religious law.

In a report released December 22, the government's Central Bureau of Statistics stated that 84 percent of the country's Christian community said that they were satisfied with life in the country. Also, according to the study, Arab Christian women had some of the highest education rates in the country.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In meetings with Israeli government officials, the Ambassador, Charge d'Affaires and other embassy officials stressed the importance of religious pluralism and respect for all religious groups. Numerous high-level U.S. officials made formal stops at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust remembrance site, to keep a public spotlight on antisemitism and highlight religious tolerance. The U.S. Secretary of Defense visited Yad Vashem in April and the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations visited the site in November. The U.S. Ambassador's first official event was to Yad Vashem on December 2, shortly after his arrival in Israel, and he publicly condemned antisemitism on social media.

In November, the Charge d'Affaires hosted an interfaith reception for representatives of the country's diverse religious groups.

Senior U.S. officials spoke publicly about the importance of maintaining the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and conveyed this message in meetings with government officials. Throughout the year, embassy officials used social media platforms to express U.S. support for tolerance and the importance of openness to members of other religious groups. Embassy officials advocated for the right of persons from all faiths to practice their religion peacefully while also respecting the beliefs and customs of their neighbors. The embassy also issued public statements condemning attacks on places of worship.

Embassy-supported initiatives focused on interreligious dialogue and community development and advocated a shared society for Arab and Jewish populations. One project was the Jerusalem Intercultural Center for an interreligious community economic development program in the Old City. Another project brought together three interfaith groups in Jerusalem's Jewish and Palestinian neighborhoods to meet with U.S. experts, coordinators, and fellow interfaith groups to transform attitudes through constructive conversations on each religion's similarities and differences.

The embassy also promoted the reduction of tensions between religious communities and an increase in interreligious communication and partnerships by bringing together representatives of many faith communities to advance shared goals and exchange knowledge and experience. Embassy programs supported mixed Jewish-Arab educational and community initiatives to reduce societal tensions and violence through sports, the arts, environmental projects, and entrepreneurship.

Continuing embassy initiatives included a project by the Citizens Accord Forum that brought together Bedouins and Jews of Ethiopian descent to address violence and build strong relationships between their communities. Both Ethiopian and Bedouin religious leaders were interviewed about the principles of their *Shmagloch* and *Sulha* methods (traditional conflict resolution methods of the respective communities), with the interviews recorded and broadcast at an online convention in August. Embassy support to the Tag Meir Forum continued to provide joint training sessions for Muslim and Jewish teachers to promote interreligious tolerance in classrooms.

The embassy worked to mitigate interreligious and intercommunal tensions between the country's non-Jewish and Jewish citizens through the greater

integration of the Arab minority into the broader national economy, especially the high-tech sector.

Throughout the year, the embassy highlighted events, programs, religious holidays and observances, and news related to interfaith dialogue and religious freedom across embassy social media platforms and in conversations with reporters.

WEST BANK AND GAZA 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

West Bank and Gaza Strip residents are subject to the jurisdiction of separate authorities, with different implications for the fabric of life. Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to Jordanian and Mandatory statutes in effect before 1967, military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander in the West Bank, and, in the relevant areas, Palestinian Authority (PA) law. Israelis living in the West Bank are subject to military ordinances enacted by the military commander and to Israeli law and Israeli legislation. The PA exercises varying degrees of authority in the small portions of the West Bank where it has some measure of control. Although PA laws theoretically apply in the Gaza Strip, the PA does not have authority there, and Hamas continues to exercise de facto control over security and other matters. The PA Basic Law, which serves as an interim constitution, establishes Islam as the official religion and states the principles of sharia shall be the main source of legislation, but provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites unless they violate public order or morality. It also proscribes discrimination based on religion, calls for respect of “all other divine religions,” and stipulates all citizens are equal before the law. The Israeli government continued to allow controlled access to religious sites in Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount (the site containing the foundation of the First and Second Jewish temples and the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque). Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site. On September 10, Israeli police temporarily closed off all entrances to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount after a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem attempted to stab an Israeli Border Police officer. Police shot the suspect, who later died of his wounds. Later in September, a Palestinian woman attempted to stab police officers outside the Chain Gate to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and police shot and killed her. On November 17, a Palestinian youth stabbed two Israeli Border Police officers in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, and a civilian shot and killed him. On November 21, a Palestinian teacher shot and killed an Israeli tour guide and wounded four others with an automatic weapon near the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem. Security officials shot and killed the attacker immediately after the assault. In April and May, clashes occurred in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between Israeli security forces and Palestinian protesters at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The Palestinian National and Islamic Factions in the West Bank called on Palestinians across West Bank cities, villages, and refugee camps

to participate in a “Day of Rage” on May 11 to protest Israeli Security Force and Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound and in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. On April 13, at the start of Ramadan, media and Waqf officials reported that Israeli National Police (INP) entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and disconnected loudspeakers used for the call to prayer without coordinating with Waqf officials, to avoid disrupting an official Memorial Day service attended by then Israeli President Reuven Rivlin in the adjacent Western Wall Plaza. During the last Friday of Ramadan on May 7, Israeli police entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and al-Aqsa Mosque using teargas, stun grenades, and rubber-tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians who were throwing rocks. Media reported that in the aftermath, Palestinians stockpiled stones on the compound in anticipation of confrontations with police and far-right Israeli nationalists planning to march through the Old City. On May 10, Israeli police entered the compound again and used stun grenades, teargas, and rubber-tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians. The Palestinian Red Crescent stated that more than 300 individuals were injured. In an attempt to ease tensions and reduce the potential for clashes, Israeli police temporarily barred non-Muslims from visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Palestinians at times violently protested when Jewish groups visited the site of Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus, throwing rocks and bottles at Israeli Defense Force (IDF) personnel providing security, who responded by firing tear gas and rubber bullets. On September 26, Palestinian protesters attacked buses carrying approximately 500 Jewish worshipers traveling to the site and injured two Israeli soldiers escorting the convoy. According to police, the protestors used live fire, stones, and homemade explosive devices. On November 4, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected an appeal submitted by the PA Hebron Municipality against the establishment of an elevator at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs. Some official PA media channels, as well as social media accounts affiliated with the ruling Fatah political movement, featured content praising or condoning acts of violence against Jews, often referring to assailants as “martyrs.” Both Palestinians and Israelis evoked ethnoreligious language to deny the historical self-identity of the other community in the region or to emphasize an exclusive claim to the land. The PA and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) continued to provide “martyr payments” to the families of Palestinians killed while engaged in violence against Israelis or of those killed by Israeli military actions, including victims of air strikes in Gaza, and also continued to provide separate stipends to Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including those convicted of acts of terrorism involving Jewish targets. In June, the German nongovernmental organization (NGO) Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research released the findings from its European Union-commissioned review of PA curriculum assessing the extent of

inciteful content. The report found the curriculum had eliminated some prior inciteful content and included promotion of UNESCO standards such as respect for human rights and pluralism, but the report also highlighted the enduring presence of problematic content, including “antisemitic references” that contain negative stereotypes of the Jewish people and some content that delegitimized the State of Israel.

Hamas, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization with de facto control of Gaza, the U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other extremist groups disseminated antisemitic materials and advocated violence through traditional and social media channels as well as during rallies and other events. Hamas also continued to enforce restrictions on Gaza’s population based on its interpretation of Islam and sharia. According to the Israeli government, Hamas and other groups launched more than 4,360 unguided rockets and mortars toward Israeli population centers, killing 13 between May 10 and 21 during the “Days of Rage.” The United Nations reported that during the May fighting, attacks by the Israeli military killed 260 Palestinians in Gaza.

During the year, there were incidents of violence that perpetrators justified at least partly on religious grounds. Actions included individual killings, physical attacks and verbal harassment of worshippers and clergy, and vandalism of religious sites. There was also harassment by members of one religious group of another, social pressure to stay within one’s religious group, and antisemitic content in media. Amid tensions in Jerusalem and conflict in Gaza, ethnic-based violence and civil unrest broke out during a one-week period in May in a number of mixed Jewish-Arab cities in Israel, including Jerusalem. The INP reported it made approximately 1,550 arrests during that time, with the overwhelming majority of the arrestees being Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel. Security officials characterized the arrested Jewish citizens as predominately middle-aged nationalist extremists. On December 16, gunmen killed yeshiva student Yehuda Dimentman near Jenin in the West Bank. On March 1, unknown assailants set fire to the entrance of a Romanian Orthodox Church monastery in Jerusalem near the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea Shearim. According to local press and social media, some settlers in the West Bank continued to justify “price tag” attacks on Palestinian property, such as the uprooting of Palestinian olive trees, vandalism of cars and buildings, arson, and slashing of tires as necessary for the defense of Judaism. (“Price tag” attacks refer to violence by Jewish individuals and groups against individuals, particularly Palestinians and Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel, and property with the stated purpose of exacting a “price” for actions taken by the government contrary to the attackers’ interests.) According to the Times of Israel,

on October 13, vandals sprayed nationalist slogans and damaged cars in the Palestinian village of Marda in the West Bank. Slogans painted on walls included “price tag” and “demolish enemy [property], not Jewish.” According to media reports, on November 9, unidentified individuals vandalized nearly two dozen vehicles and a building in the Palestinian town of al-Bireh with slogans such as “enemies live here” and “price tag.” On April 28, arsonists set three Palestinian cars ablaze in Beit Ikse, a village outside Jerusalem. According to media reports, dozens of Jewish residents of a nearby neighborhood chanted, “May your village burn,” until police arrived and dispersed the crowd.

Senior U.S. officials worked to harness normalization between Israel and predominantly Muslim countries, which would improve access for Muslim worshippers to Islamic sites. Senior U.S. officials publicly raised concerns about antisemitism among PA officials and more broadly in Palestinian society throughout the year. Senior White House officials and other U.S. officials repeatedly pointed out that Palestinian leaders did not consistently condemn individual terrorist attacks, including the November Hamas attack at Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount, nor speak out publicly against members of their institutions, including Fatah, who advocated violence. U.S. embassy officials met with Palestinian religious leaders to discuss religious tolerance and a broad range of issues affecting Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities. They met with political, religious, and civil society leaders to promote interreligious tolerance and cooperation. U.S. representatives met with representatives of religious groups to monitor their concerns about access to religious sites, respect for clergy, and attacks on religious sites and houses of worship. They also met with local Christian leaders to discuss their concerns about threats to the presence of Christian communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as ongoing Christian emigration.

This section of the report covers the West Bank and Gaza and East Jerusalem territories that Israel occupied during the June 1967 war. In 2017, the United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Language in this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status issues to be negotiated between the parties to the conflict, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the borders between Israel and any future Palestinian state.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total Palestinian population at 2.9 million in the West Bank and 2 million in the Gaza Strip (midyear 2021). According to the U.S.

government and other sources, Palestinian residents of these territories are predominantly Sunni Muslims, with small Shia and Ahmadi Muslim communities. The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics reports an estimated 441,600 Jewish Israelis reside in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Israeli statistics do not count settlements in East Jerusalem as part of the West Bank. Palestinian officials use the figure of 751,000 Jewish residents in the West Bank which includes settlements in the suburbs of Jerusalem. According to various estimates, 50,000 Christian Palestinians reside in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and according to media reports and religious communities, there are approximately 1,300 Christians residing in Gaza. Local Christian leaders state Palestinian Christian emigration has continued at rapid rates. A majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox; the remainder includes Roman Catholics, Melkite Greek Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Coptic Orthodox, Maronites, Ethiopian Orthodox, Syrian Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, other Protestant denominations, including evangelical Christians, and small numbers of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) and Jehovah's Witnesses. Christians are concentrated primarily in Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus; smaller communities exist elsewhere. Approximately 360 Samaritans (practitioners of Samaritanism, which is related to but distinct from Judaism) reside in the West Bank, primarily in the Nablus area.

The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics estimates 569,900 Jews, 349,600 Muslims, and 12,900 Christians live in Jerusalem, accounting for the vast majority of the city's total population of 952,000, as of 2020.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

Residents of the occupied territories are subject to the jurisdiction of different authorities. Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to Jordanian and Mandatory statutes in effect before 1967, military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander in the West Bank in accordance with its authorities under international law, and, in the relevant areas, PA law. Israelis living in the West Bank are subject to military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander and Israeli law and legislation. West Bank Palestinian population centers mostly fall into Areas A and B, as defined by the Oslo-era agreements. Under those agreements, the PA has formal responsibility for civil administration and security in Area A, but Israeli security forces frequently conduct security operations there. The PA maintains civil administration in Area B in the West Bank while Israel maintains security

control in this area. Israel retains full security and administrative control of Area C (which constitutes approximately 60 percent of the West Bank) and has designated most Area C land as either closed military zones or settlement zoning areas.

