

# ISRAEL 2022 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 "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."

On May 13, prosecutors indicted Sheikh Yousef Elbaz for "incitement to violence" after he posted statements on Facebook describing as "heroic" the youths and Muslims who confronted police at the al-Aqsa Mosque. On April 14, police arrested six Jewish activists on suspicion that they planned to sacrifice a goat during the Passover holiday at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount complex. Police also arrested several Jewish activists for blowing the Shofar horn at the Bab al-Rahma Muslim Cemetery. On May 29, tens of thousands of Jews participated in the "Flags March," waving Israeli flags and walking through the Old City, including the Muslim Quarter, with marchers chanting insults about the Prophet Muhammad while clashing with Palestinians and police. Ultra-Orthodox protesters continued to attack and harass Jewish women who belong to the Women of the Wall group during their monthly service at the Western Wall. The Women of the Wall, whose members are mostly Reform and Conservative Jews, stated that their goal is to secure recognition for the right of women to wear prayer shawls and pray at the Western Wall. On at least one occasion, on June 30, ultra-Orthodox individuals went to a separate egalitarian section of the Western Wall and interrupted a bar mitzvah ceremony, calling the participants "Nazis," "Christians," and "animals." While the government said it was rare for any individual to be barred entry to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, human rights and civil society organizations said authorities periodically banned individual Palestinian residents of the occupied territories West Bank and Gaza, as well as Arab/Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel, from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site. The government reiterated that non-Islamic prayer

was not allowed on the grounds of the site but that non-Muslim visitors were allowed.

The Chief Rabbinate continued not to recognize as Jewish some Israeli 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. Evangelical Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses, among others, were still not able to obtain official recognition as a religious group. Members of some religious minorities said the government did not provide the same services and benefits to them as to the country's majority Jewish population.

On February 7, unknown persons punctured the tires of 20 cars in Kfar Qasim and spraypainted a Star of David on them, writing, "Jewish wake up. Fight the enemy." During the year, unknown persons painted swastikas at sites in several cities, including Petah Tikva, Eilat, and Ashdod. In April, vandals painted a swastika on the sign of the Beit Tzur Baruch Synagogue in Ashdod. In some ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, private organizations posted "modesty signs" demanding women dress modestly. Egged, the country's largest transit company, removed ads with images of women from its buses, with a company spokesman saying, "Images [like these] cannot appear in advertisements, in consideration of children, teenagers, the religious [Jews], or Muslim Arabs." Christian clergy and pilgrims also continued to report that they were regularly harassed and spit upon by ultra-Orthodox Jews. Some Jews continued to oppose missionary activity directed at Jews as amounting to religious harassment and reacted with hostility toward Jewish converts to Christianity, such as Messianic Jews. Tension continued between the ultra-Orthodox community and other citizens, including concerns related to service in the Israel 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 conducted in July and published in September, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Hiddush reported that 64 percent of respondents identified as either "secular" (47 percent) or "traditional - not-religious" (17 percent) with regard to public policies on religion and the state, results that were consistent with its polling in recent years.

In meetings with government officials, the Ambassador 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 remember the six million Jews and millions of others killed by the Nazis, underscore the importance of Holocaust education and countering Holocaust denial and disinformation, 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/Palestinian and Jewish populations of the country. The embassy also promoted a 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/Palestinian 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 the Golan Heights and issues primarily related to Israeli residents of 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 8.9 million (midyear 2022). According to the country's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) classification system (2021 data), approximately 73.8 percent of the population is Jewish, 18 percent Muslim, 1.9 percent Christian, and 1.6 percent Druze. The remaining 5 percent

consists of those the CBS classifies as “other.” This category includes those who identify as Jewish but do not satisfy the Orthodox Jewish definition of “Jewish” that the government uses for civil procedures and applies to many immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The country is also home to relatively small communities of Samaritans, Karaite Jews, Messianic Jews, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Baha’is. The majority of non-Jewish citizens are of Arab/Palestinian origin. This includes approximately 75.8 percent of the country’s 185,000 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 in August by religious freedom NGO Hiddush, 58 percent of Jewish citizens do not affiliate with any religious group, 20 percent are “Zionist Orthodox,” 11 percent “ultra-Orthodox,” 5 percent “Reform,” 4 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, several Druze communities live in the Golan Heights.

In 2020, the most recent year for which data are available, the Jerusalem Institute estimated 570,100 Jews, 353,800 Muslims, and 16,300 Christians lived within the current municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, accounting for approximately 99 percent of the city’s total population of 951,100 as of 2020.

According to government and NGO data, approximately 330,000 foreign workers live 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 (Church of Jesus Christ), 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 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.

The Law of Return provides the right for any Jew, including converts 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 may receive humanitarian status but are not automatically granted citizenship. Non-Jews who are not descendants of Jews do not have this route to

immigration. Descendants of Jews qualify for immigration under this law regardless of the religious beliefs under which they were raised as minor children. 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.

Under the Law of Return, the Population and Immigration Authority of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) recognizes Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform conversions in the country for the purpose of immigration, citizenship, and registration. 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.

The law recognizes only Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the Druze faith, and the Baha'i Faith. The adopted Ottoman *millet* (court) system recognizes Christian religious communities, including 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 the taxation of their 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.

The law establishes local 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 convened on May 15 its annual interreligious council of all recognized religions, including Judaism, which serves as a discussion forum for recognized religious communities.

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. 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 willfully and unjustly disturbing any meeting of persons lawfully assembled for religious worship. 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.

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 it 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 criminalizes causing a person to be regarded with contempt because of that person's religion.

The law states that acts of enmity toward 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 2021.

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 Israeli 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. Since the 2011 unrest and civil war in Syria, Druze residents of the Golan Heights have been unable to travel to Syria for religious pilgrimage or for higher education. 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 to 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 only domestic marriages with legal standing and that may be registered are those performed according to the religious statutes of recognized religious communities. The law allows for the 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. Marriages performed outside of the country may be registered with the MOI. A law mandating women’s equality contains

language that explicitly exempts matters of marriage, divorce, and appointments to religious positions.

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.

The law allows a Jewish woman or man to initiate divorce proceedings, but both the husband and wife must give consent to make the divorce final. A Muslim man may divorce his wife without her consent and without petitioning the court. A Muslim woman may petition for and receive a divorce through the sharia courts without her husband's consent under certain conditions. A marriage contract may provide for other circumstances in which she may obtain a divorce without her husband's consent. Christians may seek official separations or divorces through ecclesiastical courts, depending on their denomination.

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 IDF does not consider conscientious objection due to religious beliefs as a basis 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. Arab/Palestinian 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 Service program, a civilian alternative in which volunteers work for two years to promote social welfare in schools, hospitals, or NGOs.

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 Israeli 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 unrecognized religious groups are recorded as "lacking religion." The vast majority are immigrants from the former Soviet Union, their children, and grandchildren, 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.

On March 10, the Knesset reenacted the Law of Citizenship and Entry, after the Knesset failed in 2021 to pass a previous version of the law, which requires annual renewals. The law explicitly prohibits 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. The amended law allows a quota of 58 cases in which the Minister of Interior can make a special determination, usually on humanitarian grounds. The figure is based on the total number of approvals of requests in 2018.

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's 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 consider "Israel's traditions," among other factors, when deciding 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 and local religious councils have the 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. A law passed in 2021, which took effect on January 1, permits local religious councils to award kashrut certification to establishments anywhere in the country and not solely to entities in their respective jurisdiction. Starting January 1, 2023, both private Orthodox organizations and religious councils will be able to award kashrut certificates. 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 or the religious councils. The Chief Rabbinate has the authority to indict 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.

