

# WEST BANK AND GAZA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

West Bank and Gaza Strip residents are subject to the jurisdiction of separate authorities, with different implications for the fabric of life. Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to Jordanian and Mandatory statutes in effect before 1967, military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander in the West Bank, and, in the relevant areas, Palestinian Authority (PA) law. Israelis living in the West Bank are subject to Israeli laws and Israeli legislation and military ordinances enacted by the military commanders, whereas Palestinians living in the West Bank are subject primarily to Israeli military ordinances. The PA exercises varying degrees of authority in the small portions of the West Bank where it has some measure of control. Although PA laws theoretically apply in the Gaza Strip, the PA does not exercise authority there, and Hamas continues to exercise de facto control over security and other matters. The PA Basic Law, which serves as an interim constitution, establishes Islam as the official religion and states the principles of sharia shall be the main source of legislation but provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites unless they violate public order or morality. It also proscribes discrimination based on religion, calls for respect of “all other divine religions,” and stipulates all citizens are equal before the law.

The Israeli government continued to allow controlled access to religious sites in Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount (the site containing the foundation of the First and Second Jewish temples and where, the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque are located). Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site. Several instances of intercommunal violence during the year culminated in deaths.

On May 13, Israeli authorities used force against the funeral procession of Palestinian-American al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Jerusalem, beating mourners, including casket bearers, with batons, firing stun grenades into the crowd, and seizing Palestinian flags. On May 16, Israeli 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. On May 29, as part of Jerusalem Day celebrations, the “Flags March” took place in Jerusalem in which an estimated 70,000 Israeli marchers entered the Old City of Jerusalem through the Damascus Gate and the Muslim Quarter, according to press reports. Crowds danced and chanted anti-Muslim slogans including insults to the Prophet Muhammad and “death to Arabs.” A record number of more than 2,600 Jews toured the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount during the day, while young Palestinians reportedly threw rocks in protest and barricaded themselves inside the al-Aqsa Mosque. The Palestinian Red Crescent reported that Israeli authorities responded using rubber bullets, sound grenades, pepper spray, and, in one instance, live bullets, injuring 79 Palestinians and caused 28 to be hospitalized. Police detained more than 60 suspects and remanded 35 for trial.

On April 14, Israeli police arrested six Jewish activists who were planning to sacrifice a goat on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount ahead of Passover. Israeli police imposed new restrictions on Christian attendance at the Orthodox Easter Holy Fire celebrations in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City of Jerusalem on April 23; Christian leaders said there was no need to alter the ceremony and that the restrictions infringed on religious freedom and worship, while Israeli authorities said the crowd control measures were necessary for safety.

On June 30, Palestinian gunmen fired at Jewish worshipers and accompanying Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers at Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus, sparking a gun battle in which 17 Palestinians, two Israeli civilians, and an Israeli military commander were injured. On October 12, dozens of Jewish worshipers entered Joseph’s Tomb under the protection of Israeli forces after authorities approved the visit. According to Palestinian reports cited by *Haaretz*, the Jewish worshipers were escorted into the city in military vehicles, and there was an exchange of gunfire between Palestinians and soldiers. No casualties were reported. On August 30, gunmen opened fire on a car near the entrance to Joseph’s Tomb, wounding two Israelis. The IDF said the Israeli civilians, whom they described as Jewish worshipers, failed to coordinate their pilgrimage to the site with the military.

On April 26, *Haaretz* reported that Israeli police restricted male, Muslim worshipers between the ages of 17 and 45 from entering the Haram al-

Sharif/Temple Mount during Ramadan prayers unless they agreed to hand over their identification cards to police. The newspaper's report described the act as a violation of the law and the right to freedom of worship and said the practice had been used at other times going back to 2015. There were reports that Israeli authorities used excessive force against protesters in East Jerusalem, at the Damascus Gate and at Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, throughout the year. According to media reporting, on April 15, Israeli police raided the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem before dawn, as thousands of worshippers gathered for morning prayers. Police said they were trying to break up a crowd that was throwing rocks. Videos showed police firing tear gas and stun grenades at the crowd.

Authorities continued to allow use of a temporary platform south of the Mughrabi Bridge and adjacent to the Western Wall, but not visible from the main Western Wall Plaza, for non-Orthodox "egalitarian" (mixed gender) Jewish prayers. Authorities designated the platform for members of the Conservative and Reform movements of Judaism, including for religious ceremonies such as bar and bat mitzvahs. On January 28, then Prime Minister Naftali Bennett stated his government would upgrade the egalitarian plaza but avoid the implementation of other parts of the 2016 agreement, a compromise between Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities, that included the construction of a permanent plaza for mixed-gender prayer managed by non-Orthodox groups and a merged entry to all prayer spaces adjacent to the Western Wall. 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."

Over the weekend of November 19, more than 32,000 Jews visited Hebron to mark Chayei Sarah, a reading from the Torah, recounting when Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah, traditionally viewed as the site of the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs, for Sarah's burial place and, eventually, his own burial site as well as that of Isaac and Jacob. Many also visited the nearby tomb of Othniel Ben Kenaz, the first biblical judge after Joshua. During the observances, *Haaretz* reported that "hundreds of Israelis" took part in disturbances in the city and its surrounding areas. Israeli Jews threw rocks, vandalizing Palestinian property and injuring several Palestinians.

The Christian heads of churches in Jerusalem continued to raise public concerns that the Christian presence and Holy Sites in Jerusalem were under threat. The statements identified pressure points on Christians that included violence and harassment against clergy and worshipers by Israeli extremists; vandalism and desecration of church properties; attempts by settler organizations to obtain strategic property in and around the Christian quarter of the Old City and the Mount of Olives; and restrictions on residency permits for Palestinians as part of Israel's Citizenship and Entry Law. This law remained an especially acute problem, according to church leaders, because of the small Christian population and consequent tendency to marry other Christians from the West Bank or elsewhere (i.e., Christians who held neither citizenship nor residency).

Hamas, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization exercising de facto control of Gaza, as well as the U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and other extremist groups, disseminated antisemitic materials and advocated violence through traditional and social media channels as well as during rallies and other events. On September 22, prior to the start of Rosh Hashana, Hamas, PIJ, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) released a joint statement calling on Palestinians to support Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque through popular resistance against Israeli interests everywhere. Hamas Gaza Politburo member Mahmoud al-Zahar warned of a "religious war" over Israeli actions at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

During the year, there were incidents of violence that perpetrators justified, at least partially, on religious grounds, including individual killings, physical attacks and verbal harassment of worshippers and clergy, and vandalism of religious sites. There was also harassment of members of one religious group by members of another, social pressure to stay within one's religious group, and antisemitic content in media. On January 15, unknown persons ignited a fire in a building used as a synagogue at a memorial site near the West Bank settlement of Ma'ale Hever and the Palestinian village of Birin. Firefighters said perpetrators threw several burning car tires into the building, destroying the contents including Jewish prayer books and an empty Torah ark. On January 23, Jewish extremists slashed tires and vandalized vehicles of Palestinian residents in the West Bank village of Qira with Stars of David and chanted slogans calling for an end to administrative orders, under which suspects of settler violence can be barred from areas without formal charges.

Palestinian leaders, media, and social media regularly used the word “martyr” to refer to individuals killed during confrontations with Israeli security forces, whether those individuals were involved in confrontations or were innocent bystanders. Some official PA media channels, social media sites affiliated with the Fatah political movement, and terrorist organizations glorified terrorist attacks on Jewish Israelis, referring to the assailants as “martyrs.” The PA continued to pay “martyr payments” to families of Palestinians killed during terrorist acts or of those killed in Israeli military actions, including victims of airstrikes in Gaza, as well as stipends to Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including those awaiting charges and those convicted of acts of terrorism.

On March 24, unknown persons attempted to burn a mosque in the Palestinian village of Zeita Jamain near Nablus and vandalized the mosque and nearby Palestinian homes with graffiti, including, “Jews won’t be silent when our brothers are murdered.” On March 7, the Higher Presidential Committee on Churches Affairs in the Palestinian Territories denounced what it described as the “sinful attack” on the Abbey of the Dormition on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Vandals targeted the monastery several times with stones and glass bottles, in addition to throwing garbage in its orchard, causing some damage to the property. On June 6, local media reported that Israeli Jewish extremists broke into the Greek Orthodox Chapel of the Pentecost on Mount Zion and threatened the church groundskeeper.

Senior U.S. officials, in meetings with PA representatives, raised concerns about PA officials’ statements or social media postings that promoted antisemitism or encouraged or glorified violence. U.S. officials used public diplomacy programming and messaging aimed to combat antisemitism and promote nonviolence more broadly in Palestinian society throughout the year. U.S. government officials repeatedly and publicly pointed out that Palestinian officials and party leaders did not consistently condemn individual terrorist attacks nor speak out publicly against members of their institutions, including Fatah, who advocated violence. U.S. embassy officials met with political and civil society leaders to discuss religious tolerance and a broad range of issues affecting Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities. They met with political, religious, and civil society leaders to promote interreligious tolerance and cooperation. U.S. representatives met with representatives of religious groups to monitor their

concerns about access to religious sites, respect for clergy, and attacks on religious sites and houses of worship.