Palestinians living in the portion of the West Bank designated as Area C in the Oslo II Accord are subject to military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander. PA civil and criminal law applies to Palestinians who live in Area B, while Israel retains the overriding responsibility for security. Although per the Oslo II Accord, only PA civil and security law applies to Palestinians living in Area A of the West Bank, Israel applies military ordinances enacted by its military commander whenever the Israeli military enters Area A, as part of its overriding responsibility for security. The city of Hebron in the West Bank – an important city for Jews, Muslims, and Christians as the site of the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs – is divided into two separate areas: area H1 under PA control and area H2, where approximately 800 Israeli settlers live and where internal security, public order, and civil authorities relating to Israelis and their property are under Israeli military control.

The Oslo Accords stipulate that protection of 12 listed Jewish holy sites and visitors in Area A is the responsibility of Palestinian police, and the accords created a joint security coordination mechanism to ensure “free, unimpeded and secure access to the relevant Jewish holy site” and “the peaceful use of such site, to prevent any potential instances of disorder and to respond to any incident.” Both sides agreed to “respect and protect the listed below religious rights of Jews, Christians, Muslims and Samaritans” including “protection of the Holy Sites; free access to the Holy Sites; and freedom of worship and practice.”

Israeli government regulations recognize 16 sites as holy places for Jews, while various other budgetary and governmental authorities recognize an additional 160 places as holy for Jews.

The Israeli Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled since 1993 that Jews have the right to pray on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, but police may restrict this right in the name of public order and safety. The court reiterated in 2019 that its precedent on this issue is nonintervention in government decisions, “except in highly unusual cases when the decision constitutes a major distortion of justice or is extremely unreasonable.”

The Jordanian Waqf in Jerusalem administers the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, while the Jordanian Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Holy Places supports maintenance and salary of the Waqf staff in Jerusalem.

The Israeli “Nakba Law” prohibits institutions that receive Israeli government funding from engaging in commemoration of the Nakba (“catastrophe”), the term used by Palestinians to refer to the displacement of hundreds of thousands 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.”

In 2007, Hamas staged a violent takeover of PA government installations in the Gaza Strip and has since maintained a de facto government in the territory, although the area nominally falls under PA jurisdiction.

An interim Basic Law applies in the areas under PA jurisdiction. The Basic Law states Islam is the official religion but calls for respect of “all other divine religions.” It provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites unless they violate public order or morality. It criminalizes the publishing of writings, pictures, drawings, or symbols of anything that insults the religious feelings or beliefs of other persons. The Basic Law also proscribes discrimination based on religion and stipulates all citizens are equal before the law. The law states the principles of sharia shall be the main sources of legislation. It contains language adopted from the pre-1967 criminal code of Jordanian rule that criminalizes “defaming religion,” with a maximum penalty of life in prison. Since 2007, the elected Palestinian Legislative Council, controlled by Hamas, has not convened. The Palestinian Constitutional Court dissolved the Palestinian Legislative Council in December 2018 and called for new elections. The President of the PA promulgates executive decrees that have legal authority.

There is no specified process by which religious groups gain official recognition; each religious group must negotiate its own bilateral relationship with the PA. The PA observes 19th-century status quo arrangements reached with Ottoman authorities, which recognize the presence and rights of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholic, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Armenian Catholic Churches. The PA also observes subsequent agreements that recognize the rights of the Episcopal (Anglican) Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Council of Local Evangelical Churches (a coalition of evangelical

Protestant churches present in the West Bank and Gaza). The PA recognizes the legal authority of these religious groups to adjudicate personal status matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Recognized religious groups may establish ecclesiastical courts to issue legally binding rulings on personal status and some property matters for members of their religious communities. The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs is administratively responsible for these family law issues.

Islamic or Christian religious courts handle legal matters relating to personal status, including inheritance, marriage, dowry, divorce, and child support. For Muslims, sharia determines personal status law, while various ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status matters for Christians. By law, members of one religious group may submit a personal status dispute to a different religious group for adjudication if the disputants agree it is appropriate to do so.

The PA maintains some unwritten understandings with churches that are not officially recognized, based on the basic principles of the status quo agreements, including with the Assemblies of God, Nazarene Church, and some evangelical Christian churches, which may operate freely. Some of these groups may perform some official functions, such as issuing marriage licenses. Churches not recognized by the PA generally must obtain special one-time permission from the PA to perform marriages or adjudicate personal status matters if these groups want the actions to be recognized by and registered with the PA. These churches may not proselytize.

By law, the PA provides financial support to Islamic institutions and places of worship. A PA religious committee also provides some financial support for Christian cultural activities.

In Jerusalem, the Israeli government provides separate public schools for Jewish and Arab children with instruction conducted in Hebrew and Arabic, respectively. For Jewish children, there are separate public schools available for religious and secular families. Individual families may choose a public school system for their children regardless of ethnicity or religious observance. Minors have the right to choose a public secular school instead of a religious school regardless of parental preference. By law, Israel provides the equivalent of public school funding to two systems of “recognized but not official” (a form of semiprivate) ultra-Orthodox religious schools affiliated with ultra-Orthodox political parties: the United Torah Judaism-affiliated Independent Education System and the Shas-affiliated Fountain of Torah Education System. Churches, however, receive only partial government

funding to operate “recognized but not official” schools. Palestinian residents in Jerusalem may send their children to one of these church schools or a private school operated by the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf; both include religious instruction. Some Israeli-funded public schools in Jerusalem use the PA curriculum.

Religious education is part of the curriculum for students in grades one through six in public schools the PA operates as well as in some Palestinian schools in Jerusalem that use the PA curriculum. There are separate courses on religion for Muslims and Christians. Students may choose which class to take but may not opt out of religion courses. Recognized churches operate private schools in the West Bank that include religious instruction. Private Islamic schools also operate in the West Bank.

Palestinian law provides that in the defunct Palestinian Legislative Council, six seats be allocated to Christian candidates, who also have the right to contest other seats. There are no seats reserved for members of any other religious group. A 2017 presidential decree requires that Christians head nine municipal councils in the West Bank (including Ramallah, Bethlehem, Birzeit, and Beit Jala) and establishes a Christian quota for representation on these councils and one additional municipal council.

PA land laws prohibit Palestinians from selling Palestinian-owned lands to “any man or judicial body corporation of Israeli citizenship, living in Israel or acting on its behalf.” While Israeli law does not authorize the Israel Land Authority, which administers the 93 percent of Israeli land in the public domain, to lease land to foreigners, in practice, foreigners have been allowed to lease if they could show they qualify as Jewish under the Law of Return.

Although the PA removed the religious affiliation category from Palestinian identity cards issued in 2014, older identity cards continue to circulate, listing the holder as either Muslim or Christian.

Israel’s Law of Citizenship and Entry, first passed in 2003 and renewed annually, explicitly prohibited residence status for non-Jewish Iranians, Iraqis, Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, including those who are spouses of Israeli residents or citizens, unless the Israeli Ministry of Interior (MOI) makes a special determination, usually on humanitarian grounds.

The Jordanian Waqf administers Islamic courts in Jerusalem for Muslim residents, with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in Jordan having appellate authority.

There is no Israeli legal requirement regarding personal observance or nonobservance of the Jewish Sabbath (Shabbat) from sunset on Fridays until sunset on Saturdays and on Jewish holidays. The law, however, declares in the context of labor rights that Shabbat and Jewish holidays are national days of rest, while permitting non-Jewish workers alternate days of rest. The law criminalizes (up to one month imprisonment) employers who open their businesses and employ Jews on Shabbat, except those who are self-employed. There are exceptions for essential infrastructure and the hospitality, culture, and recreation industries. The law instructs the Israeli Minister of Labor and Welfare to take into account “Israel’s tradition,” among other factors, when considering whether to approve permits to work on Shabbat. The law prohibits discrimination against workers who refuse, based on their religion and regardless of whether they are religiously observant, to work on their day of rest.

Israeli law states public transportation operated and funded by the national government may not operate on Shabbat, with exceptions for vehicles bringing passengers to hospitals, remote localities, and non-Jewish localities and for vehicles essential to public security or maintaining public transportation services.

Government Practices

Because religion and ethnicity or nationality are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

On September 10, Israeli police temporarily closed off all entrances to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount after a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem attempted to stab an Israeli Border Police officer. Police shot the suspect, who later died of his wounds.

Later in September, a Palestinian woman attempted to stab police officers outside the Chain Gate to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and police shot and killed her.

On November 17, a 16-year-old Palestinian stabbed two Israeli Border Police officers in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, and a civilian shot and killed him.

On December 19, a 20-year-old Palestinian attempted to stab two ultra-Orthodox Jews in a parking lot near the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem and fled the scene. Israeli police later arrested the attacker, and no injuries were reported.

On November 21, a Palestinian teacher shot and killed an Israeli tour guide and wounded four others with an automatic weapon near the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem. The U.S.-designated terrorist group Hamas said the gunman was a senior member of its movement in East Jerusalem. Security officials shot and killed the attacker immediately after the assault.

On December 4, Israeli police shot and killed a Palestinian after he stabbed and wounded an ultra-Orthodox Jew near the Damascus Gate just outside Jerusalem's Old City. Israeli police released surveillance video in which the attacker could be seen stabbing the Jewish man and then trying to stab a Border Police officer before being shot and falling to the ground. The *Religion News Service* reported that a widely circulated video filmed by a bystander appeared to show an officer from Israel's paramilitary Border Police shooting the attacker when he was already lying on the ground, and another appeared to show police with guns drawn preventing medics from reaching him. The United Nations' Human Rights Office, PA officials, some Joint List and Meretz members of the Knesset (MKs), and Israeli and Palestinian human rights groups such as B'Tselem and Al-Haq described the police shooting as an extrajudicial execution. Israeli investigators cleared the officers of any wrongdoing. Magen David Adom, the Israeli emergency medical service, said it treated an ultra-Orthodox man in his 20s who was stabbed. Police identified the attacker as a 25-year-old from Salfit in the West Bank.

On December 18, Israeli Border Police arrested a 65-year-old Palestinian woman for the stabbing of an Israeli man near a checkpoint close to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron.

On October 20, the trial of an Israeli Jewish minor, accused in the 2018 killing of a Palestinian woman, Aysha al-Rabi, a resident of Bidya village, began at the Central District Court in Lod. Prosecutors accused the minor, then 17, of throwing a two-kilogram (4.4 pound) stone through al-Rabi's car windshield "with the intent of using it to harm Arab passengers out of an ideological motive of racism and hostility toward Arabs." In 2019, authorities arrested and later released four other suspects who, like the defendant, were yeshiva students from the settlement of Rehelim. According to press reporting, the prosecution linked the defendant's DNA to the stone that caused al-Rabi's death and also linked him to Kahanism, which *Haaretz* described as a "far-right anti-Arab ideology inspired by Rabbi Meir

Kahane.” In January, authorities stated that the stone throwing that killed al-Rabi, a mother of eight, was a terror attack but declined to recognize her as a victim of terrorism. Press reports said that authorities said the decision was reached because al-Rabi was not an Israeli citizen and the killing occurred outside Israel's recognized borders. At year's end, the trial was continuing and the accused remained under supervised house arrest.

Clashes broke out in April and May with “Day of Rage” demonstrations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem against Israeli actions at Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The Palestinian National and Islamic Factions in the West Bank called on Palestinians across West Bank cities, villages, and refugee camps to participate in a “Day of Rage” on May 11 to protest actions by Israeli security forces, and Israelis living in East Jerusalem against Palestinians at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound and in Sheikh Jarrah.

According to press and NGO monitors, multiple events related to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount contributed, along with other factors, to escalations resulting in unrest and conflict across Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. On April 13 on the evening of the first day of Ramadan, media and Waqf officials reported that Israeli National Police entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and disconnected loudspeakers used for the call to prayer to avoid disrupting an official Memorial Day service for fallen soldiers attended by then Israeli President Rivlin in the adjacent Western Wall square. The incident was condemned by PA officials as a “hate crime.”

On June 17, the *New York Times* reported that the government charged a police officer, whose name was not released, with manslaughter in the 2020 killing of Iyad Halak, an autistic Palestinian man, in Jerusalem's Old City. Following an investigation, the Ministry of Justice said that Halak had not posed any danger to police. At Halak's funeral, the press reported that mourners chanted, “Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews, the army of [the Prophet] Mohammed will return,” a taunt referring to the seventh century Muslim massacre and expulsion of the Jews of Khaybar.