On May 13, authorities indicted Sheikh Yousef Elbaz for "incitement to violence" as a result of an April 22 Facebook post and an April 24 sermon he delivered at al-Aqsa Mosque. If convicted, Elbaz could face up to five years in prison. According to the indictment, Elbaz praised the youths and Muslims in al Aqsa, calling them "respected jihadists who crushed the nose of the Israeli occupation and in its blood prevented it from dividing al-Aqsa Mosque." The government accused Elbaz of glorifying the masked youths "defending al Aqsa with their bodies" and with "little bits of stones, metal, and wood" against the "Israeli war machine." Elbaz added that Israel would have emptied al Aqsa to allow "intruders" to do as they wish, if not for the "heroic youth standing up to the police, fighting them, getting injured – and we should salute them."

On April 14, police arrested six Jewish activists suspected of planning to sacrifice a goat during the Jewish Passover holiday at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The “Returning to the Mount” group, which advocates the construction of a third Jewish temple on the site, had circulated a flyer offering a cash prize to anyone who managed to offer a living sacrifice on the Temple Mount, and to anyone arrested trying to do so.

On April 26, *Haaretz* newspaper reported that Israeli police allowed Muslim worshippers to enter the Al-Aqsa Mosque the previous week only if they agreed to hand over their identification cards to police, arguably in violation of the law and the right to freedom of worship.

On May 4, the Israeli National Police (INP) warned that terror organizations were inciting violence with false publications about the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The INP reiterated there had been no changes in policy at the site with regard to Muslim worshipers and visits by tourists from abroad and Israelis.

The police arrested and detained for a short time Southern Islamic Movement (SIM) senior official and member of the Shura council Sheikh Mohammed Salameh Hasan, along with his wife and son, near the entry to al Aqsa on June 5. Police stated he “disrupted public order” but later released him following a decision of the commander. SIM and the Ra’am political party released a statement condemning the incident, calling for an investigation of the police officers and adding that Sheikh Hasan had been arrested only for telling a policewoman not to smoke near the holy site.

During September celebrations of the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah, Jewish activists, including former Member of Knesset (MK) Yehuda Glick and current MK Simcha Rothman, blew shofars and raised Israeli flags on graves at the Bab al-Rahma Muslim cemetery located outside the Old City walls and adjacent to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. On October 7, *Haaretz* reported that police were concerned that blowing a shofar in a Muslim cemetery was a provocation that could lead to disorder, but Israeli courts blocked police from restricting activists from the area. Earlier in the year, local media reported that unidentified vandals set fires at the Bab al-Rahma cemetery on June 22.

Authorities investigated reported attacks against Palestinians and Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel, primarily in Jerusalem, by members of organizations, such as Lehava, that made anti-Christian and anti-Muslim statements and objected to social relationships between Jews and non-Jews. At the conclusion of the May 29 Flags March, Jewish activists clashed with police, who reportedly threw stun grenades at them.

On May 29, a district court increased from four months of probation and a fine to seven months of probation the sentence of former Yitzhar settlement yeshiva Rabbi Yosef Elitzur, convicted in 2021 of incitement to violence for publishing articles in 2013 calling on Jews to rise up against Palestinian violence. The court stated in its ruling that the appropriate punishment should have been six months' imprisonment but chose not to overturn a lower court decision keeping Elitzur out of prison.

The status quo arrangement that allows non-Muslims to visit the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount but forbids them from praying there continued to erode during the past year, according to the Jerusalem-based NGO Ir Amim. The organization reported that despite Israeli officials committing to the status quo, daily Jewish prayers continued with the approval and supervision of the police.

The government continued to allow controlled access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The government expressed continued support for the status quo pertaining to the site, 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. The Waqf said that it had a reduced ability to administer the site because Israeli authorities refused to grant permits to new staff hired to work there and barred individual Waqf members from the site, leaving the Waqf seriously understaffed.

While the government reported it was unusual for any individual to be barred entry to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, human rights and civil society organizations said Israeli authorities barred 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 identity 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.

On May 22, the Jerusalem Magistrate Court overturned a 15-day police order barring four Jewish Israelis from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and Jerusalem's Old City after they participated in overt prayer at the site. The visitors justified their actions by pointing to an April 15 statement by Israeli Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai that "the Temple Mount is open ... we allow all residents of the state and the [West Bank and Gaza] territories who come to pray on the Mount and to ascend and observe their religion." The court ruled that the conduct of the two minors and two adults at the site did not "raise worry of harm befalling national security, public safety, or individual security." Police appealed the decision, and on May 25, the Jerusalem District Court overturned the magistrate court's decision and ruled that Jewish worship at the site "is not absolute, and it should be superseded by other interests, among them the safeguarding of public order."

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 continued to visit the site. In some cases, 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. A record number of more than 50,000 Jews visited the site during the year, according to NGOs that encourage such visits. According to official police figures, 26,234 non-Muslim Israelis visited, compared with 23,658 for the same period in 2021. The number of tourists, according to police, increased from 13,053 in the first nine months of 2021 to 131,562 in 2022.

Some Jewish groups escorted by police performed religious acts such as prayers and prostration despite the ban on non-Islamic prayer. The government reiterated that overt non-Islamic prayer was not allowed on the grounds of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. On May 22, the Prime Minister's Office stated



that “there [was] no change, nor is any change planned, on the status quo of the 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.

Police continued to screen non-Muslims for religious articles. Police allowed Jewish males wearing a *kippah* and *tzitzit* (fringes) and those who wished to enter the site barefoot (in accordance with interpretations of halacha) to enter with a police escort. Activists, including former MK Glick, continued to say openly that Jews should be allowed to pray at the site.

Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site, including Jewish activists who 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. Authorities usually banned individuals for a period of months, then allowed them to return. The Israeli government stated that some individuals, including both Muslims and Jews, could not access the site during the year because they could have caused disturbances and riots.

The government stated that during the year, 172 Jews and 586 Muslims were arrested at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The government reported that authorities denied 666 Muslims and 181 Jews access to the site during the year, compared with 17 Jews and 93 Muslims in 2021.

The government stated that police responded to public disturbances on Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount five times during the year, to prevent and stop violent behavior on the site and allow peaceful prayer to continue. The government said the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount was completely closed to non-Muslim visitors 10 times, and one additional time for several hours, during Muslim holidays, while entrance for Muslim worshipers continued as usual. According to the government, the site was not closed to Muslims during the year.

There were reports that Israeli authorities used excessive force against protesters in East Jerusalem, at the Damascus Gate and at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, throughout the year. According to media reports, on April 15, police entered the al-Aqsa Mosque compound after early morning Ramadan prayers; police stated they were trying to break up a crowd throwing rocks. Videos showed police firing tear gas and stun grenades. Video of the event appeared to show Palestinians barricading themselves in al-Aqsa Mosque prior to the police entry and launching fireworks, stones, and Molotov cocktails from the mosque, while police on top of the mosque broke windows and fired tear gas and rubber bullets down onto the barricaded Palestinians before entering the mosque and arresting suspected rioters. The Jordanian Waqf stated that INP officers shot one of the mosque guards in the eye with a rubber-coated bullet. INP officials said they entered the compound to respond to Palestinians hurling firecrackers and stones at their forces and at the nearby Jewish prayer area by the Western Wall. Media reported that INP beat mosque staff, the elderly, young persons, and paramedics. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent, INP hindered the arrival of ambulances and paramedics; Palestinian media said dozens of injured worshippers remained trapped inside the compound. Media reported at least 158 Palestinians were injured and estimated that INP detained 300-400 persons; INP reported that three officers were injured.

On May 16, police and Palestinians violently clashed during funeral processions for Walid al-Sharif, a 21-year-old Palestinian who died from a brain injury sustained in clashes on April 22 on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. According to *Haaretz*, police said he was throwing rocks and hit his head when he fell while running away on April 22, but Palestinian witnesses and his family said he was shot in the head with a sponge-tipped bullet. Israeli authorities held al-Sharif's remains until May 16 before releasing them to family members. Al-Sharif's family reported that police requested the family limit participation and Palestinian national chants and symbols during the funeral to release his body to relatives. Funeral participants reported that Palestinians clashed with police after they attempted to limit the number of participants and Palestinian flags in the funeral procession as it traveled from the Old City gate of Bab al-Zahra to a near-by cemetery. Police reported that rioters threw stones, fireworks, and large objects at the police from buildings above the procession. The police reportedly entered the cemetery as well, physically assaulting the mourners inside. Media, police, and medical professionals reported 71 Palestinian injured with 13

hospitalizations, 10 journalists injured, six police lightly injured, and dozens arrested during the funeral clashes.