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

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total Palestinian population at 3 million in the West Bank and 2 million in the Gaza Strip (midyear 2022). According to the U.S. government and other sources, Palestinian residents of these territories are predominantly Sunni Muslims, with small Shia and Ahmadi Muslim communities.

The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics reports an estimated 465,400 Jewish Israelis reside in Israeli settlements in the West Bank in 2021. Israeli statistics do not count settlements in East Jerusalem as part of the West Bank. Palestinian officials use the figure of 751,000 Jewish residents in the West Bank, which includes settlements in the suburbs of Jerusalem. According to various estimates, 50,000 Christian Palestinians reside in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and according to media reports and religious communities, there are approximately 1,300 Christians residing in Gaza. Local Christian leaders state Palestinian Christian emigration has continued at rapid rates. A majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox; other Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Melkite Greek Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Coptic Orthodox, Maronites, Ethiopian Orthodox, Syrian Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, other Protestant denominations, including evangelical Christians, and small numbers of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) and Jehovah's Witnesses. Christians are concentrated primarily in Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus governates; smaller communities exist elsewhere. Approximately 360 Samaritans (practitioners of Samaritanism, which is related to but distinct from Judaism) reside in the West Bank, primarily on Mount Gerizim in the Nablus area.

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

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

Residents of West Bank and Gaza are subject to the jurisdiction of different authorities. Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to Jordanian and Mandatory statutes in effect before 1967, military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander in the West Bank, and, in the relevant areas, PA law. Israelis living in the West Bank are subject to Israeli law and Israeli legislation and military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commanders, whereas Palestinians living in the West Bank are subject primarily to Israeli military ordinances. West Bank Palestinian population centers mostly fall into Areas A and B, as defined by the Oslo-era agreements. Under those agreements, the PA has formal responsibility for civil administration and security in Area A, but Israeli security forces frequently conduct security operations there. The PA maintains civil administration in Area B in the West Bank, while Israel maintains security control in this area. Israel retains full security and administrative control of Area C (which constitutes approximately 60 percent of the West Bank) and has designated most Area C land as either closed military zones or settlement zoning areas.

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

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

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

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

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

The Israeli “Nakba Law” prohibits institutions that receive Israeli government funding from engaging in commemoration of the Nakba (“catastrophe”), the term used by Palestinians to refer to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence. The law forbids activities that include rejection of the existence of Israel as a “Jewish and democratic state” or commemorating “Israel’s Independence Day or the day on which the State was established as a day of mourning.”

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



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

There is no specified process by which religious groups gain official recognition in the West Bank; each religious group must negotiate its own bilateral relationship with the PA. The PA observes 19<sup>th</sup>-century status quo arrangements reached with Ottoman authorities, which recognize the presence and rights of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholic, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Armenian Catholic Churches. The PA also observes subsequent agreements that recognize the rights of the Episcopal (Anglican) Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Council of Local Evangelical Churches (a coalition of evangelical Protestant churches present in the West Bank and Gaza). The PA recognizes the authority of these religious groups to adjudicate personal status matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Recognized religious groups may establish ecclesiastical courts to issue legally binding rulings on personal status and some property matters for members of their religious communities. The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs is administratively responsible for family law issues.

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

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

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

In Jerusalem, the Israeli government provides separate public schools for Jewish and Arab/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 a public school system for their children regardless of ethnicity or religious observance. Minors have the right to choose a public secular school instead of a religious school regardless of parental preference. By law, Israel provides the equivalent of public-school funding to two systems of “recognized but not official” (a form of semiprivate) ultra-Orthodox religious schools affiliated with ultra-Orthodox political parties: the United Torah Judaism-affiliated Independent Education System and the Shas-affiliated Fountain of Torah Education System. Churches, however, receive only partial government funding to operate “recognized but not official” schools. Palestinian residents in Jerusalem may send their children to one of these church schools, a private school that follows an internationally sanctioned curriculum, or a private school operated by the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf (which also includes religious instruction). Some Israeli-funded public schools in Jerusalem use a version of the PA curriculum, modified by the Israeli Ministry of Education.

Religious education is part of the curriculum for students in grades one through six in public schools the PA operates as well as in some Palestinian schools in Jerusalem that use the PA curriculum. There are separate courses on religion for

Muslims and Christians. Students may choose which class to take but may not opt out of religion courses. Recognized churches operate private schools in the West Bank that include religious instruction. Private Islamic schools also operate in the West Bank.

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

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

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

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

There is no Israeli legal requirement regarding personal observance or nonobservance of the Jewish Sabbath (Shabbat) from sunset on Fridays until sunset on Saturdays and on Jewish holidays. The law, however, declares in the context of labor rights that Shabbat and Jewish holidays are national days of rest, while permitting non-Jewish workers alternate days of rest. The law criminalizes (with 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 Israeli minister of labor and welfare to take into account "Israel's tradition," among other factors, when considering whether to approve permits to work on Shabbat. The law prohibits discrimination against workers who refuse, based on their religion and regardless of whether they are religiously observant, to work on their day of rest.

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

### **Government Practices**

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

On October 8, 22-year-old Udai Tamimi attacked Israeli border guards stationed at a barrier crossing in East Jerusalem's Shuafat refugee camp, shooting and killing one IDF soldier and wounding two others before fleeing the scene. Following the attack, the government restricted movement in and out of the neighborhood for 11 days to find and apprehend Tamimi, which according to multiple media reports, impeded the ability of residents to attend work or school and delayed medical treatment in some instances. Palestinian residents described the restrictions as "collective punishment," sparking several days of clashes in the camp between residents and police and on October 13, a general strike and violent demonstrations in East Jerusalem in solidarity with camp residents. According to the *Times of Israel*, two police sustained injuries, and officials arrested five Palestinians in Jerusalem. On October 19, Tamimi attacked another

checkpoint at the West Bank settlement of Maale Adumim on the outskirts of East Jerusalem, injuring one security guard before security shot and killed him.

On October 29, a Palestinian gunman killed one Israeli settler and wounded three others, including a Palestinian paramedic, in a shooting attack outside the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba near Hebron. According to *Haaretz*, the gunman, who reportedly had ties to Hamas, died during the attack when the settlement's security officer rammed him with a truck and an off-duty military officer shot him.

On November 23, two nail bombs exploded at bus stops in Jerusalem, killing two and wounding more than 20 Israeli Jews. Israeli police arrested Eslam Froukh, a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem whom they identified as an ISIS sympathizer, in connection with the attack. At year's end, his case remained pending.

On October 30, a Palestinian man drove into Israeli soldiers standing at bus stops in two locations near the West Bank city of Jericho, injuring five. According to the *Times of Israel*, IDF soldiers fired at the vehicle following the initial ramming, but he fled and drove into a second bus stop in the area where police and an armed Israeli civilian shot and killed him.

On October 25, settlers attacked Moayyad Shaban, head of the PA's Settlements Commission, in Turmos Ayaa while he was supporting the olive harvest. He reported that during the attack, witnesses filmed Israeli security forces guarding settlers as they set fire to two cars, one of which belonged to Shaban's staff. On November 5, a group of approximately 40 Israeli settlers assaulted and stoned three Palestinians, including a 13-year-old child, while they were harvesting their olive trees north of Kafr ad Dik village in Salfit Governorate; during the same incident, Israeli settlers stole about 88 pounds of harvested crops and a harvesting machine.

On March 16, authorities arrested Yair Oppenheimer, a security coordinator for the illegal Gilad outpost, for suspected acts of vandalism against Palestinian property in the neighboring village of Far'ata, in eastern Qalqiliya Province. Officials charged Oppenheimer with suspicion of spray-painting offensive graffiti, slashing tires, and interfering with the police investigation against him.

On May 13, Israeli 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 youth 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 is accusing Elbaz of glorifying the masked youth saying that they were “defending al-Aqsa with their bodies,” and with “a little bit of stones, metal, and wood” against the “Israeli war machine.” He added that Israel would have emptied al Aqsa to allow “intruders” to do as they wish if it wasn’t for the “heroic youth standing up to the police, fighting them, getting injured – and we should salute them.”

On June 16, IDF vehicles stopped Minwar Dawabsha and Muhammad Salawdah as they were driving out of the main entrance of Duma. The men complied and parked their vehicle near an IDF vehicle, at which time, multiple settlers reportedly attacked their vehicle, smashed the windshield and the driver’s side window, and pepper-sprayed the men’s faces. The IDF reportedly observed the incident but did not intervene.

In a separate incident that same day, a Palestinian family returning to Duma stopped at what they incorrectly thought was an IDF checkpoint, where settlers reportedly attacked them; nearby IDF personnel did not intervene. According to Israeli media, one of the settlers removed a blanket covering a baby in the vehicle and pepper-sprayed the infant.

On September 11, settlers from the Havot Ma’on illegal outpost, attacked and reportedly broke both of Hafez Huraini’s arms while he was on his private property. One settler allegedly suffered a fractured skull in the incident. Settlers punctured the tires of the ambulance that attempted to reach the site, according to reports. On September 12, the IDF arrested Huraini for attempted murder. During a hearing at the Ofer Military Court, the judge asked why police had not arrested the settlers involved in the incident. The police representative said that police had requested that settlers from Havat Ma’on report to the police station, but they refused; police can only summon settlers to appear at the police station if an Israeli court issues a warrant for their arrest, which, according to the police official, was rare in such cases.