During the last Friday of Ramadan on May 7, Israeli police entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and al-Aqsa Mosque using teargas, stun grenades, and rubber tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians who were throwing rocks. Media reported that in the aftermath, Palestinians stockpiled stones in the compound in anticipation of confrontations with police and far-right Israeli nationalists planning to march through the Old City. On May 10, Israeli police entered the compound

again and used stun grenades, teargas, and rubber tipped bullets to disperse Palestinians. The Palestinian Red Crescent stated that more than 300 individuals were injured. In an attempt to ease tensions and reduce potential for clashes, Israeli police temporarily barred non-Muslims from visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

According to the *Jerusalem Post*, on December 24, PA security forces used tear gas and batons to disperse more than 50 Palestinians, some armed with Molotov cocktails, who were attempting to march to Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, in Area A of the West Bank, a site of religious significance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. On December 26, more than 200 Palestinians tried to march on the shrine, but PA authorities had cordoned off the area and prevented the demonstrators from reaching the site. Individuals that the newspaper identified as "activists" said that these attempts to set fire to the building were intended as a response to "settler crimes" against Palestinians. The PA security forces stated that they received "clear and firm" instructions to protect the tomb.

On January 10, Israeli Border Police arrested a Palestinian teenager after he threw a Molotov cocktail at Rachel's Tomb, a Bethlehem shrine of religious significance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims under Israeli Jurisdiction in Area C. During unrest in April, police and media reported that dozens of youths threw stones and Molotov cocktails at the shrine. The shrine remained separated from the West Bank by a barrier built during the 2000-2005 Second Intifada, and Palestinians were able to access it only if permitted by Israeli authorities. Residents and citizens of Israel continued to have relatively unimpeded access. Israeli police closed the site to all visitors on Saturdays for the Jewish Sabbath (Shabbat). In October, Palestinian demonstrators sporadically clashed over several days with the INP after the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority began landscaping work on public land adjacent to the Islamic al-Yusufiya Cemetery in East Jerusalem and unearthed human remains in a shallow grave. During demonstrations against the construction work, Palestinian protestors reportedly chanted, "Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews, the army of [the Prophet] Mohammed will return." The cemetery, which is hundreds of years old, is affiliated with the Jordanian Waqf. Multiple graves and headstones are located in the disputed area adjacent to the cemetery, some dating from Jordanian control of Jerusalem and others allegedly used more recently and without authorization.

According to an October 11 report in *Haaretz*, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority said, "This territory [adjacent to the al-Yusufiya Cemetery] is a national park and open public space, outside the Muslim cemetery. The Muslim Waqf,

unlawfully and in violation of court orders, placed several graves there. During works with the Jerusalem Development Authority to develop the open public space, a shallow dig was uncovered with several bones in it. The matter is being investigated. The works at the site are ongoing under court orders.” On October 17, the Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court rejected requests submitted by the Committee for the Care of Islamic Cemeteries in Jerusalem to suspend bulldozing and exhuming graves. However, the court restricted construction activity to only include light work, such as covering ground, placing grids, and gardening, and prohibited demolition, excavation, casting, or drilling. Authorities did not allow construction that would affect any graves at the site. On October 28, Israeli authorities fenced the walls surrounding area and installed surveillance cameras. On October 29, the PA President’s advisor for religious and Islamic affairs described the bulldozing as an ongoing crime against the cemetery, while the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem stated, “No tomb was damaged during the works, and there is no intention to displace any grave, even if built illegally.”

In general, NGOs, religious institutions, and media continued to state that arrests of Israelis in religiously motivated crimes against Palestinians rarely led to indictments and convictions. Palestinians stated that they faced procedural difficulties in filing complaints with Israeli police, who are located at stations within settlements or at military-run liaison offices outside those settlements. Data from the NGO Tag Meir, which tracks hate crimes, and media reports indicated in recent years Israeli authorities had indicted few suspects in attacks on religious sites.

Israeli government officials made public statements against “Israeli extremists’ attacks” on Palestinians and made efforts to enhance law enforcement in the West Bank, including through task forces, increased funding, and hiring additional staff members. According to *Haaretz*, on December 13, Minister of Public Security Omer Bar-Lev said the government viewed settler violence “severely” and it was taking steps to address the issue, including increasing police in the West Bank and providing clearer instructions to the IDF on how to deal with attacks by Jews on Palestinians. The report stated that Minister of Defense Benjamin Gantz had promised to increase enforcement against such attacks, which the newspaper said had increased 150 percent from 2019. Other political leaders criticized Bar-Lev. Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked said, “The settlers are the salt of the earth. The violence that is shocking is the dozens of cases of stone-throwing and beatings of the Jews that happen daily... with the encouragement and support of the Palestinian Authority.” Minister of Religious Affairs Matan Kahana said, “It is sad

to see a security man rich in experience and years get such a false and distorted narrative.”

According to a December 15 report by the *Times of Israel*, security officials said that the year saw a drastic spike in violence by what they termed Jewish extremists in the West Bank. According to the *Times of Israel*, in 2020, the Shin Bet internal security service registered 272 violent incidents in the West Bank; through the middle of December, the agency recorded 397. On the same day, *Haaretz* reported that, according to government figures, there were 135 stone-throwing incidents targeting Palestinians during the year, up from 90 in 2019, and 250 other violent incidents, up from 100 in 2019. The newspaper also reported that violence against the Israeli security services also rose, from 50 incidents in 2019 to 60 in 2021.

In a fact sheet reviewing the years 2005-2021 released in December, the Israeli NGO Yesh Din stated, “The State of Israel is evading its duty to protect Palestinians in the West Bank from Israelis who seek to harm them. Long-term monitoring of the outcomes of investigations into ideological offenses committed by Israelis shows that Israeli law enforcement agencies leave Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories defenseless to attacks and harassment perpetrated by Israeli settlers.” According to Yesh Din statistics, Israeli police failed to make arrests in the investigation of 81 percent of the files opened between 2005 and 2021, and 92 percent of all investigation files were closed without an indictment.

Attacks in the West Bank on Palestinians by Israeli citizens, some of whom asserted their right to settle in what they stated was the historic Jewish homeland of Judea and Samaria, continued, as well as Palestinian attacks on settlers. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported 496 attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem during the year, including 370 attacks that resulted in property damage and 126 attacks that resulted in casualties, three of which were fatal. According to UN monitors, this was the highest reported level of settler-related violence since UNOCHA began recording incidents in 2005 and represented a 40 percent increase in the number of incidents, compared with 2020. Comparable to the UN, the IDF recorded 446 incidents of settler violence during the year. UNOCHA updated its metrics to incorporate more information from civil society about violence against Israelis. During the year, “in the context of the occupation and conflict,” UNOCHA estimated that there were 82 Palestinian fatalities and 16,421 Palestinians injured and three Israeli fatalities and 146 Israelis injured in West Bank violence, including in East Jerusalem. The Israeli government said that

UNOCHA did not provide information about actions by Hamas in its public statistics and did not fully cover attacks targeting Israelis.

The Israeli government said it thwarted 270 “significant attacks” in the West Bank. During the year, according to the Israeli government, there were 7,153 cases of “hostile destructive activity” in the West Bank and Gaza which included stone-throwing, Molotov cocktails, shootings, stabbings, and assaults with vehicles. Of these activities, 4,417 were missiles fired from the Gaza Strip during May. The Israeli police recorded more than 2,400 cases of Molotov cocktails and stone-throwing in Jerusalem. The Israeli government said that during the year, 19 Israeli citizens and residents in Israel lost their lives following these attacks, and more than 3,000 were injured.

The government of Israel continued to discourage Israeli citizens in unofficial capacities from traveling to the parts of the West Bank under the civil and security control of the PA (Area A), with large road signs warning Israelis against entering these areas and stating it was dangerous for Israelis and against Israeli law to do so. Significant numbers of Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel, and some Jewish and other Israelis, chose to privately visit Area A without repercussions, according to media and individuals who visited. Media reported that while these restrictions in general prevented Jewish Israelis from visiting numerous Jewish religious sites, the IDF provided special security escorts for Jews to visit religious sites in Area A under Palestinian control, particularly Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus and the Shalom al Israel Synagogue in Jericho. Some Jewish religious leaders said the Israeli government policy limiting travel to parts of the West Bank prevented Jewish Israelis from freely visiting several religious sites in the West Bank including Joseph’s Tomb, because they were denied the opportunity to visit the site on unscheduled occasions or in larger numbers than permitted through IDF coordination. IDF officials said requirements to coordinate Jewish visits to Joseph’s Tomb were necessary to ensure Jewish-Israelis’ safety. The Israeli government said that Jewish worshippers could only visit Areas A and B of the West Bank with the protection of the IDF and that the PA was not fulfilling its commitments under the Oslo Accords to ensure freedom of religion for Jewish worshippers in these areas. Palestinian and Israeli security forces coordinated some visits by Jewish groups to PA-controlled areas within the West Bank, which generally took place at night to limit the chance of confrontations with Palestinians who opposed the visit.

Palestinians at times violently protested when Jewish groups visited holy sites in areas in the West Bank under Palestinian control, where freedom of access was

guaranteed by the PA in the Oslo Accords, particularly Joseph's Tomb in Nablus (located in Area A). On September 26, Palestinian protesters attacked buses carrying approximately 500 Jewish worshipers traveling to the site, resulting in minor injuries to two Israeli soldiers escorting the convoy. According to police, the protestors used live fire, stones, and homemade explosive devices. The Israeli government said the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) facilitated seven visits to the site during the year.

On November 2, according to the *Jerusalem Post*, which cited Palestinian media, Palestinians and Israeli security forces clashed in the vicinity of Joseph's Tomb. The violence involved gunfire from both sides. Palestinian rioters placed burning tires in the middle of streets in the city to impede Israeli forces and Jewish visitors who were set to visit Joseph's Tomb later that night.

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs previously stated that Israeli officials, including high-ranking politicians and senior officials from law enforcement bodies, had declared an unequivocal zero-tolerance policy towards the phenomenon of “price tag” offenses committed by Israeli settlers against Palestinians. The Nationalistic Motivated Crimes Unit of the Judea and Samaria Police District of the INP was tasked with preventing and investigating ideologically based offenses in the West Bank and with supporting other police districts in the investigation of such crimes. The Israeli government maintained an interagency team overseeing law enforcement efforts in the West Bank related to incitement, “violent uprisings,” and “ideological crimes.”

The Israeli government continued to allow controlled access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and said freedom of worship at the site was a supreme value. The government expressed continued support for the post-1967 status quo pertaining to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount to allow non-Muslim visitors but prohibit non-Islamic worship on the compound, while stating that Israel respected Jordan's “special role” at the site, as reflected in the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty. The Waqf said that Israeli authorities continued to interfere in the Waqf's administration of the site, including delaying longstanding maintenance and restoration work. Israeli officials and activists again stated the Waqf sometimes attempted to conduct repairs without coordinating with Israeli authorities. In addition to the police banning individual Waqf staff members from the site, the Waqf said that it had a reduced capacity to administer the site because Israeli authorities refused to grant permits to new staff hired to work there, leaving the Waqf seriously understaffed.

Israeli police continued to be responsible for security at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, with police officers stationed both inside the site and at entrances. Police conducted routine patrols on the outdoor plaza and inside buildings on the site and regulated pedestrian traffic exiting and entering the site. Israeli police continued to maintain exclusive control of the Mughrabi Gate entrance, through which non-Muslims may enter the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site, and allowed visitors through the gate during set hours. Police sometimes restricted this access, citing security concerns.

In April at the beginning of Ramadan, Israeli authorities restricted the number of persons allowed to enter al-Aqsa Mosque to 10,000 vaccinated Palestinians entering from the West Bank because of “high morbidity rates” from coronavirus in the West Bank. Israeli military authorities said the measures were being taken to allow freedom of worship and religion, and also to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the area.