On December 8, *Haaretz* reported that a sign erected by the Chief Rabbinate warning Jewish visitors against entering the Temple Mount at the entrance to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount had been removed. The sign stated, "According to Torah law, it is forbidden for any impure person to enter the Temple Mount because of its holiness." The Temple Mount Administration, identified by the paper as an activist group which encourages Jewish visits to the site, erected new signs, in different locations, including at a police checkpoint and a waiting room, that listed rules for entering the Temple Mount according to Jewish law. On December 15, *Haaretz* reported that the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, a governmental body that manages the Western Wall complex, put the original sign back and removed the new ones.

On May 29, as part of Jerusalem Day celebrations, the "Flags March" took place in Jerusalem in which an estimated 70,000 Israeli marchers, in the largest parade, in years entered the Old City of Jerusalem through the Damascus Gate through the Muslim Quarter, according to press reports. Crowds danced and chanted "death to Arabs," "Muhammad is dead," and "Muhammad is a son of a bitch," according to reports. A record number of more than 2,600 Jews toured the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site during the day, while young Arab/Palestinians barricaded themselves inside the al-Aqsa Mosque. Israeli police in riot gear blocked surrounding streets and forcibly removed Palestinians from the route. The Palestinian Red Crescent reported that Israeli authorities' use of rubber bullets, sound grenades, pepper spray, and in one instance live bullets injured 79 Palestinians and caused 28 to be hospitalized. Clashes leading to injuries occurred as well in other parts of East Jerusalem, such as Sheikh Jarrah. Police detained more than 60 suspects and remanded 35, including arresting on May 30 two Jewish men for allegedly assaulting Iyad Harb, an Arab/Palestinian journalist for the Israeli broadcaster KAN, while he was covering clashes in Sheikh Jarrah. *Haaretz* reported the two were the only Jews arrested in connection with the day's events.

Media, Armenian officials, and interfaith NGO advocates reported that on November 7, IDF soldiers from the Givati Brigade spat at an Armenian Archbishop during a procession through the Old City. Israeli police detained two soldiers on

the spot but later released them, and media reported that they would face disciplinary action for behaving disrespectfully. The Israeli MFA reported that one individual was arrested, but the case was “shelved due to a lack of evidence of criminal intent.”

The Israeli government said that seven complaints were filed during the year over assault on Christian clergy in Jerusalem and that a total of six suspects were arrested in all incidents. According to the MFA, there was only one complaint where there was insufficient evidence to indict.

The Israeli MFA reported 105 attacks on holy sites in Jerusalem during the year, without specifying the religion of the sites or the perpetrators. Of those cases, the government reported 20 indictments, 14 arrests, and two convictions, noting that indictments and court decisions would likely increase, as investigations and legal proceedings were still underway in many cases.

On May 30, then Minister of Defense Benny Gantz stated that the time had come to consider designating the Jewish supremacist group Lehava and the far-right Jerusalem soccer fan club La Familia as terrorist organizations. Then Minister of Public Security Bar Lev stated the same day that he intended to ask the attorney general to outlaw the organizations, which, he stated, were hurting the security of the country. According to the antiterrorism law, the Minister of Defense, with the approval of the attorney general, has authority to designate an organization as a terrorist group. On June 27, the NGO Tag Meir, an umbrella of Jewish groups working to monitor and counter hate crimes and religiously based racism in the country, sent a letter to the head of Shin Bet, Ronen Bar, asking him to support the designation.

At year’s end, the 2020 trial of Lehava Director Ben-Zion Gopstein for incitement to terrorism, violence, and racism was ongoing.

On May 13, Israeli authorities used force to disrupt the funeral procession of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Prior to the procession, dozens of Israeli police officers wearing protective gear rushed crowds gathered at the hospital containing her body, entered the hospital, hitting and shoving people inside with batons and deploying tear gas and concussive grenades, according to Israeli media and footage released by the hospital. A police officer told the crowd that

the funeral procession would not commence until the crowd stopped “nationalistic chants,” according to Israeli media. Video during the funeral procession documented police beating pallbearers with batons so that the coffin dropped almost to the ground. Police confiscated Palestinian flags from the casket, the hearse, and mourners. Public security officials investigated the use of force by police during the funeral. After the investigation, police issued a statement saying the funeral had been a “complex” event and that “it is impossible to remain indifferent to the harsh images,” but they did not release any of the formal findings.

On May 18, the State Attorney’s Office published a summary of cases filed in connection with May 2021 intercommunal violence across the country, including Jerusalem. The summary indicated that the vast majority (88 percent) of the 616 defendants were Arab/Palestinian citizens and Palestinian residents of Jerusalem and that more than 26 percent of the cases were against minors.

On July 27, the state comptroller released a special audit report on policing and law enforcement in mixed Jewish-Arab/Palestinian cities during the May 2021 escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to the report, police and Shin Bet arrested 3,200 Arab/Palestinian citizens and Palestinian residents of Jerusalem and 240 Jewish Israelis on suspicion of participating in the May 2021 riots and violent incidents in Jerusalem and in mixed Jewish-Arab/Palestinian cities. Prosecutors charged only 18 percent of those arrested. Arab/Palestinian politicians and civil society organizations criticized the severe indictments, which used terrorism charges against Arab/Palestinian citizens, leading to extensive imprisonment sentences, compared with lenient charges against Jewish Israelis. For example, on July 17, the Beer Sheva District Court sentenced 21-year-old Arab/Bedouin citizen Abd al Aziz Amrani to nine years in prison for severely attacking a Jewish driver on racial grounds and out of a nationalist ideology during the May 2021 events. The special audit report highlighted gaps between local government services provided to Jewish residents and those provided to Arab/Palestinian residents, such as property allocations, support for addressing religious services, welfare, youth, and cultural issues. The NGO Abraham Initiative called on authorities to urgently reduce such gaps between Arab/Palestinian and Jewish residents.

On March 6, unknown individuals attempted to set the Ayelet HaShachar Synagogue in Ramla on fire. On March 7, police arrested a suspect for allegedly breaking a window at the synagogue, pouring gas in the building, and lighting a fire. Shin Bet handled the investigation because the crime had a potential nationalist motive. On March 8, a magistrate court approved a Shin Bet request to prevent a suspect from meeting his lawyer. Shin Bet requested a gag order on the investigation. According to the government, following an investigation, the case was transferred to the central district attorney's office for examination, where a decision was made to close the file due to lack of sufficient evidence.

On March 23, INP and Border Police officers arrested a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem for allegedly physically attacking a Jewish individual in Jerusalem and uploading the attack to TikTok.

On November 16, the police opened an investigation into the vandalizing of approximately two dozen tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Givat Ram, in Jerusalem. The investigation remained open at year's end.

Ultra-Orthodox groups, include the Peleg Yerushalmi and Eda Haredit, held protests in Jerusalem throughout the year against drafting ultra-Orthodox into the military and against the proposed path of a Jerusalem light rail line through an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood. On March 3, authorities arrested six ultra-Orthodox individuals, as hundreds clashed with police to protest the arrest of an ultra-Orthodox youth who refused military service. On July 26, authorities arrested four ultra-Orthodox individuals in Jerusalem in a demonstration against the light rail path, during which protesters torched trash bins. In both cases, the police used water cannon against the protesters.

Authorities continued to allow the 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, including for religious ceremonies such as bar and bat mitzvahs.