On June 5, police arrested and shortly detained Southern Islamic Movement (SIM) senior official and member of the Shura council, Mohammed Salameh Hasan, along with his wife and son, near the entry to al-Aqsa. Police stated he “disrupted public order” but later released him at the instruction of the commander. SIM and Ra’am released a statement condemning the incident, calling for an investigation of the police officers and adding that authorities only arrested Sheikh Hasan because he told a policewoman not to smoke near the holy site.

On May 29, a district court increased the sentence of former Yitzhar settlement Yeshiva Rabbi Yosef Elitzur from four months of probation and a fine to seven months of probation. A court convicted him 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.

On March 2, the *Jerusalem Post* reported the PA arrested a Palestinian pastor and shut down his ministry after he met with a former Israeli Member of the Knesset (MK). According to the report, officials arrested the pastor for “promoting normalization with the ‘Zionist entity’ and welcoming an ‘extremist Zionist settler’ into the center.” The pastor’s organization released a statement saying that he was not aware of the MK’s identity when the MK asked to take a selfie. A Palestinian court ordered his release after 40 days of detention.

On February 1, Israeli soldiers demolished the East Jerusalem family apartment of a deceased Palestinian teacher who in 2021 shot and killed an Israeli tour guide and wounded four others near the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The terrorist group Hamas said the gunman was a senior member of its movement in East Jerusalem. After the Israeli Supreme Court rejected an appeal by the family against the demolition order, Israeli forces demolished the interior and sealed the apartment, displacing the late attacker’s widow and five children. The Israeli Supreme Court accepted the state’s argument that the demolition was for deterrence and not punishment, but some Israeli, Palestinian, and International human rights NGOs contended that “punitive demolitions” are a form of “collective punishment” towards family members and a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

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 and police confiscating Palestinian flags from the casket, the hearse, and mourners. Israeli public security officials investigated the use of force by police during the Abu Akleh funeral. After the investigation, police issued a statement saying the funeral had been a “complex” event and “it is impossible to remain indifferent to the harsh images” but did not release any of the formal findings.

On May 16, Israeli 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*, Israeli 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 at the funeral to release his body to relatives. Funeral participants reported that Palestinians clashed with police after they attempted to limit participants and Palestinian flags in the funeral procession as it traveled from the Old City gate of Bab al-Zahra to a nearby 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 injuries with 13 hospitalizations, 10 journalists injured, six police lightly injured, and dozens arrested during the funeral clashes.

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. A record number of more than 2,600 Jews toured the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount during the day, while Palestinians reportedly threw rocks in protest and 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. *Haaretz* reported that videos showed Jews and Palestinians committing assaults, acts of vandalism and theft, shouting racist chants and incitement, using pepper spray and throwing rocks, but cautioned that "videos and photos posted on social media paint a different picture, one in which Jewish rioters acted with near-total impunity for many hours." 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 there were only two arrests involving Jews in connection with the day's events.

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 recommend the declaration. At year's end, there were no further developments.

According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the trial of an Israeli Jewish minor, accused in the 2018 killing of a Palestinian woman, Aysha al-Rabi, remained pending at year's end. Witnesses stated the minor threw a 4-pound stone through her car windshield, and a court indicted him on charges of

manslaughter under circumstances of a terrorist act, later releasing him in 2019 on house arrest for duration of the trial.

According to a report by the Middle East Institute, 49 Palestinians were killed, including 15 children and four women, during an August 5-7 escalation between Israel and the PIJ based in Gaza. Citing an imminent threat of attack by the PIJ following an Israeli arrest of senior PIJ leaders in the West Bank, Israel evacuated or closed Israeli towns in the Gaza periphery and launched strikes on PIJ sites in Gaza starting on August 5. PIJ militants and other armed factions fired more than 1,000 rockets at Israel in response, the report said, while Israeli strikes in the Gaza strip continued for two-and-a-half days. Observers noted that rocket misfires resulted in numerous civilian deaths. The IDF Spokesperson's Unit said that during the fighting, every reasonable effort was made to minimize harm to civilians and civilian property. Israeli officials, however, confirmed that five minors were killed in an airstrike on August 7 at the al-Faluja Cemetery east of Jabalya while the IDF was targeting a rocket launching site in the area.

According to the *Times of Israel*, on August 14, an assailant shot and injured seven persons near the Dung Gate entrance to the Western Wall and in a nearby parking lot by King David's Tomb in Jerusalem. The wounded included a pregnant Israeli woman in her 30s, who required an emergency C-section. The East Jerusalemite assailant, Amir Sidawi, turned himself in following an overnight manhunt. Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum praised the attack as a courageous act of resistance.

On August 25, according to a report by *+972 Magazine*, Israel's State Prosecutor's Office announced its intention to close an investigation without indictment against a settler who fatally stabbed Ali Hassan Harb, a Palestinian man from the village of Iskaka of Salfit Province. The prosecutor's office said the claim of self-defense could not be ruled out. On June 21, a group of settlers arrived at land owned by villagers of Iskaka with the reported intention of establishing an illegal outpost. The unidentified Israeli settler stabbed Harb during a confrontation between settlers and Palestinians from the village, and said it was in self-defense from Palestinians who were throwing stones. NGO observers and Israeli media reported that the attack occurred when settlers attempted to erect a tent on Palestinian agricultural land, reportedly owned by Harb's family, near the Ariel settlement. Israeli human rights NGO Yesh Din, which represented the Harb

family, criticized the decision to close the case, saying the investigation “was done in two months, with scare tactics and threats against both the family and witnesses. The suspect’s version of events contradicts statements given from witnesses.”

On February 27, *Haaretz* reported that the trial started for an Israeli police officer charged in the 2020 killing of Iyad Hallak, an autistic Palestinian man who was on his way to his special needs school in Jerusalem’s Old City. Authorities charged the officer, whose name was not released, with manslaughter. Following an investigation, the Ministry of Justice said that Halak had not posed any danger to police. Press reported that at the trial’s start, dozens of Israelis, including MK Itamar ben-Gvir, protested in support of the officer at the court, calling him a “hero.” At year’s end, the trial was continuing, and the accused officer remained in custody.

According to a *Times of Israel* report, on August 2, Israeli police arrested the Palestinian principal and a teacher from an East Jerusalem high school for inciting terrorism after video footage surfaced showing a school play where Palestinian students acted in a mock execution of other students dressed as religious Jews. The Israeli Education Ministry condemned the incident and said that the school in question was under full administrative control of the PA.

On April 14, the *Times of Israel* reported that Israeli police arrested six Jewish activists who were planning to sacrifice a goat on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount ahead of Passover. The “Returning to the Mount” group, which advocated the construction of a third Jewish temple on the site, circulated flyers offering cash prizes to anyone who managed a living sacrifice on the site or who was arrested while trying to do so. Multiple Palestinian factions called for “general mobilization” at the site to prevent the announced sacrifice attempts. On April 17, Israeli police arrested four persons suspected of heading to the site and confiscated two goats near Jaffa Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem.

On December 1, a report in the *Times of Israel* stated that the Israeli military announced the redeployment from the West Bank of the Netzah Yehuda battalion, which had been at the center of several incidents involving Palestinians. Unlike other IDF units, the battalion, primarily made up of ultra-Orthodox soldiers, has been permanently stationed in the West Bank since the early 2000s.

The government created Netzah Yehuda to facilitate ultra-Orthodox and other religious soldiers' military service, allowing them to maintain their religious practices, such as by allowing additional time for prayers and religious study and limiting interactions with women. Earlier in the year, the unit was involved in the death of Palestinian-American Omar Assad; the government denied that moving the battalion was related to Assad's death.

Palestinians violently clashed with Israeli police multiple times during the year as police secured tour routes for non-Muslim visitors on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, most notably during the overlap of Ramadan, Easter, and Passover in April. According to media reports, on April 15, Israeli police entered the al-Aqsa Mosque compound after early morning Ramadan prayers, with police saying 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 the al-Aqsa Mosque prior to the police entry and launching fireworks, stones, and Molotov cocktails out of 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 Islamic endowment that administered the site stated that Israeli National Police (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 allegedly 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.

According to the *Times of Israel*, similar incidents occurred on June 5 when police and Palestinians clashed at the site as Jewish visitors toured the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound during the Jewish holiday of Shavout. The *Times* reported that Palestinians barricaded themselves in the al-Aqsa Mosque and threw stones at police in response to the visits.

On August 8, Union Construction and Investment (UCI), a Palestinian real estate company based in Area B, reported a settler attack against their employee and

clients while the latter were traveling in a vehicle outside of a UCI project in Turmus Ayya. According to UCI, the settlers, carrying rocks and sticks, blocked the vehicle, broke its windows, and set it aflame. UCI also reported that the settlers stole a laptop and cash estimated at 30,000 shekels (\$8,500) from the vehicle. UCI stated that the group attempted to call the IDF for support, but the military never arrived at the scene.