According to local media, some Jewish groups performed religious acts such as prayers and prostration on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount despite the ban on non-Islamic prayer. The Israeli government reiterated that overt non-Islamic prayer was not allowed on the grounds of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. NGOs, media, and Jewish Temple Mount advocacy groups continued to report that in practice, police generally allowed discreet non-Muslim prayer on the site. The news website Al-Monitor reported in October that although the country’s two chief rabbis repeatedly said Jews were not to set foot in the Temple Mount out of concern they could inadvertently step into an area which, in Jewish law, it was forbidden to enter unless one was ritually pure. In recent years, some Jews had entered the mosque and tried to offer prayers. In August, the *New York Times* reported that Rabbi Yehuda Glick, whom the newspaper described as a “right-wing former lawmaker,” led “efforts to change the status quo for years” and said that Glick livestreamed his prayers from the site. The report said that although the government officially allowed non-Muslims to visit the site each morning on the condition that they did not pray there, “In reality, dozens of Jews now openly pray every day [at the site]... and their Israeli police escorts no longer attempt stop them.” The *New York Times* reported that Glick and activists ultimately sought to build a third Jewish Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock, an idea that Azzam Khatib, the deputy chairman of the Waqf council, said “will lead to a civil war.” According to the Religion News Service, one group known as the Temple Institute hoped to build a third temple where one of the al-Aqsa complex’s three mosques now stands and to reinstate ritual animal sacrifices. The group’s website reported that it was working with an architect on a design. In September, al-

Monitor reported, “In the past, doing so [praying out loud or making movements of genuflection], could lead to the person being detained and ejected from the site, as Jews are not allowed to pray there. But more recently, a warning is reportedly more common. Last July Israel’s Channel 12 filmed Jews praying silently at the site while police officers watched.” Police continued to screen non-Muslims for religious articles. Police allowed Jewish male visitors who were visibly wearing a kippah and *tzitzit* (fringes), and those who wished to enter the site barefoot (in accordance with interpretations of *halacha*, Jewish religious law) to enter with a police escort.

On October 5, the Jerusalem Magistrate Court ruled that “silent Jewish prayer” on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount did not violate existing police rules on the site. The ruling was in response to a case involving a 15-day administrative restraining order against a man whom police had removed from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount on September 29 on grounds that he disturbed public order by engaging in Jewish prayer. The judge ruled that silent prayer “does not in itself violate police instructions” that prohibit “external and overt” non-Muslim prayer on the site. Al-Monitor said the Magistrate’s Court’s ruling was “unprecedented” and “seem[ed] to question the status quo that has prevailed over the site.” The Jerusalem District Court overturned the lower court’s ruling on October 8, ruling that the INP had acted “within reason,” and “the fact that there was someone who observed [him] pray is evidence that his prayer was overt.” Minister of Public Security Bar-Lev supported the appeal, saying “a change in the status quo will endanger public security and could cause a flare-up.” The Waqf said the lower court’s ruling was “a flagrant violation” of the complex’s sanctity and a “clear provocation” for Muslims.

On July 17, during the Jewish holiday of Tisha B’Av, a day of fasting when Jews commemorate the destruction of the temples, activists of Liba Yehudit, a national-ultra-Orthodox NGO described by Haaretz as “ultra-extreme,” put up a makeshift partition in the middle of the egalitarian prayer area of the Western Wall Plaza, intended to divide those praying by gender, and yelled and cursed to disrupt those praying there for the holiday. According to Haaretz, “hundreds of right-wing, Orthodox Jews, mostly teenagers” disrupted the reading of the Book of Lamentations by a female member of the Conservative movement, that organized the annual event. Haaretz described Liba as “an extreme right-wing group, which has been trying to prevent the non-Orthodox from having access to a new and revamped prayer plaza at the southern end of the site.”

On July 18, on Tisha B'Av, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett tweeted thanks to the Public Security Minister and the Israel Police Inspector General for “maintaining freedom of worship for Jews on the Mount.” On November 19, the Prime Minister’s Office said that the government’s policy regarding the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, which prohibits non-Islamic worship, had not changed and what Bennett actually meant was that both Jews and Muslims had “freedom of visitation rights.”

The Waqf continued to restrict non-Muslims who visited the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount from entering the Dome of the Rock and other buildings dedicated for Islamic worship, including the al-Aqsa Mosque, unless they were participating in a Waqf-sponsored visit. It also lodged objections with Israeli police concerning non-Muslim visitors wearing religious symbols or religious clothing. Israeli police sometimes acted upon these objections.

Waqf officials repeated previous years’ complaints concerning their lack of control of access to the site. The Waqf objected to non-Muslims praying or performing religious acts on the site and to individuals whom they perceived to be dressed immodestly or who caused disturbances, but they lacked authority to remove such persons from the site. Waqf officials stated Israeli police did not coordinate with the Waqf on decisions regarding entry and barring of Muslim and non-Muslim visitors to the site. Waqf employees remained stationed inside each gate and on the plaza, but Waqf officials exercised only limited oversight. Throughout the year, the government extended visiting hours in the afternoon by 30 minutes to prevent large groups forming at the entrance for non-Muslims, in accordance with COVID-19 health restrictions.

The PA Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Muhammad Ahmad Hussein, issued a fatwa denying access to the site to Muslims from countries that established diplomatic relations with Israel, but the Jordanian Waqf rejected the fatwa. The Waqf stated that Muslim visitors from those countries were brought by Israeli officials without coordination with the Waqf. The government welcomed these visits as a positive outcome of normalization and as demonstrating freedom of religion.

Many Jewish religious leaders, including Shmuel Rabinovitch, the government-appointed Rabbi of the Western Wall and the Holy Sites of Israel, continued to say Jewish law prohibited Jews from entering the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for reasons of ritual purity. Some Jewish religious leaders, Knesset members, and activists called for reversing the policy of banning non-Islamic prayer at the site to provide equal religious freedom for all visitors.

The government continued to allow Knesset members and ministers to visit the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site. Members of the Knesset were required to inform the Knesset guard at least 24 hours prior to the visit to allow for coordination with the police.

At the main Western Wall Plaza, the place of worship nearest the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and Judaism's holiest site, the government continued to prohibit the performance of any "religious ceremony that is not in accordance with the customs of the place, [or] which harms the feelings of the public towards the place." Authorities interpreted this prohibition to include mixed-gender Jewish prayer services, over the objections of the Jewish Conservative and Reform movements. The organization Women of the Wall, whose membership is composed of mostly Reform and Conservative Jewish women and whose goal is to secure the official right for women to pray at the Western Wall, stated that their monthly presence at the wall for more than 30 years had established them as part of the "customs of the place."

Authorities continued to prohibit visitors from bringing private Torah scrolls to the main Western Wall Plaza and women from accessing the public Torah scrolls or giving priestly blessings at the site. Authorities, however, permitted women to pray with *tefillin* and prayer shawls pursuant to a 2013 Jerusalem District Court ruling stating it was illegal to arrest or fine them for such actions. On several occasions, MK Gilad Kariv (Labor) used his parliamentary immunity to bring Torah scrolls for the use of Women of the Wall and referred to the prohibition as illegal.

Within COVID-19 limitations, authorities allowed Women of the Wall to hold its monthly service in a barricaded portion of the women's area of the main Western Wall Plaza. Ultra-Orthodox protesters harassed and attacked Women of the Wall members repeatedly during their monthly services by throwing coffee or bottles at them, screaming, cursing, blowing whistles, or pushing them.

Representatives of Women of the Wall complained of a lack of effort by police or ushers from the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, which administers the main Western Wall Plaza and which is ultra-Orthodox-run, to intervene when ultra-Orthodox women and men disrupted their monthly prayer service with screaming, whistling, and pushing. Ahead of a November service held by Women of the Wall, tension rose when former Shas MK Aryeh Deri called MKs and the public to attend the service and prevent MK Kariv from bringing Torah scrolls to the women's section, which Deri said would be a "desecration of the Western Wall."

The Western Wall Heritage Fund announced it would not take responsibility for maintaining public order at the plaza, leading to increased INP presence on November 5. With President Isaac Herzog's intervention, and his promise to hold a meeting on pluralistic prayer at the Western Wall, most MKs refrained from attending the service at the Western Wall on November 5. MK Ben Gvir of the Religious Zionist Party still attended to protest against the Women of the Wall, expressing outrage that police confronted protesters who attempted to reach the women who were conducting services at the site. According to the NGO Israel Religion and Action Center (IRAC), INP and the Western Wall Heritage Fund guards confronted Women of the Wall during the service. The President held a meeting on pluralistic prayer at the Western Wall on December 1.

A 2017 petition to the Supreme Court by Women of the Wall asking that ushers and police prevent disruption of their services was pending at year's end.

Authorities continued to allow use of a temporary platform south of the Mughrabi Bridge and adjacent to the Western Wall, but not visible from the main Western Wall Plaza, for non-Orthodox "egalitarian" (mixed gender) Jewish prayers. Authorities designated the platform for members of the Conservative and Reform movements of Judaism, including for religious ceremonies such as bar and bat mitzvahs. On November 4, the Supreme Court criticized the government for its lack of progress upgrading the area to a more permanent egalitarian prayer space. On December 7, the government told the Supreme Court it intended to continue to upgrade the egalitarian plaza but did not mention steps towards further equality and recognition included in the 2016 Western Wall Agreement. The 2016 agreement was a compromise between Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities, which the government "froze" in 2017, that included the construction of a permanent plaza for mixed-gender prayer managed by non-Orthodox groups, and a merged entry to all prayer spaces adjacent to the Western Wall. The government requested to update the court on developments within six months.

The Supreme Court case was a combination of lawsuits against the government, some dating back to 2013, that would allow prayer for all religious streams of Judaism at the Western Wall. It resulted in the 2016 Western Wall Agreement. In 2018, a special government committee approved expansion of the temporary platform for members of the Conservative and Reform movements. The non-Orthodox Jewish movements stated that upgrading the prayer space alone would not fulfill their 2016 agreement with the government. In addition, observers stated that scaffolding prevented visitors from touching the sacred wall in the egalitarian prayer space since a rock fell there in 2018. Over the same period, the Western

Wall Heritage Foundation managed large construction projects in the main plaza, making routine inspections for loose rocks at the main plaza without blocking access to the wall.

On September 2, the Supreme Court rejected a petition by female rabbis demanding structural improvements to prevent collapse of the Mughrabi Bridge (the only entrance for non-Muslims to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, that crosses over the women's section of the main Western Wall Plaza); the court accepted the state's argument that it was taking action to restore the wooden beams on metal bases which support the bridge. The court added, "in a place like the Temple Mount, where any change could lead to political or security turbulence, the decision of state institutions to not change the existing situation on the ground is a practical and reasonable decision in which there is no room to intervene."

In November and December, press reported that despite the government's declared intention to create an egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall, the proposal appeared to be losing support within the ruling coalition. Minister of Religious Affairs Kahana said the vast majority of Jews in Israel were Orthodox and that it would not be right to give control of parts of the space to the Conservative and Reform streams. Kahana said the issue "must be studied, to see how we resolve the [religious] wars." Other members of the cabinet continued to publicly support the plan. According to *Haaretz*, the two key components of the proposal were creating a new and enhanced space on the southern side of the Western Wall for egalitarian prayer and providing official recognition to the Conservative and Reform movements at the site. The newspaper reported that "the disagreements [were] about that second component." Under the government's original plan, a new authority would have been created to govern the egalitarian space and representatives of the Reform and Conservative movements would sit on its board. However, *Haaretz* reported that two Orthodox members of the cabinet, Kahana and Housing Minister Ze'ev Elkin, found this unacceptable and suggested that the egalitarian prayer space continue to operate under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office or, alternatively, be handed over for supervision to the Jewish Agency. Leaders of the non-Orthodox movements rejected that plan. At year's end, the government had taken no action to move the proposed changes forward.

The Jordanian Waqf in Jerusalem administered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, while the Jordanian Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Holy Places supported maintenance and salary of the Waqf staff in Jerusalem. The issue of the use of the Gate of Mercy (Bab al-Rahma), a building within the Haram al-Sharif/Temple that was reopened by the Waqf in 2019 after it had been closed since 2003, remained

unresolved. The Israeli government stated it regarded the reopening as a violation of the status quo. An Israeli court extended a court order issued in July 2020 to close the site, but by year's end the INP had not enforced the order. The Waqf said it did not recognize the authority of Israeli courts over the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Throughout the year, Muslim worshippers could generally enter the site, although Israeli police sometimes conducted security searches there.

Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site, including Jewish activists believed to have violated the status quo understanding prohibiting non-Islamic prayer, Muslims believed to have verbally harassed or acted violently against non-Muslim visitors to the site or incited others to violence, and public figures whose presence authorities feared would inflame tensions. Banned individuals included Waqf guards and administrative and maintenance staff and imams delivering sermons at the site, as well as prominent activists. The Israeli government said that some individuals – including both Muslims and Jews – were prevented access to the site during the year because they could have caused disturbances and riots. The government said Israeli security prevented access to the site for 389 Muslims and 99 Jews during 2021 due to previous incidents of public disorder at the site, including assaulting or interfering with police, or based on intelligence information. The Wadi Hilweh Information Center reported that Israeli authorities banned 357 individuals from the site during the year.