On January 28, then Prime Minister Naftali Bennett stated his government would upgrade the egalitarian plaza but would avoid implementation of other parts of

the 2016 agreement. This 2016 agreement represented a compromise between Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities following a Supreme Court petition that included the construction of a permanent plaza for mixed-gender prayer managed by non-Orthodox Jewish groups and a merged entry to all prayer spaces adjacent to the Western Wall. The petition, which the government put on hold in 2017, was pending at the year's end.

On January 16, the government approved a budget of 110 million shekels (\$31.2 million) for a new five-year-plan to upgrade infrastructure at the Western Wall and encourage visits, but it did not include the egalitarian plaza.

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 toward 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 members were mostly Reform and Conservative Jewish women and whose goal was 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 Torah scrolls in the women's section of the main Western Wall Plaza and prohibit women from giving priestly blessings at the site. More than 100 Torah scrolls are housed in the men's section. 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), a Reform rabbi, used his parliamentary immunity to bring Torah scrolls to the women's section for use by Women of the Wall. He referred to the prohibition as illegal.

On March 4, during the monthly prayer of Women of the Wall, several ultra-Orthodox individuals chanted at MK Kariv, "Gilad Kariv be careful, Rabin is searching for a friend," referring to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated in 1995.

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 screaming, cursing, blowing whistles, and spitting on or pushing them.

On June 30, a group of ultra-Orthodox, including minors, interrupted a bar mitzvah ceremony at the egalitarian plaza, calling the participants "Nazis," "Christians," and "animals." One of the minors tore apart a prayer book and used it to blow his nose. On July 18, then Prime Minister Lapid apologized to the bar mitzvah boy and his family, condemning the attack, and stating it contradicts Jewish values.

On July 26, the Prime Minister's Office sent a letter to the director of the Jewish Quarter Development and Renovation Corporation, calling for a ban on the erection of a partition between men and women at the egalitarian plaza of the Western Wall.

Representatives of Women of the Wall continued to say police and ushers from the ultra-Orthodox Western Wall Heritage Foundation, which administers the main Western Wall Plaza, were reluctant to intervene when ultra-Orthodox women and men disrupted the women's monthly prayer service.

On July 29, according to a representative of Women of the Wall, an usher snatched the cell phone of the NGO Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC) director and stated her role was not to protect the Women of the Wall. After the women turned to the police to request the usher's name, police officers removed some of the women from the plaza. 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.

Due to elections in November, the Supreme Court postponed until February 15, 2023, 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 had postponed the implementation. On January 31, the Knesset passed in a first reading (of three readings required for enactment) a draft bill that included yearly benchmarks for ultra-Orthodox serving in the military and a deduction in



government support for yeshivas if those benchmarks were not achieved. The bill did not pass a second or third reading. Those exempt from compulsory military service continued to have the option to join the National Service. 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, community representatives said police arrested dozens of their members every month.

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.

There were no Islamic seminaries 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, stating that none of those institutes was an Islamic seminary.

On May 15, the Supreme Court rejected petitions opposing the government’s approved plan for the construction of an aerial cable car over Jerusalem’s Old City, which passes above a Karaite (a Jewish religious movement) cemetery. According to the Karaite community, the cable car would desecrate the cemetery, thus preventing its further use. The verdict stated that since the government had planned the project under the mistaken assumption that the cemetery was no longer in use and alternatives had become more limited, it recommended an additional meeting between the government and Karaite community representatives to find a way to reduce harm to the cemetery. 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 promote Jewish touristic sites in East Jerusalem and reinforce the country’s claims of sovereignty over the area.

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

On March 27, *Haaretz* reported that police escorted members of the “settler organization” Ateret Cohanim as they moved into part of the Petra Hotel near the Jaffa Gate of Jerusalem’s Old City, while legal disputes over ownership of the hotel between Ateret Cohanim and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate were pending adjudication in the country’s Supreme Court. Lawyers for the hotel tenants said that the Ateret Cohanim members were trespassing and that they attacked the tenants with pepper spray. In a statement issued on April 4, the Patriarchs and Heads of Local Christian Churches of Jerusalem characterized the lease of the hotel to Ateret Cohanim as a threat to the continued existence of a Christian Quarter in Jerusalem and to the peaceful coexistence of communities in the city. On June 8, the Supreme Court denied a Greek Orthodox Patriarchate request to block the transfer. Courts had previously ruled in favor of Ateret Cohanim, and in 2020, the district court had ruled against reopening the case to hear new evidence brought forward by the church. According to the *Times of Israel*, the Supreme Court justices said their ruling was focused narrowly on whether the church’s claims met the legal threshold for a retrial and did not speak to the merit of the competing claims. The church accused Ateret Cohanim of using bribes, fraud, extortion, and shell companies to buy the property involved and alleged that Jewish extremists targeted Christian areas in an attempt to change the character of Jerusalem’s Old City.

When asked about Ateret Cohanim’s acquisition of the property, the Vicar General of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem said, “The dispute about the two hotels has a political dimension, because it corresponds to an Israeli vision of strengthening the Jewish presence in the Old City. It also has a religious aspect. Most of the religious processions to the Holy Sepulcher and almost all the pilgrims pass in front of the two hotels. Having these places controlled by settlers could have an impact on the processions and the free passage of pilgrims, given that in the past the Haredim, or ultra-Orthodox Jews, have sometimes spat on people wearing a cross. The fear does not relate to Jews as such but to the ultra-Orthodox or the settlers.”

On August 7, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem strongly protested the repeated violation and attempt by some squatters to occupy the church's property at Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The church reported that police removed the individuals from the scene.

The MRS listed 21 dedicated cemeteries in Israel and West Bank settlements for the burial of persons the government defined as "lacking religion," and 33 cemeteries for civil burial, but only three were available for use by the 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 NGO 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 Jewish religious views. The two MRS-administered cemeteries in West Bank settlements were available only for the burial of Israeli citizens.

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 the 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.

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

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.

On May 22, the Ministerial Committee for Internal Affairs, to which the government had referred the matter after a court order, rejected a request by the Jehovah's Witnesses NGO Watchtower Association for recognition as an official religion in the country. According to the committee's decision, "There is no room

to change the policy of the State of Israel from the last 50 years to not recognize new religious sects.” The committee’s decision received a validation as a government decision on June 2. On September 28, the Supreme Court dismissed the Watchtower Association petition on the matter.

On March 30, the Supreme Court issued a conditional order, demanding that the Knesset’s Finance Committee explain why it would not grant the Watchtower Association a tax-deductible status as part of a petition submitted in 2017, and following a tax authority audit. On June 22, the Knesset’s Finance Committee approved the Watchtower Association’s application. After the committee’s decision, the court on July 27 dismissed the association’s 2017 appeal asking that the government respond to its application for tax-deductible status.

The Center of Scientology, despite being a non-profit public benefit company, continued to pay full city property tax on its center, similar to other businesses.

After the government-imposed safety limits on crowds following a 2021 stampede that killed 45 ultra-Orthodox Jews attending an annual pilgrimage, police restricted attendance at Orthodox Easter services in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Authorities said they would allow 4,000 worshippers to attend the services, with 1,800 allowed in the church. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate stated that 11,000 persons usually attend. The patriarchate released a statement saying that it “was fed up with police restrictions on freedom to worship.” A police representative said the decision was “totally about safety and not at all about anything else.” Christian leaders said there was no need to alter the ceremony and that restrictions infringed on religious freedom and worship. Police sealed off and established checkpoints at main entrances to the Old City, the Christian quarter, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which the Greek Patriarchate denounced in a statement accusing police of practicing violence against worshippers at the checkpoints.

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

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/Palestinian students. A few independent, mixed Jewish-Arab/Palestinian 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. A small number of schools that receive public funding teach a bilingual Hebrew-Arabic curriculum with a focus on Jewish-Arab/Palestinian coexistence.

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 examination at lower rates than their non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish counterparts. The government continued educational and scholarship programs to benefit Arab/Palestinian students. There were 60,000 Arab/Palestinian students in higher education programs, 18 percent of all students in the country, slightly fewer than the Arab/Palestinian percentage of the population (21 percent, including residents of East Jerusalem), according to the Council for Higher Education. In the last decade, there was an increase of approximately 133 percent in the number of Arab/Palestinian students, 115 percent in bachelor's programs, 257 percent in master's programs, and 140 percent in doctoral programs.