*Haaretz* reported that Israeli police imposed new restrictions on Christian attendance at the Orthodox Easter Holy Fire celebrations in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City of Jerusalem on April 23. Israeli police said the crowd control and attendance restrictions were safety measures following the 2021 stampede disaster at Mount Meron. 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 worshipers at the checkpoints.

On March 27, *Haaretz* reported that Israeli 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 with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate were pending adjudication in the Israeli Supreme Court. Lawyers for the tenants in the hotel said that the Ateret Cohanim members were trespassing and 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 hotel’s lease as a threat to the continued existence of a Christian Quarter and to the peaceful coexistence of communities in the city.

On June 8, the Israeli Supreme Court denied a Greek Orthodox Patriarchate request to block the transfer of properties near Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem’s Old City, including the Petra Hotel, to Ateret Cohanim, which signed a 99-year lease for the properties in 2004. Courts previously ruled in favor of Ateret Cohanim, and in 2020, the district court ruled against reopening the case to hear new evidence brought forward by the church. According to the *Times of Israel*, the Supreme Court justices said the ruling 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 three properties and alleged Jewish extremists targeted Christian areas in an attempt to change the character of Jerusalem's Old City.

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 Israeli police removed the individuals from the scene.

Rachel's Tomb, a Bethlehem shrine of religious significance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims under Israeli jurisdiction in Area C, remained separated from the West Bank by a barrier built during the 2000-2005 Second Intifada, and Palestinians were able to access it only if permitted by Israeli authorities. Residents and citizens of Israel continued to have relatively unimpeded access. Israeli police closed the site to all visitors on Saturdays for the Jewish Sabbath.

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

Israeli government officials made public statements against "Israeli extremists' attacks" on Palestinians and reported efforts to enhance law enforcement in the West Bank, including through task forces, increased funding, and hiring of additional staff members. According to the Associated Press, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Khoavi publicly condemned an October 19 attack by dozens of settlers on the Palestinian town of Huwara, which then-Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid described as "shameful and disgraceful criminal behavior that demands strict and swift justice."

Shin Bet reported that 18 Israeli civilians and six members of the Israeli Security forces died during the year because of Palestinian attacks. The MFA reported, without specifying the identity of perpetrators or victims, that during the year

there were 29 stabbings, 138 shootings, six vehicle-ramming attacks, and 2,470 stone-throwing attacks against Israelis.

According to The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), as of November 15, there were 506 “nationalistic” attacks in the West Bank by settlers or Jewish extremists that involved Palestinian property damage, a 37 percent increase over 2021. Throughout the year, Jewish individuals and groups committed hate crimes and violence against Palestinians and their property, often with the stated purpose of exacting a “price” for actions taken by the Israeli government against the attackers’ interests. The most common offenses, according to police, were attacks on vehicles, defacement of real estate, harm to Muslim and Christian holy sites, assault, and damage to agricultural lands.

In a data sheet reviewing the years 2005-2022, released in December, the Israeli NGO Yesh Din stated, “Lack of enforcement and deterrence against ideological crime perpetrated by Israelis against Palestinians enables persistent crime against a defenseless population. Israel’s failed enforcement policy against settler violence precludes any possibility of deterring perpetrators and shows Israel is responsible for and complicit in violence against Palestinians.” Yesh Din said Israel opened 1,597 investigation files following complaints from the NGO, but 93percent of the law enforcement investigation files in the West Bank were closed without an indictment. Only 3 percent of investigation files opened into ideologically motivated offenses by Israelis against Palestinians in the West Bank had led to a conviction according to Yesh Din.

Attacks in the West Bank on Palestinians by Israeli citizens, some of whom asserted their right to settle in what they stated was the historic Jewish homeland of “Judea and Samaria,” continued, as well as Palestinian attacks on settlers. UNOCHA reported 849 attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem during the year, including 621 attacks that resulted in property damage and 228 attacks that resulted in casualties, 13 of which were fatal. According to UN monitors, this was the highest reported level of settler-related violence since UNOCHA began recording incidents in 2005 and represented a 40 percent increase in the number of incidents, compared with 2020.

Some Israeli and Palestinian officials, as well as numerous NGOs, alleged that some Israeli settlers used violence against Palestinians to intimidate them from using land that settlers sought to acquire. According to UNOCHA, in July and August, 19 Palestinian households comprising about 120 people, mostly children, evacuated Ras al-Tin, a herding community in Area C of the West Bank northeast of Ramallah, and relocated to land in Area B. The West Bank Protection Cluster (WBPC), an umbrella organization that includes UN agencies as well as local and international NGOs, labeled the relocation a forcible displacement. According to UNOCHA and NGOs, repeated attacks over the previous three to four years by settlers of the Kochav HaShachar settlement and other nearby unauthorized outposts convinced the community to leave. This was the first case of an entire Palestinian community evacuating their homes due to settler violence.

UNOCHA observed a series of incidents throughout the year where Israeli security forces failed to respond to attacks on Palestinian communities. On October 21, witnesses filmed an Israeli settlement security coordinator handing a tear gas grenade to a settler, who threw it at Palestinian farmers in the village of Burin. On October 25, IDF reportedly suspended the coordinator, but later reinstated him after an investigation.

In November, one UN official said that this year was “the deadliest year for Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, since 2006.” The IDF recorded 446 incidents of settler violence during the year. UNOCHA updated its metrics to incorporate more information from civil society about violence against Israelis and estimated that there were 82 Palestinian fatalities and 16,421 Palestinians injured and three Israeli fatalities and 146 Israelis injured in West Bank violence, including in East Jerusalem. The Israeli government said that UNOCHA did not provide information about actions by Hamas in its public statistics and did not fully cover attacks targeting Israelis.

The government of Israel continued to discourage Israeli citizens in unofficial capacities from traveling to the parts of the West Bank under the civil and security control of the PA (Area A), with large road signs warning Israelis against the danger and illegality of entering these areas. Significant numbers of Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel, some Jewish Israelis, and other Israeli citizens, chose to privately visit Area A without legal repercussions, according to media. Media outlets reported that while these restrictions generally prevented Jewish



Israelis from visiting numerous Jewish religious sites, the IDF provided special security escorts for Jews to visit religious sites in Area A under Palestinian control, particularly Joseph's Tomb in Nablus and the Shalom al Israel Synagogue in Jericho.

Some Jewish religious leaders said the Israeli government policy limiting travel to parts of the West Bank prevented Jewish Israelis from freely visiting several religious sites in the West Bank, including Joseph's Tomb, because they were denied the opportunity to visit the site on unscheduled occasions or in larger numbers than permitted through IDF coordination. The Israeli MFA reported that IDF facilitated 13 visits during 2022 and that there were three non-facilitated visits which did not involve the IDF. IDF officials said requirements to coordinate Jewish visits to Joseph's Tomb were necessary to ensure Jewish-Israelis' safety. The Israeli government said that Jewish worshippers could only visit Areas A and B of the West Bank with the protection of the IDF and that the PA was not fulfilling its commitments under the Oslo Accords to ensure freedom of religion for Jewish worshippers in these areas. Palestinian and Israeli security forces coordinated some visits by Jewish groups to PA-controlled areas within the West Bank, which generally took place at night to limit the chance of confrontations with Palestinians who opposed the visit.

Palestinians at times violently protested, and IDF returned gunfire at violent demonstrators, when Jewish groups visited holy sites in areas in the West Bank under Palestinian control, particularly Joseph's Tomb. Without specifying details, including the nationalities of victims or assailants, the Israeli MFA reported six deaths during IDF-facilitated visits to Joseph's Tomb in 2022. They also reported 24 Palestinians and two Israelis sustained injuries during these visits. On August 18, Palestinians violently confronted an IDF convoy escorting Jewish pilgrims to the site. The *Times of Israel* reported that during the clashes, a sniper shot and killed a Palestinian teenager and dozens more sustained injuries, mostly from tear gas inhalation. The IDF reported no injuries and said IDF and Border Police returned gunfire at Palestinian gunmen.

On June 30, Palestinian gunmen shot at Jewish worshipers at Joseph's Tomb, sparking a gun battle in which 17 Palestinians, two Israeli civilians, and an IDF commander sustained injuries. On October 12, despite Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) warnings about possible violence, dozens of Jewish worshipers entered

Joseph's Tomb under the protection of Israeli forces after authorities approved the visit. According to Palestinian reports, the Jewish worshipers were escorted into the city in military vehicles, and there was an exchange of gunfire between Palestinians and soldiers. No casualties were reported. On August 30, two Israeli civilians sustained moderate injuries when gunmen opened fire on their car near the entrance to Joseph's Tomb. The IDF said the Israeli civilians, whom they described as Jewish worshipers, had failed to coordinate their visit to the site with the military. After they were subjected to gunfire, Israeli soldiers extracted them from Nablus.