While the government stated it was rare for any individual to be barred entry to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, human rights and civil society organizations said Israeli authorities banned some Palestinian residents in the occupied territories, and Arab/Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel from the site. Palestinian civil society organizations said that, in a practice that began in 2020, police continued to check the identify cards of individuals entering the Old City to visit the site for Friday prayers and would bar from entry those with West Bank identity cards and return them to the West Bank. In May, media reported that Israeli police blocked several buses of Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel outside of Jerusalem from visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Police said they stopped the buses because they had intelligence indicating some of the passengers were planning to riot at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

Media reported that Israeli authorities barred Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, former imam of al-Aqsa Mosque, former Palestinian Grand Mufti, and current head of the private Higher Islamic Council in Jerusalem, from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for several months due to charges of incitement. In March, government security

officials briefly detained Sabri before releasing him. Sabri said that police arrested him for planning to take part in the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's night journey to Jerusalem and ascension to heaven. He said authorities accused him of violating a court decision that closed the Bab al-Rahma/Gate of Mercy. On October 10, police again summoned Sabri for questioning; before his interrogation, he told media outlets that he expected to be asked about decisions by Israeli courts allowing Jewish prayer at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Palestinian media reported Israel banned Sabri for a week after the interrogation. In November, Israeli authorities detained Sheikh Najeh Bakirat, Deputy Director-General of the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, for four days and subsequently banned him from entering the site for 20 days and from entering the West Bank for 30 days.

Human rights and civil society organizations said Israeli authorities at times also restricted some Muslims from entering the site based on gender and age. Israeli authorities have not issued permits for Gazans to visit the site during Islamic holidays since 2017, when it issued several hundred permits for Gazans during Ramadan, according to UN reports. Muslims who were Israeli citizens, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, or foreigners already present in Israel did not need permits to visit the site.

The Waqf also said that Israeli authorities continued to interfere in the Waqf's administration of the site, including delaying longstanding maintenance and restoration work. Israeli officials and activists again stated the Waqf sometimes attempted to conduct repairs without coordinating with Israeli authorities. In addition to the police banning of individual Waqf staff members, the Waqf said that it had a reduced capacity to administer the site because Israeli authorities refused to grant permits to new staff hired to work at the site, leaving the Waqf seriously understaffed.

Israel only allowed Palestinians who had obtained certification of their COVID-19 vaccination or a certificate of COVID-19 recovery to enter Israel, a restriction which applied also to Palestinian Muslims or Christians coming from the West Bank for religious purposes.

The IDF continued periodically to limit access to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, a site of significance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims as the tomb of Abraham. The Israeli government said there were longstanding entry arrangements which should not be considered as restricting access. Palestinian leaders continued in statements to local media to oppose the IDF's control of access, citing Oslo Accords-era agreements that gave Israel and the PA shared

responsibilities for the site, although Israel retained full security responsibility for it; the Oslo Accords and 1997 Hebron Accords gave “civil powers and responsibilities” including “planning authority” for the site to the Hebron Municipality. Some Muslim leaders publicly rejected a Jewish connection to the site.

The IDF again restricted Muslim access to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs during 10 days corresponding to Jewish holidays and Jewish access during 10 days corresponding to Islamic holidays. The IDF restricted Muslims to one entry point, which was staffed by soldiers with metal detectors, while granting Jews access via several entry points. Citing security concerns, the IDF periodically closed roads approaching the site and, since 2001, had permanently closed Shuhada Street, the former main Hebron market and one of the main streets leading to the holy site, to Palestinian-owned vehicles. The government said the closure was done to prevent confrontations. Both Muslims and Jews were able to pray at the site simultaneously in separate spaces, a physical separation that was instituted by the IDF in November 1994 following an attack earlier in the year by an Israeli that killed 29 Palestinians. Israeli authorities continued to implement frequent bans on the Islamic call to prayer from the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs, stating the government acted upon requests by Jewish religious leaders in Hebron in response to requests of Jewish worshippers at the site. The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs reported that Israel prevented calls to prayer at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs 525 times during the first 10 months of the year, including 59 times in March and 44 times in April, per Palestinian media. Passover was celebrated from March 27 to April 3.

In 2020, then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit approved a 2019 decision by Israel’s then Minister of Defense Naftali Bennett, shortly before Bennett left office, to bypass the Hebron municipality and expropriate land at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of Patriarchs in Hebron. The Israeli government stated it intended to renovate the site and establish elevators to make it accessible to persons with disabilities to “promote the rights of people with disabilities and allow access to religious sites for every population.” The Israeli government said it proceeded with the plan after multiple attempts to gain PA, Hebron municipality, and Waqf support for increased access to the site for persons with disabilities. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, “Hebron’s Jewish community and right-wing politicians and activists have long lobbied to make the site wheelchair accessible.” The paper stated that the only way that Jewish sanctuaries within the site could be reached is by climbing a long staircase.

On November 4, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected an appeal submitted by the PA Hebron municipality against the establishment of an elevator at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs. On June 10, Defense Minister Gantz approved the implementation of the elevator project as well as the building of a road to facilitate access to the site. On August 12, after some site preparation for the project had begun, the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs announced the closure of all other mosques in Hebron for Friday prayers on August 13 and asked Muslims to gather at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs to “denounce” the Israeli occupation. On August 13, Israeli security forces used stun grenades to disperse a large crowd of Muslim worshippers who gathered outside the mosque for Friday prayers in the protest. Jamal Abu Aram, director of the Hebron Waqf, told the Palestinian news agency *Ma’an* that the Waqf estimated the crowd to number from 15,000 to 20,000 persons.

On November 28, the first day of Hanukkah, President Herzog lit a menorah candle in the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs, and said, “The historical affinity of the Jewish people to Hebron, to the Cave of the Patriarchs, [and] to the heritage of our matriarchs and patriarchs is not in doubt. Recognition of this attachment must be beyond all controversy.” Herzog said, “In this holy space dedicated to all the sons of Abraham, we have to continue dreaming of peace, between all faiths and creeds in this land, and to condemn any hatred and violence.” The PA and the Hebron municipality said they viewed the shrine as exclusively Muslim. The PA Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Herzog’s visit was “a dangerous attempt to Judaize the site.” Palestinian and Israeli demonstrators protested in the center of Hebron during Herzog’s visit.

Israeli authorities and settlers, who were often armed, prevented access by Palestinians to several mosques in the West Bank located within Israeli settlements. Israeli authorities declared all legal settlements as restricted Israeli military zones. Palestinians were unable to visit them without Israeli government approval.

In December, Israeli Minister of Religious Affairs Kahana announced that the government would build seven of the 30 new synagogues included in his ministry’s budget in the West Bank. He also decided to earmark 25 percent of the ministry’s budget for the construction of *mikvehs* (Jewish ritual baths) to building mikvehs in the West Bank.

In March, the NGO Emek Shaveh and the Arab Culture Association petitioned the Supreme Court to end what they said was the discriminatory policy of the Ministry

of Jerusalem and Heritage in allocating budgetary outlays for work on heritage sites. The petition cited calls by the ministry that included criteria that excluded non-Jewish historical sites from qualifying for funding. In response, the ministry's legal advisor said that "the ministry was established with the aim of conserving the country's national and Zionist heritage." In August, the ministry formally responded to the pending petition, reiterated its view of its role, and stated that "other government ministries invest budgets also in minority heritage sites." The Attorney General supported this argument. At year's end, the Supreme Court had not ruled on the petition.

The Israeli NGO Machsom ("Checkpoint") Watch's website compared "freedom of worship and ritual at sites of heritage and religion" for Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank. According to Machsom Watch, Israeli Jews had "free access...at any site that [was] considered a heritage or sanctified site." The NGO said some of these sites were Palestinian and had "undergone 'Judaization'" while Palestinians were "denied access to numerous heritage and ritual sites" and "some such sites [were] appropriated by Jews or neglected and vandalized." In a 2020 report, Machsom Watch stated that the Israeli government had used three strategies to "erase" Muslim religious sites in the West Bank: enclosing sites within closed military zones, including sites in nature reserves; divesting shrines of their Islamic religious identity by opening them to the general public; and declining to recognize the site as having any religious significance in Islam. The NGO said Israeli authorities gave more weight to sites associated with Biblical prophets than to sites significant only to Muslims. Machsom Watch said Israeli authorities denied Palestinians any access to 13 sites in the West Bank that were of traditional Muslim heritage, worship, or prayer or that were important to multiple faiths. The NGO said some of these sites were dilapidated and frequently the object of vandalism by Israeli settlers.

The Israeli government said it coordinated access to the Prophet Samuel's Mosque during the year for 1,500 Palestinian residents of the Nebi Samuel and al-Khalaila villages. The site has both a mosque and synagogue and, with the villages, is located in the West Bank, but inside the Israeli barrier.

In August, Emek Shaveh reported that the government approved a plan for the development of the archaeological and holy site of the Prophet Samuel's Mosque, a site held sacred by Jews as the tomb of the Biblical prophet Samuel, which is inside an Israeli national park in the West Bank. The NGO said that the plan ignored the adjacent village of Nabi Samuel, which experienced a lack of new construction since its proposed master plans had not been approved and building

permits therefore could not be issued. Emek Shaveh said that the government had previously rejected a similar plan, following objections from residents of Nabi Samuel and from Emek Shaveh and another NGO, Bimkom. According to Emek Shaveh, although the site is considered holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, most visitors were Jewish worshippers. The Israeli government said the site had more than 270,000 visitors during the year, including Jews, Muslims, and tourists of other religions.

According to press reports, on November 24, shortly before the start of Hanukkah, Israel Nature and Parks Authority officials erected a large electric menorah on the roof of the Mosque of the Prophet Samuel. Israeli officials repositioned the menorah to the entrance of the synagogue after the local Palestinian population protested the installation. A local Palestinian leader said the Muslim community previously asked Israeli authorities for permission to light up a crescent on top of the mosque, but the request was denied. A senior official in the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs condemned the erection of the menorah as an “infringement upon the sanctity” of the site.

On February 24, the Supreme Court ordered the government to answer a series of questions by April 22 regarding its proposal to build an aerial cable car over a Karaite cemetery in Jerusalem’s Old City. This order was in response to three petitions which were filed by the Karaite community, the Emek Shaveh, and the NGO Israel Union for Environmental Defense, which the court considered in several sessions over the last three years. The court suspended work on the cable car project to examine why the project was approved through the National Infrastructure Committee, unlike other projects, which went through Jerusalem’s District and Planning Committee, a distinction that the court said deprived citizens of the opportunity to offer their opinions and submit reservations and objections. The justices also questioned the government’s designation of the cable car as a transportation rather than tourism project, and why the route could not be modified to avoid the Karaite community. During the year, the government continued to promote the establishment of a cable car route from the First Station cultural complex in Jerusalem to the Dung Gate of the Old City that would pass over the cemetery. According to the Karaite community, the cable car would desecrate the cemetery, thus preventing its further use. The government stated the cable car was meant to solve accessibility problems to holy sites such as the Western Wall, but some NGOs said the project was meant to specifically promote Jewish tourism in East Jerusalem and to reinforce Israel’s claims of sovereignty over the area. Despite a November 26 statement by Israeli Transportation Minister Merav Michaeli and a December 13 statement by Israeli Environmental Protection

Minister Tamar Zandberg against the project, the government told the Supreme Court at the end of December that it supported the construction of the gondola line.

The 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 journalistic, humanitarian, and NGO activities. The government stated that the barrier was needed for security reasons.

In May, the Jerusalem municipality opened a parking lot on property it had leased from the Armenian Church in 2020. In July, the Church signed a new contract with the Jerusalem municipality extending the lease for 99 years, and the municipality announced that a Jewish-Australian developer would construct a new hotel on the property. Palestinians widely criticized the Church for leasing the property to the municipality, including public statements by PA figures. PA Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Riyad Malki raised the transaction with his Armenian counterpart and asked for Armenian Foreign Ministry assistance in pressuring the Church to cancel the lease. Minister Malki characterized the deal as opening the door for "the gradual encroachment of Israel's settler-colonialism into the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem," and said it "risks accelerating the obliteration of the Palestinian, Muslim, and Christian character of Jerusalem."

The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs continued to provide imams with themes they were required to use in weekly Friday sermons in West Bank mosques and to prohibit them from broadcasting Quranic recitations from minarets prior to the call to prayer.