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 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 NGO Secular Forum, growing "religionization" (*hadata*) of the education system continued, including in textbooks and through programs in schools taught by Orthodox NGOs. After years in which the government funded only activities of Orthodox organizations in secular schools and following a 2020

Supreme Court verdict ordering the government to reexamine the funding of school activities by pluralistic Jewish organizations, the government still did not fund such activities during the year, according to IRAC.

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 Jewish schools, they would lose autonomy over hiring, admitting students, and the 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 25, the Ministry of Education published a call for ultra-Orthodox educational institutions to accept up to 100 percent funding if they include a core curriculum of mathematics, science, Hebrew, and English, with students' scores in the subjects taken into consideration. The Belz Hasidic sect developed the plan. The skills were considered critical for participation in the job market. In October, Yitzchak Goldknopf, the head of the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism (UTJ) party, said the country had not benefited from teaching math and English in secular schools. The coalition agreements of the new government, which took office December 29, however, included plans to revert to previous funding conditions, which did not incentivize core curriculum studies.

Jewish schoolgirls with Mizrahi ethnicity (ancestry from North Africa or the Middle East) continued to be denied admission to ultra-Orthodox schools despite a 2009 court ruling prohibiting the ethnic segregation of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi schoolgirls, according to the NGO Noar Kahalacha. In August 2021, parents of Mizrahi schoolgirls in Elad, together with the Legal Aid of the Ministry of Justice, filed a petition in the Jerusalem District Court arguing that admission examinations for ultra-Orthodox high school seminaries in the city were meant to exclude Mizrahi girls. The court had yet to consider the petition as of year's end.

In May, the Secular Forum issued a letter to the Ministry of Education initiating proceedings that objected to the certification and funding of a youth movement run by the ultra-Orthodox Chabad movement aimed toward secular children with the purpose of bringing them closer to religion.

The government acknowledged it used “exceptional measures” during interrogation in some cases, but the Ministry of Justice did not provide details. According to the Israeli NGO Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), these measures might constitute religion-based humiliation. According to accounts that PCATI had received in recent years, these practices include interference in a detainee’s ability to pray while in detention (such as refusing to tell the time to a detainee, prolonged interrogations with no breaks, recurring intrusions into a detainee’s cell); provocatively eating and drinking in front of detainees while they were fasting for Ramadan; and multiple affronts to the modesty practices of religious women detainees (such as by activating cameras in their cells, preventing them from privately using the bathroom, or removing their headscarves).

The barrier that divided the majority of the West Bank from Green Line Israel also divided some communities in Jerusalem, affecting non-Jewish residents’ access to places of worship and employment, agricultural lands, schools, and hospitals as well as the conduct of journalism and NGO and humanitarian activities. The government stated the barrier was needed for security reasons.

In the November 1 national elections, conservative parties, including ultra-Orthodox and Religious Zionist parties, won a majority of seats in the 120 seat Knesset, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu led the formation of a new government that took office on December 29. Half of the 64-member governing coalition came from religious parties.

Several groups, including religious minorities and human rights NGOs, continued to criticize the Nation State Law, which specifies Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

On July 21, the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs launched a new Directorate of Jewish Renewal. The directorate, established by a coalition agreement between the Yesh Atid and Labor Parties, is to fund Jewish Conservative and Reform organizations’

activities. Minister of Diaspora Affairs Nachman Shai wrote on July 21, “From the very first day I took office, I emphasized that the State of Israel needs to be open to every Jew – no matter how one expresses Jewish identity. Only this way can we truly represent the values of our Jewish and democratic state, which is based on the principles of freedom, equality, and diversity.” MKs from Shas, UTJ, and the Religious Zionist Party described the decision as political and contributing to the destruction of Judaism.

On May 2, the Supreme Court rejected a petition by NGOs Emek Shaveh and the Arab Culture Association against the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage, demanding that criteria for funding heritage sites by the ministry not exclude non-Jewish sites. The court accepted the government’s position that the state is entitled to delineate the boundaries of each ministry’s jurisdiction, even if these are determined by religious or national identity criteria. Emek Shaveh criticized the ruling, which, according to the organization, could lead to other ministries serving only Jews. The NGOs also argued the ruling would “seal the fate of hundreds of sites and monuments that embody the multicultural story of this land that stand abandoned and neglected with no ministry appointed to protect them.”

On July 28, the Supreme Court issued an interim order that put on hold reform of the “kosher cellphones” market, initiated by Minister of Communications Yoaz Hendel, following a petition by ultra-Orthodox organizations. Kosher cellphones are configured only for calls and text messages, with no Internet access or apps, and are affiliated only with one provider, thus preventing competition, according to Hendel. Media outlets reported that kosher cellphones also allow rabbis to control the free flow of information into their communities. A hearing on the petition was scheduled for 2023.

Throughout the year, in Bnei Brak and Jerusalem, ultra-Orthodox individuals vandalized, broke windows, and set on fire cellphone businesses that refused to only sell kosher phones in their stores.

In November, the MRS held halachic knowledge exams for women for the first time, following a petition filed with the Supreme Court by six Orthodox women halacha students and NGOs to permit women to take the Chief Rabbinate’s halacha examinations used to ordain rabbis. The exam was separate from the



Chief Rabbinate's exam and, according to the NGO Rackman Center, further strengthened discrimination against women. The petition remained pending at the year's end.

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 13.9 percent (65 percent of which were at entry- and mid-level), according to the Civil Service Commission. In addition, 3.4 percent were Ethiopian-Israelis, 3.3 percent were people with disabilities, 1.9 percent were ultra-Orthodox, and 1.2 percent were new immigrants. The percentage of Arab/Palestinian employees in the 62 government-owned companies was approximately 1.5 percent; the percentage of Druze employees was approximately 1.3 percent. 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.

On August 8, the Supreme Court dismissed a petition filed in 2021 by women's rights and religious freedom NGOs against the MRS, demanding appropriate representation for women on religious councils. Then Minister of Religious Services Matan Kahana issued regulations for appropriate representation for women in religious councils in May and appointed nine religious council chairwomen and 20 cochairs, according to the government.

In November, the Rackman Center submitted a petition to the Supreme Court, demanding an increase in the representation of women in the Chief Rabbinate Council responsible for electing the two Chief Rabbis. Only 10 percent of the 150 members council are women, according to the Rackman Center. The petition was pending at the year's end.

According to the Secular Forum, *hadata* (religionization) continued in the IDF, and accommodation for religious soldiers affected secular soldiers, particularly women. On May 26, agreeing to a request from the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, commanders instructed the Givati Brigade's education officer not to act as the master of ceremonies in the unit's swearing-in ceremony because she is

a woman, according to media reports. The IDF stated the commanders erred in their judgment. IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi referred to the incident as “a violation of the army’s values and its orders.” In June, religious soldiers from the Nachal Brigade were allowed to avoid participation in an exercise due to the presence of a female officer, according to media reports.

In June, a group of religious Zionist rabbis and national Orthodox rabbis published an advertisement stating that religious soldiers cannot serve with women in combat units, calling on the IDF to avoid taking steps to integrate women into more units. This followed the state’s response to Supreme Court petitions by individuals demanding women’s inclusion in elite combat units. A pilot program began in November, placing women in combat positions in a search-and-rescue unit.

On December 2, the ultra-Orthodox news website *Behadrei Haredim* issued an apology and provided monetary compensation to five women leaders of progressive Judaism movements after it published a photo of a meeting that they held with President Isaac Herzog that blurred out women participants. The apology and compensation were part of a compromise reached following a lawsuit in the Jerusalem Magistrate Court by the women who participated in the meeting.

In March, a Rahat Municipality requirement for Bedouin women to sit in the back of the Rahat municipality’s cultural center during a music event led to a protest by Bedouin women.