On the evening of April 9-10, just days before Passover, about 100 Palestinian vandals broke into Joseph's Tomb, breaking light fixtures, setting fires, and damaging the stone lid of the tomb before Palestinian security forces dispersed them. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said, "Palestinian rioters on a spree of destruction simply vandalized a place that is holy for us Jews." Days later, on April 13, Israeli troops deployed with repair crews to restore the tomb. According to *Haaretz*, the commander of the IDF brigade conducting the restoration invoked Biblical justifications for Israeli control over the site and violated orders by coordinating with far-right lawmakers and settlement leaders to orchestrate live media coverage of the operation.

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

The Israeli government continued to allow controlled access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and said freedom of worship at the site was a supreme

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

Israeli police continued to be responsible for security at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, with police officers stationed both inside the site and at entrances. Police conducted routine patrols on the outdoor plaza and inside buildings on the site and regulated pedestrian traffic exiting and entering the site. Israeli police continued to maintain exclusive control of the Mughrabi Gate entrance, through which non-Muslims may enter the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site and allowed visitors through the gate during set hours. The Israeli MFA said the government did not close the site for Muslim visitors during 2022, although media reports indicated police sometimes restricted this access, citing security concerns. The MFA said that during the year, police dealt with public disturbances on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount five times and arrested 758 persons at the site, 172 Jews and 586 Muslims. According to the MFA, police denied access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount to 666 Muslims and 181 Jews during the year, for different periods of time. The PA Governorate of Jerusalem reported that Israeli authorities banned 427 individuals from the site during the year.

Specific individuals who Israeli authorities barred from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site included Jewish activists believed to have violated the status quo understanding prohibiting non-Islamic prayer, Muslims believed to have verbally harassed or acted violently against non-Muslim visitors to the site or incited others to violence, and public figures whose presence authorities feared would inflame tensions. Other banned persons included Waqf guards, administrative and maintenance staff, and imams delivering sermons at the site

as well as prominent activists. The Israeli government said that some individuals – including both Muslims and Jews – were prevented access to the site during the year because they could have caused disturbances and riots.

Human rights and civil society organizations said Israeli authorities banned some Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, 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. In April, Israeli police suspended non-Muslim access during the final 10 days of Ramadan as they had in previous years and closed the site in the afternoons during the first 20 days for non-Muslim visitors.

On April 26, *Haaretz* reported that Israeli police restricted male, Muslim worshippers between the ages of 17 and 45 from entering the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount during Ramadan prayers unless they agreed to hand over their identification cards to police. The newspaper's report described the act as a violation of the law and the right to freedom of worship and said the practice had been used at other times going back to 2015. In a letter to Jerusalem District Police Chief Doron Turgeman, the human rights organization Adalah reported that in some cases, return of identification to Palestinians was contingent upon questioning by police. Adalah said the actions were of a "collective deterrent and punitive nature."

Although the Chief Rabbinate and rabbis of many ultra-Orthodox denominations continued to discourage Jewish visits to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site due to the ongoing *halakhic* (Jewish legal) debate about whether it is permissible or forbidden for Jews to enter the Temple Mount, some Orthodox rabbis continued to say entering the site was permissible. Many among the self-identified "national religious" Zionist community stated they found meaning in visiting the site. Groups such as the Temple Institute, Beyadenu, and Returning to the Temple Mount continued to call for increased Jewish access and prayer as well as the construction of the third Jewish temple on the site. In some cases, Israeli police prevented individuals from praying and removed them; in other cases, reported by the Waqf on social media and by NGOs, police appeared not to

notice the activity. Beyadenu stated that during the Tishrei Jewish Holidays, 7,959 Jews visited the site, compared with 6,102 in 2021.

On December 8, *Haaretz* reported that a sign from Israel's Chief Rabbinate warning Jewish visitors against entering at the entrance to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound 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, erected new signs, in different locations, including 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, replaced the original sign and removed the new ones.

According to local media, some Jewish groups performed religious acts, such as prayers and prostration on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, despite the ban on non-Islamic prayer. The Israeli government reiterated that overt non-Islamic prayer was not allowed on the grounds of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and according to the Israeli MFA, Israeli police responded to 172 "rule violations by non-Muslim visitors" without differentiating outcomes between warnings, visit limitations, and arrests. On May 22, the Israeli Prime Minister's Office stated that "there [was] no change, nor is any change planned, on the status quo of the Temple Mount." In May, an Israeli appeals court upheld that Jewish worship at the site "should be superseded by other interests, among them safeguarding of public order." NGOs, media outlets, and Jewish Temple Mount advocacy groups continued to report that 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*, Jewish religious law) to enter with a police escort. Activists, including former MK Yehuda Glick, continued to say openly that Jews should be allowed to pray at the site, and the *New York Times* reported that dozens of Jews pray there each year, despite the prohibition against prayer by non-Muslims at the site. A group of activists, including the Temple Institute, was dedicated to rebuilding "the Holy Temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, in accord with the Biblical commandments." Mount

Moriah is the site of the Golden Dome of the Rock on the Haram al-Sharif compound. The Temple Institute displayed a gold, seven-branched menorah in the Old City of Jerusalem, which it plans 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 and ritual purification needed to enter a rebuilt temple.

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."

The *Times of Israel* reported that more than 2,000 Jews visited the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount during Tisha B'Av – a day of fasting, when Jews commemorate the destruction of the temples – on August 7, citing counts from a Temple Mount activist group. The report noted that authorities detained and removed a handful of Jewish visitors from the site for prostrating themselves and loudly praying, while some Muslim visitors experienced detention and removal from the site for "disturbing the peace, being provocative, making inciteful remarks, and unsuccessfully trying to disrupt the legal movement of visitors," according to Israeli police.

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

The Waqf continued to restrict non-Muslims who visited the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount from entering the Dome of the Rock and other buildings

dedicated for Islamic worship, including the al-Aqsa Mosque, unless they were participating in a Waqf-sponsored visit. It also lodged objections with Israeli police concerning non-Muslim visitors wearing religious symbols or religious clothing. Israeli police sometimes acted upon these objections.

Waqf officials repeated previous years' complaints concerning their lack of control of access to the site. The Waqf objected to non-Muslims praying or performing religious acts on the site and to individuals whom they perceived to be dressed immodestly or who caused disturbances, but they lacked authority to remove such persons from the site. Waqf officials stated Israeli police did not coordinate with the Waqf on decisions regarding entry and barring of Muslim and non-Muslim visitors to the site. Waqf employees remained stationed inside each gate and on the plaza, but Waqf officials exercised only limited oversight.

The Jordanian Waqf in Jerusalem administered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, while the Jordanian Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Holy Places supported maintenance and salary of the Waqf staff in Jerusalem. The issue of the use of the Gate of Mercy (Bab al-Rahma), a building within the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount that the Waqf reopened in 2019 after it had been closed since 2003, remained unresolved. The Israeli government stated it regarded the reopening as a violation of the status quo. An Israeli court extended a 2020 court order to close the site, but as of year's end, the INP had not enforced the order. The Waqf said it did not recognize the authority of Israeli courts over the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Throughout the year, Muslim worshippers could generally enter the site, although Israeli police sometimes conducted security searches there.

Media reported that Israeli authorities barred Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, former imam of al-Aqsa Mosque, former Palestinian Grand Mufti, and current head of the private Higher Islamic Council in Jerusalem, from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for several months due to charges of incitement. On May 15, government security officials placed a four-month travel ban on Sabri due to alleged "terrorist activism" and posing a threat against the Israeli state's security. Sheikh Najeh Bakirat, Deputy Director-General of the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, reported that authorities banned him from entering the site for six months, stating this was the 29th such order issued against him since 2003.

On October 26, Fakhri Abu Diab, an East Jerusalem community activist and head of the Silwan Lands Defense Committee, reported that Israeli police banned him from entering the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for up to six months due to allegations that his presence would spur serious disturbances. As of October 26, police banned Diab from entering Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for seven days until after the district commander had made a final decision on the period he would be banned. Diab denied the charges and said the ban and demolition orders against his house (which municipal officials said were for unpermitted construction) were intended to punish him for his community activism.

Waqf officials and human rights and civil society organizations said Israeli authorities at times also restricted some Muslims from entering the site based on gender, age, and place of residency. Waqf officials reported multiple times that Israeli police prohibited entry of male Muslim worshipers under the age of 50 during Ramadan. Israeli authorities have not issued permits for Gazans to visit the site during Islamic holidays since 2017, when it issued several hundred permits for Gazans during Ramadan, according to UN reports. Muslims who were Israeli citizens, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, or foreigners already present in Israel did not need permits to visit the site.

During September celebrations of the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah, Jewish Israeli activists, including former 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 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.

On January 9, a district court sentenced an East Jerusalem resident to 28 months' imprisonment, six months' probation, and an 18,000 shekel (\$5,100) fine for deliberately spilling hot coffee on a Jew for racist reasons and uploading the incident to Tik-Tok in 2020.

On January 18, the prosecution filed an indictment against two East Jerusalem residents, one of them a minor, for defiling Jewish graves in the Mount of Olives



Cemetery while filming themselves on TikTok in October 2020. Authorities charged the two with entering a place of worship or burial without permission.

On March 23, INP and Border Police officers arrested a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem after the resident allegedly attacked a Jewish individual in Jerusalem and uploaded the attack on social media (TikTok).