Unrecognized religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses faced a continued PA ban on proselytizing but stated they were able to conduct most other functions unhindered. Palestinian authorities generally recognized on a case-by-case basis personal status documents issued by unrecognized churches. The PA, however, continued to refuse to recognize personal status legal documents (e.g., marriage certificates) issued by some of these unrecognized churches, which the groups said made it difficult for them to register newborn children under their fathers' names or as children of married couples. Many unrecognized churches advised members with dual citizenship to marry or divorce abroad and to register the action officially in that location. Some converts to unrecognized Christian faiths had recognized churches with which they were previously affiliated perform their marriages and divorces. Members of some faith communities and faith-based organizations stated they viewed their need to do so as conflicting with their religious beliefs.

Religious organizations providing education, health care, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians in and around East Jerusalem continued to state that the physical barrier begun by Israel during the Second Intifada in 2003 impeded their work, particularly south of Jerusalem in West Bank Christian communities around Bethlehem. Clergy members stated the barrier and additional checkpoints restricted their movements between Jerusalem and West Bank churches and monasteries as well as the movement of congregants between their homes and places of worship. Christian leaders continued to state the barrier hindered Bethlehem-area Christians from reaching the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. They also said it made visits to Christian sites in Bethlehem difficult for Palestinian Christians who lived on the west side of the barrier. Foreign pilgrims and religious aid workers also reported difficulty or delays accessing Christian religious sites in the West Bank because of the barrier. The Israeli government previously stated it constructed the barrier as an act of self-defense and that it was highly effective in preventing terrorist attacks in Israel.

Christian expatriate workers in Israeli settlements complained that lack of public transportation on Saturdays prevented them from participating in religious activities and worship in Jerusalem.

The Israeli Ministry of Religious Services (MRS) listed 21 dedicated cemeteries in Israel and West Bank settlements for burial of persons the government defined as “lacking religion,” and 33 cemeteries for civil burial, but only three were available for use to the general public regardless of residence, and one had been full for several years. The state permitted other cemeteries located in agricultural localities to bury only “residents of the area.” This, according to the religious freedom and equal rights advocacy NGO Hiddush, left the majority of Israel’s population unable to exercise its right, as mandated by law, to be buried in accordance with secular or non-Orthodox religious views. The two MRS-administered cemeteries in West Bank settlements were available only for the burial of Israeli citizens. On September 12, the Supreme Court rejected a 2019 petition by Hiddush that demanded civil burial in agricultural localities for individuals who were not local residents and who did not have another alternative. According to the Israeli government, the existing issues regarding civil burial could not justify burial outside of place of residence. The court invited Hiddush to submit a new petition regarding a specific locality, rather than a general petition.

According to Brigham Young University’s Jerusalem Center, the Israeli government maintained an agreement with the Church of Jesus Christ stating that no member of the Church would “engage in proselytizing of any kind” within

Israel, the West Bank, or Gaza as a condition of its lease of land for its campus on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

In June, German NGO Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (GEI) released the findings from its European Union-commissioned review of PA curricula from 2017 and 2019 assessing the extent of inciteful content. The report found the curriculum included promotion of UNESCO standards for peace, tolerance, and nonviolence in educational material, but the report also highlighted the enduring presence of problematic content, including instances of antagonism toward Israel and the glorification of violence. The review praised the curriculum's focus on human rights and pluralism and elimination of some prior inciteful content, while noting other content still veered beyond a "narrative of [political] resistance" and including antisemitic references and language delegitimizing the State of Israel. It found "ambivalent – sometimes hostile – attitudes towards Jews and the characteristics they attribute to the Jewish people," noting "frequent use of negative attributions in relation to the Jewish people in, for example, textbook exercises [that] suggest[ed] a conscious perpetuation of anti-Jewish prejudice, especially when embedded within the current political context." The report also noted that GEI's overview of 18 textbooks released online for the academic year 2020/2021 included increased representation of female and Christian positions as well as "reduction in the text and images that have escalatory potential: including the alteration of a specific teaching unit that included antisemitic content by several significant changes of the narrative."

The Israeli curriculum monitoring NGO IMPACT-se stated the GEI report contained "omissions, obfuscations, and even apologetics for Jew-hate and violence." In a May update of its previous reviews of the curriculum used by Palestinian schools, IMPACT-se stated that the PA curriculum moved further from meeting UNESCO standards and that the newly published textbooks were found to be "more radical" than those previously published. According to the NGO, there is "a systematic insertion of violence, martyrdom and jihad across all grades and subjects." IMPACT-se's analysis cited examples of antisemitic tropes and the inclusion of violent wording in otherwise neutral subjects.

Consistent with UN practices globally, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA) used the same curriculum and textbooks as used by PA schools in the occupied territories. In recent years, UNRWA conducted reviews of new textbooks introduced by the PA to ensure they align with UN values.

While Israeli law does not authorize the Israel Land Authority (ILA), which administers the 93 percent of Israel in the public domain, to lease land to foreigners, in practice foreigners were allowed to lease if they could show they would qualify as Jewish under the Law of Return. This public land includes approximately 12.5 percent owned by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose statutes prohibit sale or lease of land to non-Jews. The application of ILA restrictions historically limited the ability of Muslim and Christian residents of Jerusalem who were not Israeli citizens to purchase property built on state land, including in parts of Jerusalem. In recent years, however, an increasing number of Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel in Jerusalem acquired property built on ILA-owned land. Arab/Palestinian citizens could participate in bids for JNF land, but sources stated that the ILA granted the JNF another parcel of land whenever an Arab/Palestinian citizen of Israel won a bid. Despite a 2018 Supreme Court ruling that the ILA Executive Council must have representation of an Arab, Druze, or Circassian member to prevent discrimination against non-Jews, there were no members from these groups on the council at year's end.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate continued its legal efforts to block the transfer of properties in Jerusalem's Old City to Ateret Cohanim, a Jewish organization that signed a 99-year lease for the properties in 2004. Courts previously ruled in favor of Ateret Cohanim, and in 2020, the district court ruled against reopening the case to hear new evidence brought forward by the Church. A Supreme Court hearing was set for 2022 to determine if the case should be reopened based upon the new evidence.

On December 12, 13 heads of Christian communities in Jerusalem issued a joint statement entitled, "The Current Threat to the Christian Presence in the Holy Land," that said, "Christians have become the target of frequent and sustained attacks by fringe radical groups. Since 2012 there have been countless incidents of physical and verbal assaults against priests and other clergy, attacks on Christian churches, with holy sites regularly vandalized and desecrated, and ongoing intimidation of local Christians who simply seek to worship freely and go about their daily lives. These tactics are being used by such radical groups in a systematic attempt to drive the Christian community out of Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land." The statement said, "The declared commitment of the Israeli government to uphold a safe and secure home for Christians in the Holy Land," but it added, "It is therefore a matter of grave concern when this national commitment is betrayed by the failure of local politicians, officials, and law enforcement agencies to curb the activities of radical groups who regularly intimidate local Christians, assault priests and clergy, and desecrate Holy Sites and

church properties.” The statement continued, “The principle that the spiritual and cultural character of Jerusalem’s distinct and historic quarters should be protected is already recognized in Israeli law with respect to the Jewish Quarter. Yet radical groups continue to acquire strategic property in the Christian Quarter, with the aim of diminishing the Christian presence, often using underhanded dealings and intimidation tactics to evict residents from their homes, dramatically decreasing the Christian presence, and further disrupting the historic pilgrim routes between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.”

Haaretz reported that the statement marked the beginning of a campaign that included a dedicated website and articles in the media. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the statements made by the Christian leaders were “baseless and distort the reality of the Christian community in Israel” and that the Christians’ joint statement “could lead to violence and bring harm to innocent people.” In an editorial, *Haaretz* stated, “The Christian leadership in Jerusalem may be exaggerating the sense of threat against them, to draft support from communities throughout the world... However, this does not justify the government’s irresponsible behavior toward the Christian public. The government must recognize that the Christian congregations have an important place in Jerusalem’s human mosaic. The government must pay attention to the needs and problems of Christian communities.”

On December 29, at an annual New Year’s reception for spiritual and lay leaders of Christian churches and communities, President Herzog affirmed his commitment to freedom of worship and religion in the country. Herzog said that each of the Christian groups was “a blessing and an integral part” of the country’s “mosaic.” He explicitly rejected all forms of racism, discrimination, and extremism as well as any threat to Christian communities in the country. Interior Minister Shaked also made remarks, saying that the new year offered an opportunity to build new bonds of friendship and cooperation among all religions.

In December, a ministerial-level team approved a proposal by Minister of Interior Shaked to exempt tourist groups that fell into the category of “Jewish tourism” from entry restrictions associated with the omicron variant of COVID-19. According to press, Christian organizations said the decision was unfair, especially given the impending Christmas holidays. According to a lead editorial in *Haaretz*, “This is a discriminatory exception, not to say a bigoted one.” In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said, “These unfounded allegations of discriminatory conduct are outrageous, false, and dangerous.”

In April, Al-Monitor reported that then Israeli Minister of Tourism Orit Farkash-Hacohen said that after the signing of the Abraham Accords normalizing relations between Israel and four Arab states, “Israel’s tourist branch began preparing for Muslim tourism. Senior ministry officials said the ministry was expecting tens of thousands of Muslim tourists in the upcoming months and that the ministry was mapping religious Muslim sites throughout the country.”

In a March 17 interview on Palestine TV, PA presidential advisor Mahmoud al-Habbash said, “When Theodor Herzl, the so-called ‘father of political Zionism,’ visited Palestine at the beginning of the twentieth century and saw that Palestine is [sic] inhabited, teeming with life, and brimming with a culture that has strong historical roots, he said, ‘Where will we establish our projected [state]? We must turn Palestine into a land with no people, by depopulating it.’” Al-Habbash said Herzl’s “purpose was to depopulate Palestine and bring in the Jews from all over the world... The Jews have no connection to the [Middle] East, to Palestine, or to the Semite race.”

Palestinian leaders, media, and social media regularly used the word “martyr” to refer to individuals killed during confrontations with Israeli security forces, whether those individuals were involved in confrontations or were innocent bystanders. Some official PA media channels, social media sites affiliated with the Fatah political movement, and terrorist organizations glorified terrorist attacks on Jewish Israelis, referring to the assailants as “martyrs.” Several local Fatah chapters posted memorials, including photographs, of suicide bombers. On several occasions on PA television, senior PA and Fatah official Jibril Rajoub extolled “martyrs” and prisoners serving sentences in Israeli prisons for conducting terrorist attacks. According to the Israeli NGO Palestinian Media Watch, beginning in 2020, the PA transferred funds to the PLO to allow the continuation of “martyr payments” to families of Palestinians killed during terrorist acts or of those killed in Israeli military actions, including victims of air strikes in Gaza, as well as stipends to Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including those awaiting charges and those convicted of acts of terrorism.

The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs continued to pay for construction of new mosques, maintenance of approximately 1,800 existing mosques, and salaries of most Palestinian imams in the West Bank. The ministry also continued to provide limited financial support to some Christian clergy and Christian charitable organizations.

The PA's Palestinian Broadcasting Company's code of conduct states it does not allow programming that encourages "violence against any person or institution on the basis of race, religion, political beliefs, or sex." Some official PA media channels as well as social media accounts affiliated with the ruling political movement Fatah, however, featured content praising or condoning acts of violence against Jews. On October 21, on official PA television, Fatah Deputy Chairman Mahmoud al-Aloul, appearing with Latifa Abu Hmeid, whose sons were convicted of the killing of Israelis, said, "I'm completely happy that next to me is sitting a giant of endurance... I don't at all think there is anyone who exceeds her endurance and stamina: the mother of five prisoners and also the mother of martyrs... We can't speak about all the prisoners, but we are proud of them all... They live in the heart, conscience, and awareness of every Palestinian."

Both Palestinians and Israelis evoked ethnoreligious language to deny the historical self-identity of the other community in the region or to emphasize an exclusive claim to the land. On October 1, on official PA television, PA Grand Mufti Hussein said, "The injustice will certainly pass and the occupation will pass... If we turn to the history of Palestine, it has been occupied by many peoples and many invaders have entered it, but in the end the occupation left and the invaders left... Jerusalem will certainly be liberated and return to the embrace of Islam, noble and strong, with its holy sites and its people, and the evil will pass, Almighty Allah willing." On April 25, MK Itamar Ben Gvir said in his inaugural speech before the Knesset, "I will act, with God's help, to restore sovereignty to Jerusalem in general and to the Temple Mount in particular, so that images such as those we saw last night, of groups of thugs beating police officers, shouting ' Hamas, Hamas ' and informing us that they are the bosses of Jerusalem and mainly of the Temple Mount – will not be seen or heard."