The NGO Negev Coexistence Forum (NCF), citing information gained through freedom of information requests to the government during the year, reported a new high of 3,004 demolitions of Bedouin-citizen structures in 2021. According to the NCF, self-demolition represented 86 percent of all the demolitions carried out in 2021, which reflected the immense effect the state’s eviction policy has on the Bedouin Israeli citizens. Other civil society representatives stated the demolitions ignored traditional Bedouin seminomadic lifestyles predating the modern state of Israel.

According to Amnesty International, the government planned to evict all the residents and demolish Ras Jrabeh, a Bedouin village in the Negev. The village

was not recognized by the government and its 500 residents did not receive government services. The government planned to demolish the village to incorporate its land into the nearby city of Dimona, while moving its residents into the nearby Bedouin village of Qasr al-Sir. More than 100 households in the village submitted an appeal heard by the Beersheeba Magistrate's Court on May 22 and 23, represented by lawyers from the NGO Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. On June 3, UN human rights experts called on the government to halt the process, saying, "Thousands of Bedouin citizens of Israel living in the Naqab [the Arabic name for Negev] are facing threats of eviction to make way for more Jewish-only towns, military bases, and other major infrastructure projects that exclude the Bedouin people and their development interests." The appeal remained pending at year's end.

The government continued to promote measures to encourage increased Jewish-Israeli residence and economic development in the thinly populated Negev Desert, including development plans for military industries, railways, the expansion of Road 6, and a phosphate mine. Civil society organizations criticized government's 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 April 10, the government approved establishing seven new localities for Jews in the Negev, reportedly despite the objection of the Ministry of Finance and the planning bodies.

On March 27, as part of its continuing campaign to promote Israeli-Jewish residence and economic development in the Negev, the government approved the establishment of five new communities in the region, allocating funds from various ministries for their development.

Adalah continued to report 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.

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.

Then Minister of Religious Services Kahana, who left the cabinet in May, continued to promote a reform to allow municipal rabbis, and not only the Chief Rabbinate, to perform state-recognized conversions. The reform would assist Israeli citizens from countries in former Soviet Union countries who seek to convert but lack proper documentation under the current system. The proposed reform did not include the option for non-Orthodox conversions.

On January 4, Minister Kahana announced he would recommend the appointment of Rabbi Benayahu Broner, a rabbi affiliated with Tzohar, a group of Orthodox rabbis that provides religious services outside of the rabbinate's framework, as the head of the new conversion system. On January 12, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi David Lau sent a letter to the civil service commissioner in response to the planned appointment of Broner listing government decisions that he argued provided the authority for him to head the conversion system. On January 12, Kahana submitted a bill in the Knesset to approve the conversion reform. Unable to secure a majority in the Knesset, on March 20, the government made a temporary appointment of a manager of local conversion courts and postponed the Knesset vote on the broader reform.

In August, the *Times of Israel* reported that critics said that Chief Rabbi Lau deliberately delayed his approval of conversions to Judaism to exert pressure against Kahana's proposed reform. According to the report, Lau's office said that Broner's appointment required Lau to examine each conversion case in detail before offering his final approval, which offers state recognition of the conversion. Lau's actions reportedly slowed the approval process significantly, resulting in a major backlog. Seth Farber, head of the NGO ITIM, told the *Times of Israel* that Lau's motives were political, and not religious, in nature.

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.

On September 29, the Jerusalem District Court ruled the state must recognize private Orthodox conversions for the purpose of the law of return, following two petitions in April and May. In 2016 the Supreme Court ruled such conversions must be recognized, but since then, the state has rejected requests for recognition of private Orthodox conversions, arguing it had yet to set criteria for them. In the September ruling, the court stated the lack of criteria should not prevent the examination of the petitioner's requests for recognition by the MOI.

On January 1, the government began implementing kashrut reform, allowing municipal rabbis to issue kashrut certificates beyond their jurisdiction, a step that would break up the Chief Rabbinate's monopoly over the kashrut market. According to the kashrut reform, approved in 2021, from January 1, 2023, private organizations, in addition to 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.

On January 2, leading ultra-Orthodox rabbis issued an open letter calling for a boycott of rabbis who cooperate with the kashrut and conversion reforms. The letter referred to conversion and kashrut reformers as "destroyers of religion, who have risen in evil to commit iniquities, attempt to uproot the foundations of faith in the Land of Israel and permit the conversion of hundreds of thousands of gentiles against the way of the holy Torah." On January 15, Sephardi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef specifically called initiators of the kashrut reform "destroyers of religion, destroyers of Judaism." David Stav, a rabbi who heads Tzohar, said that the Chief Rabbis "are causing the nonreligious public ... to loathe Judaism."

In light of the kashrut reform and the planned conversion reform, on January 30, thousands of yeshiva students demonstrated in Jerusalem in support of the Chief Rabbinate, with the participation of the Chief Rabbis, yeshiva rabbis, and MK

Itamar Ben Gvir. On February 1, 1,000 rabbis, including the Chief Rabbi, attended a conference opposing the reforms.

On March 27, the Chief Rabbinate published figures on cases of *get* refusals for 2021. According to the data, rabbinical courts issued 51 verdicts ordering the granting of a *get*, after which those not agreeing to do so are considered *get* refusers. The court issued 274 sanctions during 2021 against *get* refusers.

On August 28, the Chief Rabbinate Council upheld the decision of Chief Rabbi Lau, who ruled that in the case of a woman whose American ex-husband refused for nearly 20 years to grant her a *get*, the husband's aged father could be refused a Jewish burial in Israel. Rabbinic authorities had previously excommunicated the husband, excluded him from community prayer life, and prevented his mother from receiving a Jewish burial in the United States after her 2019 death.

On September 11, a rabbinical court sentenced a woman to prison for refusing to divorce her husband since 2018, the first time a rabbinical court sentenced a woman to prison for refusing to divorce. During the four years prior to the sentence, the court froze her bank account and revoked her driver's license. According to *Haaretz*, the man is the refusing partner in 95 percent of *get* refusal cases.

On July 8 and September 29, verdicts by two district courts determined that the Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA) must register Utah marriages performed online, following petitions by couples and NGOs. In 2020, Minister of Interior Aryeh Deri ordered the registration process for couples who married online in Utah to be stopped to allow further review by senior officials. According to the ruling, if the wedding certificate is valid, the wedding must be registered. On July 21, the country's (LGBTQI+) umbrella organization stated PIBA refused to register the Utah marriages despite the court verdict and sent a letter to then Minister of Interior Ayelet Shaked demanding that PIBA register the couples. In November, the Supreme Court rejected a request by PIBA for a delay in the implementation of the verdicts. Following a letter from Hiddush, on December 1, PIBA said it would begin registering Utah marriages.

A Rackman Center petition to the Supreme Court from 2021 demanding the establishment of criteria under which women could officiate state-sanctioned wedding ceremonies was pending at year's end.

Local authorities continued to circumvent the ban on public transportation on Shabbat by funding privately operated bus lines, with Hod Hasharon and Modi'in-Macabim-Reut joining the initiative during the year. On September 11, the government approved a proposal by then Minister of Transportation Merav Michaeli to establish metropolitan authorities empowered to make decisions regarding public transportation, including operations on the Shabbat. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, the decision "sparked outrage from the religious parties." Shas, a major ultraorthodox party, promised to work to overturn the decision. One supporter of the government's plan said that the transfer of power to local communities would allow residents to "live in a way consistent with their values and not one imposed on them by a religious minority that holds disproportionate control."

On October 1, then Minister of Transport Michaeli said that the new light rail in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area would operate on Shabbat in the next year. Media commentators reported political and budgetary challenges remained to the implementation of Michaeli's decision. Political leaders of the country's religious parties criticized Michaeli's announcement as a stunt and a desecration of the Sabbath.