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

Authorities continued to allow use of a temporary platform south of the Mughrabi Bridge and adjacent to the Western Wall, but not visible from the main Western Wall Plaza, for non-Orthodox "egalitarian" (mixed gender) Jewish prayers. Authorities designated the platform for members of the Conservative and Reform movements of Judaism, including for religious ceremonies such as bar and bat mitzvahs.

On January 28, then Prime Minister Naftali Bennett stated his government would upgrade the egalitarian plaza but avoid the implementation of other parts of the 2016 agreement. This 2016 agreement was a compromise between Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities following a Supreme Court petition, which the government had put on hold since 2017, that included the construction of a permanent plaza for mixed-gender prayer managed by non-Orthodox groups and a merged entry to all prayer spaces adjacent to the Western Wall. Following a December 29 Supreme Court hearing, the case remained pending at the year's end. Bennett told the *Jerusalem Post* that the 2016 agreement was controversial among the coalition, with some members of Yamina and New Hope Parties opposing the expansion of the egalitarian plaza and the creation of a joint management committee that would include conservative and reform leaders. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, Bennett was referring to New Hope Minister Ze'ev Elkin and Yamina MK Nir Orbach.

On January 16, the government approved a budget of 110 million shekels (\$31 million) for a new five-year-plan to upgrade infrastructure at the Western Wall and encourage visits but that 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, authorities 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 visitors from bringing private Torah scrolls to the main Western Wall Plaza and women from accessing the public Torah scrolls or giving priestly blessings at the site. Authorities, however, permitted women to pray with *tefillin* and prayer shawls pursuant to a 2013 Jerusalem District Court ruling stating it was illegal to arrest or fine them for such actions. On several occasions, MK Gilad Kariv (Labor), a Reform rabbi, used his parliamentary immunity to bring Torah scrolls for use by Women of the Wall and 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 former 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 contradicted 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 of the erection of a partition between men and women at the egalitarian plaza of the Western Wall. In 2020, ultra-Orthodox set up a partition at the plaza and disrupted those praying at the site during the Jewish holiday of Tisha B'Av.

Representatives of Women of the Wall said 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 Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC) director and stated her role was not to protect the Women of the Wall. After the women turned to INP 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.

The IDF continued periodically to limit access to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, a site of significance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims as the tomb of Abraham. The Israeli government said there were longstanding entry arrangements which should not be considered as restricting access. Palestinian leaders continued in statements to local media to oppose the IDF's control of access, citing Oslo Accords-era agreements that gave Israel and the PA shared responsibilities for the site, although Israel retained full security responsibility for it; the Oslo Accords and 1997 Hebron Accords gave "civil powers and responsibilities" including "planning authority" for the site to the Hebron Municipality. Some Muslim leaders publicly rejected a Jewish connection to the site.

The IDF again restricted Muslim access to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs for 10 days corresponding to Jewish holidays and Jewish access during 10 days corresponding to Islamic holidays. The IDF restricted Muslims to one

entry point, which was staffed by soldiers with metal detectors, while granting Jews access via several entry points. Citing security concerns, the IDF periodically closed roads approaching the site and, since 2001, had permanently closed Shuhada Street, the former main Hebron market and one of the main streets leading to the holy site, to Palestinian-owned vehicles. The government said the closure was done to prevent confrontations. Both Muslims and Jews were able to pray at the site simultaneously in separate spaces, a physical separation that was instituted by the IDF in 1994 following an attack by an Israeli that killed 29 Palestinians. PA officials reported that Israeli authorities continued to implement frequent bans on the Islamic call to prayer from the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs. The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs reported that Israel prevented calls to prayer at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs 613 times during the year. The Israeli MFA reported that the Israeli government did not prevent the call to prayer during the year.

In May, the *Middle East Monitor* reported that Israeli authorities began construction on an elevator on expropriated property for Jewish visitors to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs, drawing condemnation from Palestinian authorities. In 2020, then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved a decision to bypass the Hebron municipality and expropriate land at the site. The Israeli government stated it intended to renovate the property and establish elevators to make it accessible to persons with disabilities to “promote the rights of people with disabilities and allow access to religious sites for every population.” The Israeli government previously said it proceeded with the plan after multiple attempts to gain PA, Hebron municipality, and Waqf support for increased access to the site for persons with disabilities.

In May, the head of the Hebron Municipality, Tayseer Abu Sneineh, described the elevator project as part of Israeli targeting of Islamic sites and a “flagrant violation against Palestinian rights and responsibilities.... This measure comes as part of the Israeli efforts to change the identity of the Ibrahimi Mosque.” In 2021, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected an appeal submitted by the PA Hebron municipality against the establishment of an elevator at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs, after which the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs temporarily closed all other mosques in Hebron for Friday prayers in protest.

On October 2, media and social media platforms provided access to a video showing Jewish Israelis singing, dancing, and playing music inside the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs, as Israeli authorities banned Muslims from accessing the mosque. According to media reports, the video upset Muslims, who viewed the activities as a provocation in the holy site. On October 10, the PA Waqf Department in Hebron accused Israeli settlers of desecrating the Quran by tearing, burning, and throwing copies in the trash near the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs.

Over the weekend of November 19, more than 32,000 Jews visited Hebron to mark Chayei Sarah, a reading from the Torah recounting Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah, traditionally viewed as the site of the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs, for Sarah's burial and, eventually, his own burial site as well as that of Isaac and Jacob. Many also visited the nearby tomb of Othniel Ben Kenaz, the first biblical judge after Joshua. *Haaretz* reported that during the observances, "hundreds of Israelis" took part in disturbances in the city and its surrounding areas. Israeli Jews threw rocks and vandalized Palestinian property, injuring several Palestinians. During the day, the IDF closed the Hebron market area and demanded that owners close shops to allow settlers to march there. A local Palestinian activist said that the IDF blocked an area three times larger than in previous years, closed shops and prevented cars from passing. Israelis wrecked the stalls in the market, while IDF soldiers separated the Palestinians from the Israelis. According to the activist, hundreds of Israelis also attacked Palestinian homes and damaged cars and property. Police said that the cases were under investigation. In statements, then Prime Minister Lapid said the violence was "a national disgrace" and then Minister of Defense Gantz said, "I strongly condemn the attack against security forces and Palestinian residents by extremists in Hebron." UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland said, "I condemn [the] violent attacks by Israeli extremists against Palestinian residents in the Old City of Hebron."

In May, the Israeli NGO B'tselem reported that on the night of May 24 and 25, dozens of settlers threw stones at a mosque and at a home in the eastern neighborhood of the village of Urif, near Nablus. They attacked the house with stones, opened the gate to the mosque and smashed one of its windows, and smashed the windows of a bulldozer belonging to a resident. According to the

NGO report, Israeli soldiers who arrived at the village fired tear gas canisters at residents who had gathered to defend their homes, and the settlers left the area.

The *Middle East Monitor* website, citing the PA news agency WAFA, reported that on December 5, Israeli forces demolished the Rasoolallah Mosque in the Khallet Taha neighborhood of the town of Dura, southwest of Hebron. The report said that the mosque was on land that Israel was seeking to use for settlement expansion.

On March 3, according to a *Times of Israel* report, a Jerusalem district court annulled a decision giving the Russian government control of the St. Alexander Nevsky Church in Jerusalem's Old City following a petition by the Orthodox Palestine Society of the Holy Land, which owned the property until 2021. In 2020, then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu removed bureaucratic obstacles for Russia to register its ownership of the church, which Israeli media reported as a goodwill gesture to Russia following the release of an imprisoned Israeli woman. In 2021, the Israeli Land Registry Commissioner registered the ownership, but the Jerusalem District Court ruled that only the Israeli government could decide ownership, since Netanyahu declared the church a "holy site." The ownership remained unresolved, and at year's end, a decision was still pending.

On August 18, Israeli soldiers broke into St. Andrew's Anglican/Episcopal Church in Ramallah in a predawn raid of offices rented by the church to al-Haq, a Palestinian human rights organization designated by Israel in 2021 as a terrorist organization for allegedly supporting the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The rector of the church said that the breach of the church door was not necessary, as al-Haq had its own separate entrance from the church. In a statement issued on August 18, the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem said Israeli soldiers broke the church door and security glass and occupied the entire complex, including the sanctuary, parish hall, church offices, rectory, and medical center for two hours. The statement said that sounds of gunshots, stun grenades, and destruction of the doors caused terror among the families living inside the church compound.

Israeli authorities and settlers, who were often armed, prevented access by Palestinians to several mosques in the West Bank located within Israeli settlements. Israeli authorities declared all legal settlements as restricted Israeli

military zones. Palestinians were unable to visit them without Israeli government approval.

In May, the Israeli NGO Emek Shaveh reported that the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected its 2021 petition filed with the Arab Culture Association to end what it said was the discriminatory policy of the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage in allocating budgetary outlays for work on heritage sites. The petition cited calls by the ministry that included criteria that excluded non-Jewish historical sites from qualifying for funding. In response, the ministry's legal advisor said that "the ministry was established with the aim of conserving the country's national and Zionist heritage," and the ministry stated that "other government ministries invest budgets also in minority heritage sites." The attorney general supported the argument.