Antisemitic material continued to appear in official PA media. In a June 29 recorded speech opening a conference on Zionism at al-Quds University in Gaza that was posted on the PA official media website Wafa and on Palestine TV, President Abbas said, "I salute the efforts made to hold this conference, which refutes the Zionist narrative that falsifies the truth and history, and which all documents and research confirm that it is a product of colonialism. They planned and worked to implant Israel as a foreign body in this region to fragment it and keep it weak." In a June 8 Fatah Movement-Nablus Branch Facebook post, a picture of a wounded baby and an image of a Star of David with red drops of blood appeared in an advertisement encouraging Palestinians to boycott Israeli products.

Palestinian residents of Jerusalem and Muslim leaders continued to protest archaeological excavations and construction work done at the City of David National Park in the Silwan neighborhood outside the Old City and in the Old City near the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Some NGOs monitoring archaeological practices in Jerusalem continued to state the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) emphasized archaeological finds that bolstered Jewish claims in Jerusalem while minimizing historically significant archaeological finds of other religions. Emek Shaveh said that Israeli authorities were “using archaeological sites as a pretext for barring Palestinians from sites in Area C.” The government stated that IAA researchers “have greatly intensified their research on ‘non-Jewish’ periods in the history of the land of Israel, [including] the Prehistoric, Early Bronze, Byzantine, Muslim, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods.” Archeologists from Emek Shaveh continued to dispute the government’s representation of the “Pilgrim’s Road,” a tunnel dug by the IAA and inaugurated in Silwan in 2019, as being historically part of the pilgrimage route to the Jewish Second Temple. Emek Shaveh said IAA’s excavation method did not establish with certainty the date and purpose of the road. NGOs such as the City of David Foundation and the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies continued to support the government’s position.

In February, a Palestinian contractor damaged part of a wall while doing road work near the Iron Age site of Mount Ebal/al-Burnat, a West Bank archeological site in Area B near Nablus, where some believe a biblical altar erected by Joshua sits. The contractor said he was unaware that the wall was part of the antiquities site. The *Jerusalem Post* reported one “right-wing [Israeli] politician” said, “There are relentless attempts to weaken our hold on our homeland and to obscure the Jewish people’s glorious past in the land of Israel, both through terrorist acts and destruction of archaeology.”

In August, Elad, which the *Times of Israel* described as a “right-wing organization,” and the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) opened a Center for Ancient Agriculture in the Valley of Hinnom in East Jerusalem where tourists were invited to learn about Biblical-era agriculture traditions. The center was located in olive tree groves tended in the past by Palestinian residents of the surrounding areas who stated that they were the landowners responsible for maintenance of the grove. Emek Shaveh said that the center was part of a series of projects advocated by Elad to expand Jewish Israeli presence in East Jerusalem. The INPA responded that the center was “open to all.”

During the year, the Israeli government retained its previous regulations regarding visa issuance for foreigners to work in the West Bank, regulations Christian

institutions said impeded their work by preventing many foreign clergy and other religious workers from entering and working. Christian leaders said Israel's visa and permit policy also adversely affected schoolteachers and volunteers affiliated with faith-based charities working in the West Bank. Clergy, nuns, and other religious workers from Arab countries said they continued to face long delays in receiving visas and reported periodic denials of their visa applications. Officials from multiple churches expressed concern that non-Arab visa applicants and visa-renewal applicants also faced long delays. The Israeli government said that the large number of requests resulted in delays in process times. During the year, 1,404 foreign clergy entered Israel, and 2,230 visas were granted (including new issuances and extending visas for those already present).

According to church officials, Israel continued to prohibit some Arab Christian clergy, including bishops and other senior clergy seeking to visit congregations or ministries under their pastoral authority, from entering Gaza. Some clergy complained of body searches by Israeli security when entering or exiting Gaza, including a nun subjected to a body search and requested to remove her religious habit, and a priest who was asked to disrobe for examination of his chemotherapy pump despite possessing medical documentation from an Israeli doctor. Additionally, some Arab clergy reported Israel denied permission for them to leave Gaza for more than a year, and thus they were unable to renew visas or permits, preventing them from returning once they were permitted to leave.

In recent years, Israeli authorities issued permits for some Christians to exit Gaza to attend religious services in Jerusalem or the West Bank and for Muslims from the West Bank to enter Jerusalem for Ramadan. On November 25, COGAT announced a quota of 500 permits for Christian Gazans to visit family in East Jerusalem or the West Bank, 200 permits for Gazans wishing to travel abroad via the Allenby Bridge Crossing, and 15,000 permits for Christian Palestinians in the West Bank to enter Israel. *Haaretz* reported that Israel made approximately 1,000 permits available to Gaza Christians to enter Israel and the West Bank for Christmas celebrations. The Israeli government said that COGAT issued 24,016 permits during the year for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to travel to Jerusalem for major religious holidays such as Easter, Ramadan, or Christmas. Of that number, 245 were issued for Christian residents of Gaza.

The Israeli NGO Gisha stated that while Israeli authorities did not issue permits to Palestinians from Gaza due to COVID-19 until December, thereby essentially restricting them from being able to go to Israel or the West Bank except in urgent humanitarian cases, it permitted foreigners to enter Israel for much of the year to

study religion and to attend religious events, such as weddings, funerals, and bat or bar mitzvahs. Furthermore, Israelis were able to move to and from settlements in the West Bank, including for religious worship and gatherings. Gisha said that even in previous years, religious travel from Gaza was extremely limited, and announcements for “holiday permits” – if available – often came with little time for individuals to prepare for travel, file applications on time, and appeal permit denials; no Muslims were issued permits for religious travel since 2018, according to Gisha.

On July 6, the coalition government failed to renew the Law on Citizenship and Entry resulting in its expiration and paving the way for family reunification of some 3,000 Palestinians and their Israeli citizen spouses. Under the law, non-Jewish spouses of Israelis from certain countries and the West Bank and Gaza had been denied residency without a special determination from the Israeli MOI. Although the law lapsed, Interior Minister Shaked ordered the ministry to continue functioning as though the law were in place. On September 14, three NGOs, including HaMoked, petitioned the Court for Administrative Affairs demanding that the MOI respect the consequences brought about by the expiration of the law. On November 11, the government responded, supporting Shaked's continued handling of Palestinians' requests in accordance with the now-expired regulations, stating that Shaked could implement “interim procedures and regulations” until a new law was passed. No new procedures were published by year's end, however. On November 15, the court rejected the three NGOs' request for an injunction prohibiting the handling of requests based on the expired law. As a result, the petitioners appealed to the Supreme Court on November 17. At year's end, both the petition and new legislation remained pending.

According to the NGO HaMoked, there were approximately 10,000 Palestinians living in the country, including in Jerusalem, on temporary stay permits because of the citizenship and entry law, with no legal guarantee they could continue living with their families. When the previous citizenship and entry law was not renewed and expired in July, HaMoked petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court to direct the MOI to adjudicate reunification applications. HaMoked and Israeli media reported that the ministry refused to deal with these applications, and as of December, there were 1,680 such applications waiting to be reviewed. There were also cases of Palestinian spouses of Palestinian residents living in East Jerusalem without legal status. Some Palestinian residents moved to Jerusalem neighborhoods outside the security barrier to live with their nonresident spouse and children while maintaining Jerusalem residency. According to Christian religious leaders, this situation remained an especially acute problem for Christians because of their

small population and consequent tendency to marry Christians from the West Bank or elsewhere (i.e., Christians who held neither citizenship nor residency). A Christian religious leader expressed concern that this was a significant element in the continuing decline of the Christian population, including in Jerusalem, which negatively affected the long-term viability of Christian communities.

According to NGOs, community members, and media commentators, factors contributing to Christian emigration included political instability, the inability to obtain residency permits for spouses due to the 2003 Law of Citizenship and Entry, limited ability of Christian communities in the Jerusalem area to expand due to building restrictions, difficulties Christian clergy experienced in obtaining Israeli visas and residency permits, loss of confidence in the peace process, and economic hardships created by the establishment of the barrier and the imposition of travel restrictions. The Israeli government stated such difficulties stemmed from the “complex political and security reality” and not from any restrictions on the Christian community.

Actions of Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other militant and terrorist groups continued to be active in Gaza. Hamas remained in de facto political control of Gaza.

On May 10, following Israeli-Palestinian violence at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, Palestinian armed groups in Gaza started to launch rockets toward Israeli population centers. In response, the Israeli military carried out attacks in Gaza with missiles, rockets, and artillery. A ceasefire between the warring parties went into effect on May 21. The NGO Human Rights Watch released reports on July 27 and August 12 that stated Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza carried out attacks during the May fighting that violated the laws of war and that appeared to amount to war crimes. According to the Israeli government, Hamas and other groups launched more than 4,360 unguided rockets and mortars toward Israeli population centers between May 10 and 21, during the “Days of Rage.” These attacks resulted in 13 deaths and several hundred injuries. The United Nations reported that during the May fighting, attacks by the Israeli military killed 260 Palestinians, including at least 129 civilians, of whom 66 were children.

On August 5, a group of masked men bombed the Bianco Resort, a seafront tourist resort in Gaza City, causing the collapse of a perimeter wall. According to press reports, the attackers wanted to prevent the resort from hosting a mixed gender concert. Al-Monitor said that Issa Miqdad, a Salafist preacher, asked the resort’s

owner to cancel the concert in an August 4 meeting. The resort's owner, Suhail al-Saqqa, refused to cancel the concert, saying he had a permit from the Hamas Ministry of Interior. In an August 5 Facebook post, Miqdad said, "I call on all preachers and sheikhs and zealous people to denounce this evil through their [social media] pages and to mention the name of the resort and to warn against it because the center's owner is spreading evil and we must fight it after he rejected our request." Miqdad also described the concert as "organized corruption on the land of jihad." According to Al-Monitor, al-Saqqa said the hotel was the subject of an incitement campaign launched by fundamentalists on social media because of the concert.

Hamas leaders and other militant groups continued to call for the elimination of the State of Israel, and some called for killing "Zionist Jews" and advocated violence through traditional and social media channels, as well as during rallies and other events.

Hamas also continued to enforce restrictions on Gaza's population based on its interpretation of Islam and sharia, including a judicial system separate from the PA courts. Hamas courts occasionally prohibited women from departing Gaza due to ongoing divorce or family court proceedings, despite the women having Israeli authorization to travel. Media outlets reported the Hamas-affiliated Islamic University of Gaza required hijabs for all females. Gazan civil society leaders said Hamas in recent years had moderated its restrictions on dress and gender segregation in public.

On May 11, according to press, the Ministry of Interior and National Security in Gaza issued an apology after a complaint by reporter Riwa Murshid stating that two members of a Hamas military unit attacked her for not wearing a hijab in a border area. The ministry said Murshid had failed to notify authorities that she would be entering the area and had not shown any press credential to the security forces, but that the security officials had violated policy by arguing with Murshid and beating her with a tree branch. In response, Murshid said she had the permission of the property owner to be where she was, was accompanied by a photographer and a colleague, and identified herself as a journalist to the Hamas members. She said that one of the men accused her of being an apostate, said it was a dishonorable act for him to talk to her, and that he used a tree branch to hit her several times.

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 it deemed to violate Islamic identity, the religion of Islam, or “traditions,” as defined by Hamas. Hamas also interfered when there were reports of classes or activities that mixed genders. UNRWA, however, reported no Hamas interference in the administration of its Gaza schools.

According to Al-Monitor, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip criticized the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and Hamas after a contractor announced on Facebook that it had won a bid of more than one million dollars to replace the Khalil al-Wazir Mosque, which had been destroyed in 2014 Israeli-Palestinian violence. One critic said that given Gaza’s economic situation, feeding the poor should have taken precedence over building “luxurious mosques,” noting that 80 percent of the population relied on food aid. An official in the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Gaza said that the mosque would include a medical dispensary to serve its neighborhood.

Christian groups reported Hamas generally tolerated the small Christian presence in Gaza and did not force Christians to abide by Islamic law. According to media accounts, Hamas continued neither to investigate nor prosecute Gaza-based cases of religious discrimination, including reported anti-Christian bias in private sector hiring and in police investigations of anti-Christian harassment. On April 13, Manuel Musallem, a Roman Catholic priest living in Jerusalem who previously lived in Gaza, publicly called on Hamas to establish a Christian media center to defend itself from claims in the press that it mistreats Christians. On March 30, he told the Hamas-affiliated, Gaza-based newspaper *al-Resalah*, that “Hamas has been targeted by a smear campaign.” Hamas continued not to celebrate Christmas as a public holiday in Gaza, unlike in the West Bank.