In February, the IDF declared it would stop searching soldier's bags for non-kosher food on Passover, following a petition by the Secular Forum and Hiddush. On March 1, the Supreme Court ordered the IDF to explain why it refused to designate specific areas of bases as "kosher for Passover," rather than the entire base. The petition was pending at year's end.

On March 27, media reported that Haddasah Hospital in Jerusalem continued to ban *hametz* (foods with grains or leavening agents prohibited to Jews during Passover) during Passover, despite a 2020 Supreme Court ruling allowing people to bring hametz into hospitals. Then Minister of Health Nitzan Horowitz sent a letter on March 29 to all hospitals, calling on them to respect the Supreme Court ruling. Then Knesset Health Committee Chair Idit Silman attacked Horowitz on April 3 at a committee meeting, stating, "We will not allow him to be a minister."

Then Minister of Religious Services Kahana blamed Horowitz for conducting a media campaign to “put a finger in our eye.” On April 6, Silman resigned from the coalition, stating she could “no longer bear the harm to the values and flags that are an essence and a right.”

A 2021 petition by the Watchtower Association demanding that the government allow marriage registration for Jehovah’s Witnesses was pending at the year’s end.

On December 10, Chief Rabbi Yosef said that Reform and Conservative Jews represent “a new religion” and are actively “uprooting our Torah.” Yosef added that it was better to interact with secular Jews and try to bring them closer to religion than it was to interact with Reform or Conservative Jews. In response, the Reform movement said that the Chief Rabbi, whose “salary is paid by the public ... should learn there is more than one way to be a Jew.”

On May 11, while MK Mansour Abbas of the United Arab List made a statement to the media, MK Ben Gvir interrupted the speech and said, “You and the Shura council are terrorist supporters, terrorists – go to Syria.”

During the year, opposition politicians, including former Prime Minister Netanyahu, continued to criticize then Prime Minister Lapid and then Alternate Prime Minister Bennett for “capitulating” to the Islamic Movement and its political party Ra’am, often described as “terror supporters,” including during the election campaign ahead of the November 1 election.

On November 12, after the national elections, Chief Rabbi Yosef said that the new government, once it was formed, needed to pass a bill allowing the Knesset to override Supreme Court decisions. Ultra-Orthodox leaders have criticized court decisions on such issues as conversions and requiring military service for the ultra-Orthodox. Yosef said, “This is an Orthodox state, not a reform one.” Then Minister of Finance Avigdor Liberman called for Yosef to be fired for his involvement in political decisions.

On November 20, Chief Rabbi Lau called for changes to the Law of Return, saying that provisions that grant citizenship to individuals with at least one Jewish grandparent should be revoked. “For ten years I have been asking to change this



mistake of the third generation in the Law of Return – to fix it, to ensure that Israel will be a Jewish state, a state of Jews.”

The coalition agreement signed at the end of the year by parties forming the new government stated an intention to amend existing law to allow private businesses to refuse service based on religious belief.

Members of some religious minorities said 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.

According to the website of Brigham Young University’s Jerusalem Center, the government maintained an agreement with the Church of Jesus Christ that no member of the church “will engage in proselytizing of any kind” within Israel and the West Bank and Gaza as a condition for it 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.

Christian leaders continued to report little difficulty obtaining visas for clergy to serve in Israel or East Jerusalem, except for Christian clergy from Armenia or 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 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 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 a lack of MOI budgetary resources. Muslim leaders stated sharia court judges, who were Ministry of Justice employees, were their preferred religious representatives.

On November 8, the NCF stated that the government resumed the work to build the Jewish community of Hiran on disputed lands of the unrecognized village of Umm al-Hiran. A majority of the Bedouin residents of Umm al Hiran continued to oppose 2018 agreement with the government to demolish the village and relocate to vacant plots in the Bedouin town of Hura. The NCF also reported that the Jewish group Garin Hiran, which was awaiting the establishment of Hiran, was residing in the former military camp Yatir nearby.

On December 29, at an annual New Year’s reception for spiritual and lay leaders of Christian churches and communities, President Herzog said the government “will always preserve freedom of religion and worship and protect the rights of all religious communities and minorities that make up the beautiful human mosaic of our country. This commitment ... goes to the very heart of who we are as a Jewish and democratic State. There must be zero tolerance for all forms of attacks or vandalism against religious sites, institutions, or clergy.” Incoming Interior Minister Aryeh Deri said at the reception that the new government would “work for all citizens, regardless of religion, race, and sex.” Members of the Muslim, Druze, and Baha’i communities also attended.

At a November 3 interfaith conference hosted by the Religions Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (ICSD), religious leaders signed a “Jerusalem Declaration on Climate,” in which the signatories pledged to address the challenges of climate change. Participants included the papal nuncio, a representative of the Baha’i community, a Druze imam, a representative of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, several rabbis, and the founder of ICSD.

Civil rights organizations, including Adalah, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, Physicians for Human Rights Israel, HaMoked, and the Society of St. Yves,

petitioned to the Supreme Court on behalf of families affected by the newly reenacted Law of Citizenship and Entry. The groups called for revocation of the law, referring to it as discriminatory, racist, contrary to international law, a violation of constitutional rights, and unfair, because it labels all Palestinians as a security risk. Court proceedings continue at year's end.

According to HaMoked, approximately 10,000 Palestinians living in the country, including in Jerusalem, held temporary stay permits because of the citizenship and entry law, with no legal guarantee they could continue living with their families. When authorities did not renew the previous citizenship and entry law and it expired in July, HaMoked petitioned the Supreme Court to direct the MOI to adjudicate reunification applications. HaMoked and Israeli media reported that the MOI refused to deal with the applications, and that 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 East Jerusalem neighborhoods outside the security barrier to live with their nonresident spouse and children while maintaining Jerusalem residency. According to Christian religious leaders, the situation remained especially acute 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, including political instability, 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, 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. Approximately 12.5 percent of the public land is 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, 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 Bedouin Authority and the Israel Land Authority stated they gave priority to Bedouin veteran soldiers in the purchase of plots of land to encourage recruitment into the army. In accordance with the terms of a tender in Rahat, veterans were given first priority in receiving and selecting plots, at a discount of 70 percent.

Under Israeli law, excavations within a sacred site require the approval of a ministerial committee, which includes the ministers of culture, justice, and religious affairs. 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 Israel Antiquities Authority emphasized archaeological finds that bolstered Jewish claims, while minimizing historically significant archaeological finds of other religions.

Of the 120-member Knesset, there were 14 members from ethnic or religious minorities (nine Muslims, three Druze, one Ethiopian-Israeli, and one Christian) prior to the November elections. After the elections, there were no Arabs in the cabinet. One member of the 15-member Supreme Court was an Arab.

### **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.

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, including actions with the stated purpose of exacting a “price” for actions taken by the government against the attackers’ interests. (“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.) The attacks targeted both Christians and Muslims.

The government classified any association using the phrase “price tag” as an illegal association. The government further classified a price-tag attack as a security (as opposed to criminal) offense. According to police, the most common offenses were attacks on vehicles, defacement of real estate, harm to Muslim and Christian holy sites, assault, and damage to agricultural lands. 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 February 7, unknown persons punctured the tires of 20 cars in Kfar Qasim, and sprayed graffiti with the Star of David and the phrase, “Jewish wake up. Fight the enemy.” On March 9, 30 individuals vandalized 30 cars in Jaljulia and sprayed graffiti warning Arab/Palestinian men not to become involved romantically with Jewish women.

During the year, unknown persons painted swastikas in several cities, including Petah Tikva, Eilat, and Ashdod. In April, vandals painted a swastika on the sign of the Beit Tzur Baruch Synagogue in Ashdod.

In some ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, private organizations posted “modesty signs” demanding women dress modestly to avoid distracting devout men. Such signs remained in place in Beit Shemesh for the most part, despite a 2018 court petition ordering their removal.

Vandals regularly defaced publicly displayed photographs of women in cities with large ultra-Orthodox populations. According to media reports, due to failed enforcement against vandalism, some companies preferred to self-censor and not show women in their advertisements.