According to Emek Shaveh, the court accepted the government's position, since an earlier decision to establish the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage in 2015 had stipulated that the ministry will "highlight the national heritage of the people of Israel in its land." In addition, the court determined that the government has the authority to delineate the boundaries of a ministry's area of jurisdiction even if these are determined by religion or national identity. Emek Shaveh warned that the decision created a "slippery slope," allowing the government to establish new ministries or change the mission of existing ministries to serve Jews only.

On February 18, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Theopolis III, Franciscan Custos of the Holy Land Francesco Patton, and Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem Nourhan Manougian sent a letter to Israeli Environmental Protection Minister Tamar Zandberg, calling on her to stop a planned expansion of the Jerusalem Walls National Park in the Old City of Jerusalem to parts of the Mount of Olives, where there are Christian holy sites. In the letter, church leaders said the proposed plan was an attack on Christians and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and seemed to be "orchestrated, advanced, and promoted by entities whose sole purpose is to confiscate and nationalize one of the holiest sites for Christianity and later its nature." The Israel Nature and Parks Authority, which is promoting the project, said the expansion was designed to restore long-neglected lands and better preserve historical landscapes, and that it would not harm the church properties incorporated into the national park. According to a February 21 *Times of Israel* report, the authority said it would withdraw the plan. The plan

remained, however, on the Jerusalem Local Planning Committee calendar for discussion in 2023.

On August 26, the *Times of Israel* reported that Israeli police arrested five persons after Palestinian and left-wing demonstrators who were protesting the closure of the entrance to Nebi Samuel, a site with religious significance to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, clashed with right-wing Israeli counterdemonstrators. A week later, on September 2, clashes resumed between Israeli and Palestinian activists at the site. Israeli MK Itamar Ben-Gvir, who participated with the counterdemonstrators, said, "I came here to make it clear that we are the owners here and in the State of Israel."

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 would pass 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 Karaite community, Emek Shaveh, the NGO Israel Union for Environmental Defense, and attorneys for Palestinian residents of the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood had filed the petitions, which the court considered in several sessions over the preceding three years. Previously, the court had suspended work on the cable car project to examine why the National Infrastructure Committee approved the project, unlike other projects, which went through Jerusalem's District and Planning Committee, a distinction that critics argued deprived citizens of the opportunity to offer their opinions and submit reservations and objections. The justices also questioned the government's designation of the cable car as a transportation rather than tourism project, and why the route could not be modified to avoid the Karaite community. During 2021, the government continued to promote the establishment of a cable car route from the First Station cultural complex in Jerusalem to the Dung Gate of the Old City that would pass over the cemetery. The government stated the cable car was meant to solve accessibility problems to holy sites such as the Western Wall. The court ruled 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 Israeli government and settler organizations in Jerusalem made efforts to increase property ownership by Jewish Israelis in Jerusalem. Civil society organizations and representatives of the Palestinian Authority stated the efforts sought to emphasize Jewish history in Palestinian neighborhoods. UNOCHA and NGOs such as Bimkom and Ir Amim stated that the goal of Jerusalem municipal and Israeli national policies was to decrease the number of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, noting the Israeli government's goal of "maintaining a solid Jewish majority in the city" as stated in the Jerusalem municipality's master plan.

Jewish landowners and their descendants, or land trusts representing the families, are entitled to reclaim property they abandoned in East Jerusalem during fighting prior to 1949. Palestinians who abandoned property in Israel in the same period had a right to compensation only but not to reclaim the property. In some cases, private Jewish organizations acquired legal ownership of reclaimed Jewish property in East Jerusalem, including in the Old City, and through protracted judicial action sought to evict Palestinian families living there. Since 1967, Israeli authorities have designated approximately 35 percent of East Jerusalem for Israeli neighborhoods and settlements, according to NGOs, and another 35 percent as green space and national parks. A significant portion of this land previously was private, Palestinian-owned land. Palestinians were able in some cases to rent or purchase Israeli-owned property, including privately owned buildings built on Israeli government-owned land, but faced significant legal and governmental barriers to both. Israeli NGOs stated that after accounting for Israeli neighborhoods/settlements, Israeli government property, and declared national parks, authorities only designated about 15 percent of the land in East Jerusalem for residential development and construction by Palestinians or others.

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

The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs continued to pay for construction of new mosques and maintenance of approximately 1,800 existing mosques. In its annual report, the ministry said 24 mosques in the West Bank were subject to attacks by Israeli settlers, including "storming, torching, or demolishing them."

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

The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs continued to pay the salaries of most Palestinian imams in the West Bank. The ministry also continued to provide limited financial support to some religious minorities, including Christian clergy and Christian charitable organizations.

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

Religious organizations providing education, health care, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians in and around East Jerusalem continued to state that the physical barrier begun by Israel during the Second Intifada in 2003 impeded their work, particularly south of Jerusalem in West Bank Christian communities around Bethlehem. Clergy members stated the barrier and additional checkpoints restricted their movements between Jerusalem and West Bank churches and monasteries as well as the movement of congregants between their homes and places of worship. Christian leaders continued to state the barrier hindered Bethlehem-area Christians from reaching the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. They also said it made visits to Christian sites in Bethlehem difficult for Palestinian Christians who lived on the west side of the

barrier. Foreign pilgrims and religious aid workers also reported difficulty or delays accessing Christian religious sites in the West Bank because of the barrier. The Israeli government previously stated it constructed the barrier as an act of self-defense and that it was highly effective in preventing terrorist attacks in Israel.

During the year, Christian expatriate workers in Israeli settlements continued to complain that lack of public transportation on Saturdays prevented them from participating in religious activities and worship in Jerusalem.

The Israeli Ministry of Religious Services (MRS) listed 21 dedicated cemeteries in Israel and West Bank settlements for burial of persons the government defined as “lacking religion,” and 33 cemeteries for civil burial, but only three were available for use by the general public regardless of residence, and one had been full for several years. The state permitted other cemeteries located in agricultural localities to bury only “residents of the area.” This, according to the religious freedom and equal rights advocacy NGO Hiddush, continued to leave the majority of Israel’s population unable to exercise its right, as mandated by law, to be buried in accordance with secular or non-Orthodox religious views. The two MRS-administered cemeteries in West Bank settlements were available only for the burial of Israeli citizens.

According to Brigham Young University’s Jerusalem Center, the Israeli government maintained an agreement with the Church of Jesus Christ stating that no member of the church would “engage in proselytizing of any kind” within Israel, the West Bank, or Gaza as a condition of its lease of land for its campus on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

On July 28, Israeli Education Minister Yifat Shasha-Biton announced that the government would cancel the permanent licenses of six schools in East Jerusalem over alleged incitement in textbooks. Authorities issued the schools, which serve more than 2,000 children, conditional licenses for one year, during which they must change their curriculum or lose their licenses completely. According to a statement by the education ministry, the textbooks included “the glorification of prisoners and their armed struggle against the State of Israel, conspiracy theories about withholding treatment from patients and intentional harm to medical staff,

accusations of [Israel] being responsible for the water crisis in the Palestinian Authority and grave claims about killings, displacements, and military massacres.”

On September 19, the *Jerusalem Post* reported 70,000 East Jerusalem students went on strike in protest over the introduction of an Israeli curriculum and edits by Israeli officials of PA-provided textbooks.

Textbooks used in East Jerusalem schools fall under the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem Education Administration, a joint body of the municipality and the Israeli Ministry of Education. A curriculum committee reviews and edits Palestinian textbooks to remove content considered incitement against Israel, and the Israeli education ministry expects schools to use edited textbooks. Palestinians and PA officials complained that the Israel-approved curriculum whitewashes or removes references to Palestinian identity or national aspirations, including removal of Palestinian flags, pictures of Palestinian leaders, or texts about the Palestinian right of return.

In a January report, which reviewed Palestinian curricula for 2021-22 school year, the Israeli NGO Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) stated that there continued to be antisemitic descriptions in PA educational materials of Jews as devious, treacherous, and hostile. In several examples, the curricula mentioned Jewish control of global events through financial power, manipulative behavior, and encouragement of others to fight in wars. The report stated that the materials demonize Israel and deny Jewish people their right to self-determination and that the “falsehood” of Jewish nationality was taught to students in several lessons. In a July report, IMPACT-se noted that, consistent with UN global practices, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA) used the same curriculum and textbooks as used by PA schools in the West Bank and Gaza. In addition to the problematic content of PA material, IMPACT-se reported that UNRWA produced supplementary material that was also problematic. In one case, Arabic and Islamic education drill cards focused on content in the PA curriculum promoting a narrative that portrays Jews as inherently treacherous and hostile to Islam and Muslims. In addition to providing teachers with training in human rights, tolerance, and critical thinking pedagogy to equip them to discuss controversial materials in PA textbooks with students, UNRWA stated there is no place for antisemitism in its programs. In recent years, UNRWA said it conducted

reviews of new textbooks introduced by the PA to ensure they aligned with UN values.