Hamas Chairman of the Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh routinely called for Arab states to terminate normalization agreements with Israel. After the May escalation of conflict, Haniyeh said, “This battle has destroyed the project of ‘coexistence’ with the Israeli occupation, the project of ‘normalization’ with Israel.” In a speech on October 31, Haniyeh called for Arab states to terminate normalization agreements with Israel and stated, “Normalization does not serve the Palestinian cause.”

In a political rally covered on May 30 by *al-Jazeera* honoring “martyrs” killed in recent Israeli-Palestinian violence, Hamas Political Bureau member Fathi Hammad said, “The Jews are a treacherous people. There can be no peace with the Jews. There can be no peace with the Zionists. The only thing we have for the Zionists is the sword.”

The Anti-Defamation League reported that *al-Resalah* ran an editorial cartoon on May 10 depicting Israeli soldiers as monkeys fleeing the “lion of al-Aqsa.” The NGO said the image appeared to be a reference “to the fundamentalist derogatory slur that Jews are descendants from apes.”

Some Muslim students in Gaza continued to attend schools run by Christian institutions and NGOs.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Because religion and ethnicity or nationality are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

During the year, there were incidents of deadly violence that perpetrators justified at least partly on religious grounds. Actions included individual killings, physical attacks and verbal harassment of worshippers and clergy, and vandalism of religious sites. There was also harassment by members of one religious group of another, social pressure to stay within one’s religious group, and antisemitic content in media.

Amid tensions in Jerusalem and conflict in Gaza, ethnic-based violence and civil unrest broke out during a one-week period in May in a number of mixed Jewish-Arab cities in Israel, including Jerusalem. Armed Jewish Israelis clashed with Palestinians in East Jerusalem neighborhoods. Responding to the violence, the government reassigned additional security personnel, including border police from the West Bank, to augment INP personnel. The INP reported it made approximately 1,550 arrests in cities across Israel and in Jerusalem, with the overwhelming majority of the arrestees being Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel. Security officials characterized the arrested Jewish citizens as predominately middle-aged nationalist extremists.

According to the press, on December 16, unknown gunmen killed Yehuda Dimentman near Jenin in the West Bank. Dimentman was a student at a yeshiva near where the attack took place. The attackers fired on a car carrying Dimentman as it was leaving the closed settlement of Homesh. Authorities said that two other individuals traveling with Dimentman were injured in the attack.

Israeli media reported that on December 1, two Israeli ultra-Orthodox Jews drove into downtown Ramallah, an Area A city in the West Bank and seat of the PA. Israeli media described the men as wearing clothing and hairstyles preferred by an

ultra-Orthodox group and by ultra-nationalist settler youth and driving a vehicle with speaker mounts and painting that matched other vehicles some member of the ultra-Orthodox group drive while playing Jewish techno music. One of the passengers told reporters afterwards that they were lost and had been given bad directions by an Arab gas station attendant. A Palestinian crowd attacked the vehicle with cinderblocks and stones, and after the passengers left the vehicle, set it ablaze. PA security forces escorted the Israeli men to safety and turned them over to Israeli police, who subsequently held the two for interrogation and potential charges. Israelis are banned by an Israeli military order from entering Area A, as noted by large signs on all roads entering Area A. Hamas praised the assault as an “act of resistance” and criticized the PA security forces for safeguarding the two Israelis.

On March 1, unknown assailants set fire to the entrance of a Romanian Orthodox Church monastery in Jerusalem near the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea Shearim. The local priest put out the fire quickly. According to Church officials, this was the fourth act of vandalism during the year that targeted the same monastery. Christian representatives said they believed religious Orthodox Jews were the probable assailants. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem said the arson was “a sign of hatred for the Christian religion” among some Israelis.

According to local press and social media, some settlers in the West Bank continued to justify their attacks on Palestinian property, or “price tag” attacks, such as the uprooting of Palestinian olive trees, vandalism of cars and buildings, arson, and slashing of tires as necessary for the defense of Judaism. According to the *Times of Israel*, on October 13, vandals sprayed nationalist slogans and damaged cars in the Palestinian village of Marda in the West Bank. Slogans painted on walls included “price tag” and “demolish enemy [property], not Jewish.”

Media reported that on April 28, arsonists set three Palestinian cars ablaze in Beit Iksa, a village outside Jerusalem in the West Bank and wrote, “Jews, let’s win” on the road, along with “Tiktok” and a Star of David, possibly referencing a series of videos posted on the social media app appearing to show Palestinians attacking random ultra-Orthodox Jews without provocation. According to media reports, dozens of Jewish residents of a nearby neighborhood chanted, “May your village burn,” until police arrived and dispersed the crowd. Some Palestinian residents stated to media outlets that an Israeli fire truck came but did not put the fire out, and they had to wait for a Palestinian fire truck, which took longer to arrive.

On November 9, unidentified individuals vandalized nearly two dozen vehicles and a building in the Palestinian town of al-Bireh, in the West Bank, with slogans such as “enemies live here” and “price tag.” According to an AP report, Palestinian eyewitnesses said a group of Israeli settlers was responsible for the vandalism.

The Israeli government said that several times during the year, unknown persons sprayed graffiti on Joshua’s Tomb in the Palestinian village of Kifl Hares in the West Bank.

According to members of more recently arrived faith communities in the West Bank, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, established Christian groups opposed the efforts of the recent arrivals to obtain official PA recognition because of the newcomers’ proselytizing.

Political and religious groups in the West Bank and Gaza continued to call on members to “defend” al-Aqsa Mosque.

Following the announcement of the normalization agreements establishing relations between Israel and four Arab countries (the Abraham Accords), Muslims from the Gulf were at times harassed in person and vilified on social media by Palestinian Muslims for visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount as part of visits to Israel

Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to state that burial of its members remained challenging since most cemeteries belonged to churches. Jehovah’s Witnesses said the challenge was greatest in Bethlehem, where churches from the main traditions control most graveyards and refused access to them.

According to Palestinian sources, some Christian and Muslim families in the occupied territories pressured their children, especially daughters, to marry within their respective religious groups. Couples who challenged this societal norm, particularly Palestinian Christians or Muslims who sought to marry Jews, encountered considerable societal and family opposition. Families sometimes reportedly disowned Muslim and Christian women who married outside their faith. Various Israeli and Palestinian groups continued to protest against interfaith social and romantic relationships and other forms of cooperation.

Christian clergy and pilgrims continued to report instances of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem harassing or spitting on them. In May, Armenian media reported that

“Jewish youths” attacked an Armenian priest, sending him to the hospital with injuries. Police reportedly arrested three of the attackers.

The Israeli government said that only one complaint was filed during the year regarding an assault on Christian clergy in Jerusalem, and that the suspect was questioned but not indicted. In addition, it reported there was one complaint filed by church officials in Jerusalem for “blasphemy of a holy place;” no suspects were found in that case. Church officials reported that despite presenting video evidence to Israeli police in these attacks, police took insufficient action.

The *Times of Israel* reported that Palestinian protestors hung a Nazi flag bearing the swastika symbol in the West Bank village of Beit Ummar near Hebron on September 25. In October, the *Times of Israel* reported that Palestinian vandals drew the swastika symbol during several protests in the West Bank against Israeli settlements and outposts. On October 23, Israeli police arrested a Palestinian man suspected of spray-painting swastikas along a road used by settlers in the West Bank village of Hawara, near Nablus. During protests in August against the Israeli Evyatar settler outpost, Palestinians from the nearby town of Beita erected a flaming star of David with a swastika in the center.

In a December sermon at al-Aqsa Mosque, Issam Amira stated that COVID-19 spread because of the conduct of Muslim rulers. He said that this happened because of “infidel and licentious media” had spread immorality, and rulers had “permitted and promoted homosexuality” and had followed “feminist organizations.”

In a December 8 interview on Palestine TV, Jihad al-Harazin, a professor of law and political science at al-Quds University, asked why the world “weeps” over the “so-called Holocaust” committed by the Nazis when it appears to ignore “the crimes that are being committed daily,” including the death of 12-year-old Mohammed Durrak, who was killed in Gaza in 2000.

Palestinian historian Ashraf al-Qasas during a November 2 interview with Gaza-based Alkofiya TV, said, “Jews constitute surplus, and could not integrate into society.” He also said, “The Jews were a pile of garbage that you wanted to get rid of... and you do this by dumping them on the neighbors you hate: the Muslims.”

Although the Chief Rabbinate and rabbis of many ultra-Orthodox Jewish denominations continued to discourage Jewish visits to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site due to the ongoing *halakhic* (having to do with Jewish

law and jurisprudence) debate about whether it was permissible or forbidden for Jews to enter the Temple Mount, some Orthodox rabbis continued to say entering the site was permissible. Many among the self-identified “national religious” Zionist community stated they found meaning in visiting the site. Groups such as the Temple Institute and Yaraeh continued to call for increased Jewish access and prayer there as well as for the construction of a third Jewish temple on the site.

According to the Wadi Hilweh Information Center, visits to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site during the year by activists associated with the Temple Mount movement decreased to 18,500 from 30,000 in 2019, the most recent year for which numbers are available, largely due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Despite Israeli labor law mandating workers were entitled to take a weekly day off for worship, some foreign domestic workers in Jerusalem stated that some employers did not allow them to do so.

The research and consulting firm PSB took a June poll of youth between the ages of 17 and 24 in 17 Arab states and the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and reported 17 percent of respondents in the occupied territories said that their religion was the most important factor in their personal identity, compared with 34 percent regionwide. Other choices offered by the poll as possible responses included family/tribe, nationality, Arabic heritage, political beliefs, language, and gender.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Senior White House, embassy, and other U.S. officials raised concerns about PA officials’ statements or social media postings that promoted antisemitism or encouraged or glorified violence and used public diplomacy programming and messaging aimed to combat antisemitism and promote nonviolence more broadly in Palestinian society throughout the year. U.S. government officials repeatedly and publicly pointed out that Palestinian officials and party leaders did not consistently condemn individual terrorist attacks nor speak out publicly against members of their institutions, including Fatah, who advocated violence.

U.S. government representatives met with political and civil society leaders to promote tolerance and cooperation to combat religious prejudice. These meetings included discussions of the groups’ concerns about religious tolerance, access to religious sites, respect for clergy, attacks on religious sites and houses of worship, and local Christian leaders’ concerns about ongoing Christian emigration from the occupied territories.

U.S. government representatives met with representatives of a range of religious groups from Jerusalem, the West Bank, and when possible, the Gaza Strip. Engagement included meetings with Orthodox, ultra-Orthodox, and Reform rabbis, as well as representatives of various Jewish institutions, regular contacts with the Greek Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), and Armenian Orthodox patriarchates, and meetings with the Holy See's Custodian of the Holy Land, leaders of the Anglican and Lutheran Churches, the Syrian Orthodox Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and leaders of evangelical Christian groups, as well as Muslim community leaders.

Senior U.S. officials spoke publicly about the importance of maintaining the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Throughout the year, embassy officials used social media platforms to express U.S. support for tolerance and the importance of openness to members of other religious groups. The embassy also issued public statements condemning attacks on places of worship.

The Department of State and UNRWA in July entered into a Framework for Cooperation on "shared goals and priorities; continued support; monitoring and reporting; and communication and partnership" in the UN agency's delivery of education, primary health care, relief and social services, and other humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees. The framework noted, "The United States and UNRWA condemn without reserve [sic] all manifestations of religious or racial intolerance, incitement to violence, harassment or violence against persons or communities based on ethnic origin or religious belief, including antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Catholicism, anti-Arabism, or other forms of discrimination or racism against Palestinians, Israelis, or other individuals or communities based on ethnic origin or religious belief."

Embassy-supported initiatives focused on interreligious dialogue and community development and advocated constructive relationships among Palestinian and Israeli populations. Initiatives included support for the Jerusalem Intercultural Center's interreligious community economic development program in the Old City, and for the Interfaith Encounter Association's efforts to bring together three interfaith groups in Jerusalem's Israeli and Palestinian neighborhoods to meet with U.S. experts, coordinators, and fellow interfaith groups with the aim of transforming attitudes through constructive conversations on each religion's similarities and differences. Embassy officials advocated for the right of persons from all faiths to practice their religion peacefully while also respecting the beliefs and customs of their neighbors.