Egged, the largest transit company in the country, removed ads that included images of women from its buses, with a company spokesman saying “Images [like these] cannot appear in advertisements, in consideration of children, teenagers, the religious [Jews], or Muslim Arabs,” adding that they caused “discomfort and distress to wide segments of the Israeli public.”

Christian clergy and pilgrims continued to report instances of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem harassing or spitting on them. Church leaders in the Old City of Jerusalem reported Israeli police did not intervene when their processions faced verbal harassment from Israelis and that they did not observe any results from police on reported incidents of verbal or physical assault.

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 November 7, a member of Jehovah’s Witness filed a police complaint reporting an attack against her and another member during door-to-door activity in Be’er Sheva. According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, a man grabbed the victim by the hand, slapped her phone, pushed her and another member into an elevator, and then threw an object (not further identified) at them.

The Center of Scientology Israel reported that the NGO The Israeli Center for Victims of Cults targeted it. Former staff members of Yad L’Achim, an ultra-Orthodox organization opposing interfaith marriage and proselytizing efforts by Christian missionaries, established the center, whose staff receives annual government funding for helping “cult victims.” According to Scientology Israel, the government continued to support the Israeli Center for Victims of Cults.

According to media reports, members of the organization Lehava used violence and incited violence against Palestinians and Arab/Palestinian citizens of the country. Lehava continued to criticize or assault Arab/Palestinian men who were in relationships with Jewish women and to harass “mixed” couples. A campaign by Lehava stated, “The war against intermarriage is not racism.”

Lehava and Yad L’Achim continued to disrupt instances of cohabitation between Jewish women and Arab/Palestinian men. According to the Yad L’Achim website, the organization views itself as a “Jewish rescue corps” that recovers Jewish women from “hostile” Arab/Palestinian villages. The group also paid for a Google ad campaign to target Scientology online.

In January and February, thousands of people across the country demonstrated against the government under the slogan, “Israel is in danger, we want a Jewish state.” The protesters opposed the inclusion of the United Arab List in the parliamentary coalition and stated the government hurt the Jewish character of the state. Some protesters also opposed government reforms on kashrut and conversion.

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 the ultra-Orthodox perceived as immodest. The harassment included verbal abuse, spitting, 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, and participation in the workforce.

A group of activists, including the Temple Institute, dedicated themselves to rebuilding “the Holy Temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, in accord with the Biblical commandments.” Mount Moriah is at the site of the Golden Dome on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound. The Temple Institute displayed a gold, seven-branched Menorah in the Old City of Jerusalem, which it planned to install one day in the third temple. In September, the group brought in five red heifers, according to its website, as part of plans to reinstitute animal sacrifices.

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+ minors because of this treatment, leading some to attempt suicide. Media reported the practice of conversion therapy by some Jewish and Muslim religious figures. 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 Jewish 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 NGOs, there were Jewish couples who married unofficially in the country, outside of the rabbinate's authority, in unofficial Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and secular ceremonies which did not register at the MOI.

NGOs, including Mavoi Satum and ITIM, promoted the use of prenuptial agreements to prevent cases of *aginat* (the status of 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.

In a Knesset committee hearing on civil marriage, a CBS official stated that over the previous 20 years an average of 7,500 couples per year registered with PIBA marriages conducted abroad, reaching a total of 150,000 couples since 2000. According to the CBS official, 25 percent of the couples include two Jewish partners, 30 percent included one Jewish partner and one partner without religious classification or who was a non-Arab Christian. In most cases, these were individuals from the former Soviet Union, and while many of them considered themselves Jewish, the rabbinate did not recognize them as such. In 20 percent of cases, couples included one Jewish partner and one partner without a status in Israel; 12 percent comprised two partners without religious classification.

A variety of NGOs continued to try to build understanding and create dialogue among religious groups and between religious and secular Jewish communities. The NGOs included Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam, the Abraham Fund Initiative,



Givat Haviva, the Hagar and Hand-in-Hand integrated Jewish-Arab/Palestinian bilingual schools, Hiddush, Israeli Religious Action Center, Mosaica, Tag Meir, and Interfaith Encounter Association.

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 its annual *Israel Religion and State Index* survey of 800 adult Jews conducted in July and published in September, the NGO Hiddush reported that 64 percent of respondents identified as either “secular” (47 percent) or “traditional-not-religious” (17 percent) with regard to how they viewed public policies on religion and the state. Of the individuals surveyed, 81 percent supported freedom of religion and conscience and 59 percent supported the separation of religion and state, while 59 percent supported equal status for the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform traditions. A large majority did not see the need for religious conversion to be approved by the Chief Rabbinate as a condition for the state to recognize the conversion, while 33 percent considered recognition of conversion by the Chief Rabbinate necessary. Thirty-five percent stated immigrants should be recognized as Jewish if they identify as such, and 32 percent stated immigrants should be recognized as Jewish if they undergo either an Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform conversion. Of those surveyed, 25 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, 62 percent of respondents supported state recognition of choice in marriage, doing away with the rabbinate’s monopoly, and recognizing civil and non-Orthodox religious marriages equally. In addition, 49 percent stated that, had they been allowed a choice, they would not have married in an Orthodox ceremony. The poll found 73 percent of respondents did not observe Shabbat according to religious law, and 75 percent supported public transportation on Shabbat.

According to a poll of Jewish citizens by the Israel Democracy Institute conducted in August and published on September 20, 70 percent of respondents did not consider individuals born to a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother to be Jewish, while 26 percent did. Forty percent viewed persons converted through

non-Orthodox conversion to be Jews. According to the poll, 34 percent of respondents said they trusted the Chief Rabbinate, while 38 percent said they trusted municipal rabbis and 28 percent trusted rabbinical courts. Sixty-five percent of respondents preferred religious burial, while 12 percent preferred civil burial and 5 percent cremation.

In a report released December 22, the CBS stated that 84 percent of the country's Christian community said that they were satisfied with life in the country. According to the report, Arab/Palestinian and Christian women had some of the highest education rates in the country.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

In meetings with government officials, the Ambassador and other embassy officials stressed the importance of religious pluralism and respect for all religious groups. Numerous high-level officials made formal stops at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust remembrance site, to remember the six million Jews killed by the Nazis, underscore the importance of fighting Holocaust denial, keep a public spotlight on antisemitism, and highlight religious tolerance. The U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues discussed Holocaust education and commemoration and restitution for Jewish victims of the Nazis with government officials in February and March. The U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism visited Yad Vashem in July and gave a keynote speech on "New Tools in Combatting Contemporary Antisemitism" at the Hebrew University to an audience of more than 200 government, civil society, and academic representatives.

In November, the embassy 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. The embassy reiterated U.S. government statements about the need to de-escalate tensions around the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, especially when Jewish and Muslim holidays coincided, which occurred during the year with Passover and Ramadan.

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 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.

Following the June 30 disruption of a bar mitzvah by ultra-Orthodox at the egalitarian plaza, the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism issued a tweet: “Deeply disturbed by the troubling actions of a group of extremists last week at the Kotel. Let us make no mistake, had such a hateful incident – such incitement – happened in any other country, there’d be little hesitation in labeling it antisemitism.”

Embassy-supported initiatives focused on interreligious dialogue and community development and advocated a shared society for Arab/Palestinian 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. Embassy programs continued to support mixed Jewish-Arab/Palestinian educational and community initiatives to reduce societal tensions and violence through sports, the arts, environmental projects, and entrepreneurship.

In one of many examples, the embassy hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for 80 guests in which representatives from the Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Druze communities joined to celebrate diversity, partnership, and mutual respect. In addressing the guests, the embassy host highlighted the embassy’s commitment to foster ongoing dialogue, promote interreligious and intercultural communication, and partner with diverse communities in the country and the region.

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/Palestinian minority into the broader national economy,

especially the high-tech sector. This was accomplished both through funding and through high-profile visits by the Ambassador to embassy-supported organizations in this area, which were amplified on the embassy's social media.

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.