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

During an August 16 visit to Germany, PA President Mahmoud Abbas said, "From 1947 until today, Israel has committed 50 massacres in 50 Palestinian villages ... 50 slaughters. Fifty Holocausts." In a written statement, his office later clarified that he reaffirmed that the Holocaust is the most heinous crime in human history, that his answer was not intended to deny the singularity of the Holocaust, and that he condemned the Holocaust in the strongest terms. In an August 17 press conference, Abbas's advisor for religious affairs Mahmoud al-Habbash said that the Israelis "want us to forget history, while they want the world to remember a history which is mostly forged, exaggerated, fabricated, with no basis in reality." He added that saying these things could not be considered "antisemitism" because Palestinians are the "genuine Semites," as reflected in their names and cities.

In an August 29 interview on Awda Television (PA), Fatah Central Committee member Samir al-Rifai defended Abbas's comments and said that the "expulsion" of the Palestinian people from their land in 1948 was in fact that greatest crime of

the 20th century and despite the “Zionist” focus on the Holocaust, the Palestinians suffered an even worse fate than the Jews.

In several statements, Palestinian officials described Israeli government and Temple Mount activist actions as attempting to physically and/or temporally divide the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in violation of the status quo. On April 14, PA state media reported that PLO Executive Committee member Ahmed Majdalani said Israeli action during Ramadan intended to implement “temporal and spatial” division at the site. On April 17, head of the PLO Jerusalem Department Adnan Hussein said that Israeli facilitation of visits by “extremist settlers” to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount was in preparation for dividing the site. On April 20, PLO Executive Committee member Hussein al-Sheikh said that Israeli restrictions on the age and number of Muslim worshipers at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount was a breach of the status quo and intended to create a temporal division of the space.

Palestinian leaders, media, and social media regularly used the word “martyr” to refer to individuals killed during confrontations with Israeli security forces, whether those individuals were involved in confrontations or were innocent bystanders. Some official PA media channels, social media sites affiliated with the Fatah political movement, and terrorist organizations glorified terrorist attacks on Jewish Israelis, referring to the assailants as “martyrs.” The PA continued to pay “martyr payments” to families of Palestinians killed during terrorist acts or of those killed in Israeli military actions, including victims of airstrikes in Gaza, as well as stipends to Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including those awaiting charges and those convicted of acts of terrorism.

In June according to the *Jerusalem Post*, Israeli Deputy Religious Affairs Minister and MK Matan Kahana said while speaking to Israeli high school students that “if there was a button I could press that would take all the Arabs and put them on a train to Switzerland, I would. But a button like that does not exist.” Kahana subsequently said that his statement was meant to address living in coexistence since “both Jewish and Arab populations aren’t going anywhere.”

In October, the *Times of Israel* reported that then Prime Minister Yair Lapid promised to address the Basic Law – Israel – the Nation State of the Jewish People, which formally declared Israel the national home of the Jewish People,

saying that the law “as it is written today is an insult to Israeli citizens that are not Jewish and needs to be corrected.” According to the report, critics argued the law solidifies inequality among its citizens. Lapid also affirmed his support for the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, promising to “take care of the freedom of worship of Muslims in al-Aqsa, so that they will be able to go up and pray. We will also allow Jews to go up there, without praying, but they will go up under supervision to ensure the status quo is not violated.”

On April 15 amid clashes between Israeli police and Palestinians at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, then Foreign Minister Yair Lapid posted in Arabic on Twitter that “Israel guarantees freedom of worship for people of all religions in Jerusalem, and our goal is for everyone to perform their prayers quietly in the month of Ramadan. The riots [sic] that took place this morning on the Temple Mount is an unforgivable act that goes against the spirit of the religions we believe in.”

On November 20, following violence in Hebron, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Muhammad Ahmad Hussein said that “escalating attacks” by Israeli and Jewish settlers threatened to “drag the region into a religious war.” Hussein stated that “extremist militias of Jewish settlers” broke windows in two Hebron mosques in the violence, saying the IDF did nothing to prevent the vandalism. Hussein also alluded to “the Jewish seizure of al-Ibrahimi Mosque.” Giora Eiland, a retired IDF general and former head of Israel’s National Security Council, compared the attacks on Palestinians to Kristallnacht in Nazi Germany and said that the Israeli government maintained a widening double standard in which Palestinian attacks on Israeli Jews were denounced and investigated, while Israeli attacks on Palestinians were not.

The PA’s Palestinian Broadcasting Company’s code of conduct states it does not allow programming that encourages “violence against any person or institution on the basis of race, religion, political beliefs, or sex.” Some official PA media channels as well as social media accounts affiliated with the ruling political movement Fatah, however, featured content praising or condoning acts of violence against Jews.

During an interview with the newspaper *Israel Hayom*, PA Presidential Advisor on Religious Affairs al-Habbash said that the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount “is

owned by Muslims only, and non-Muslims have no right to own even an inch of it. Prayer, management, and ownership are the exclusive rights of Muslims.” He added that the Western Wall plaza was also part of the Islamic Waqf, and as such, “cannot belong to the Jews.” On October 11, the *Jerusalem Post* reported that Religious Zionist Party head and Israeli MK Bezalel Smotrich said the West Bank will be “one contiguous area of Jewish settlement within the sovereign Land of Israel.”

Antisemitic material continued to appear in official PA media. On September 30, official PA television broadcast a sermon by religious affairs advisor al-Habbash, in which he appeared to refer to Jewish visitors at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount as humanoids, apes, and pigs. On August 6, an official PA television reporter suggested that the Jewish holiday of Tisha B’Av and mourning the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem was “a tale invented by the settlers to confirm an alleged right in Jerusalem ... The legend of the temple is a result of this falsification.”

In an August 10 program on Palestine Television, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Hussein said that the “Israelites frequently indulge in transgressions and distort the truth,” giving the example of the Jews’ “claims” regarding Jerusalem and its holy places. He accused Jews of having “attacked the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.” In addition, he said that Jews slayed Allah’s prophets and persecuted Jesus.

On May 25 on Palestine Television, Samir Zaher, identified as an international law expert, said that Israel steals the organs of Palestinians from their corpses and that the “Zionist Rabbinate” permits using the skin from the backs of Palestinian corpses in order to treat soldiers who were burned in attacks. In addition, he said that Israel is considered the “biggest supermarket for human organs” and that it gives organs to any Zionist that needs them. Zaher stated that these practices are considered a “grave war crime.”

In an April 15 sermon in Ramallah that aired on Palestine Television, presidential religious advisor al-Habbash said that Jerusalem and Palestine have belonged to the Palestinian people for thousands of years. He also said that just as with the Greeks, Romans, Persians, Tatars, and Crusaders, the Israeli “occupation” will disappear, and Jerusalem will remain unchanged. In addition, he said that the



Israelis have no connection whatsoever to the land of Palestine and that unlike the Muslims, they have no religious or racial connection to Abraham.

Church leaders in Jerusalem, 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, and elsewhere in the periphery of the Old City. Some NGOs monitoring archaeological practices in Jerusalem continued to state the Israeli Antiquities Authority emphasized archaeological finds that bolstered Jewish claims in Jerusalem while minimizing historically significant archaeological finds of other religions.

*Haaretz* reported on November 11 that Jerusalem Deputy Mayor Arie King was helping a Jewish philanthropist launch a program encouraging the emigration of non-Jewish citizens from Israel. During a media interview, King said, “The idea is to encourage non-Jews to relocate outside the borders of our country.”

During a media interview published on December 6, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the Arab Muslim conquest was responsible for expelling Jews from the Land of Israel after they conquered the area in the seventh century. According to *Haaretz*, Israeli historians that it contacted “denied these claims and said Netanyahu’s claims ... misrepresent and distort history.” Netanyahu also denied the historical existence of a Palestinian people, saying, “They reconstructed history and said they’ve been here for centuries – no they haven’t, they weren’t there at all.”

During the year, the Israeli government retained its previous visa issuance regulations for foreigners to work in the West Bank, regulations Christian institutions said impeded their work by preventing many foreign clergy and other religious workers from entering and working. Christian leaders said Israel’s visa and permit policy also adversely affected schoolteachers and volunteers affiliated with faith-based charities working in the West Bank. Clergy, nuns, and other religious workers from Arab countries said they continued to face long delays in receiving visas and reported periodic denials of their visa applications. Officials from multiple churches expressed concern that non-Arab visa applicants and visa-renewal applicants also faced long delays. The Israeli government said that the large number of requests resulted in delays in process times. During the year,

Israeli officials reported 2,052 foreign clergy entered Israel and officials denied entry to one individual.

According to church officials, Israel continued to prohibit some Arab Christian clergy, including bishops and other senior clergy seeking to visit congregations or ministries under their pastoral authority, from entering Gaza.

In recent years, Israeli authorities issued permits for some Christians to exit Gaza to attend religious services in Jerusalem or the West Bank and for Muslims from the West Bank to enter Jerusalem for Ramadan. During the year, Israeli officials reported they issued 8,000 permits for Palestinians to enter Israel from the West Bank during Christmas season, and 500 family permits for West Bank residents to enter Gaza. Israeli officials reported they issued 500 permits for Christians in Gaza to enter Israel during Christmas.

The NGO Gisha reported that during the year, restrictions on freedom of movement of Palestinians in Gaza continued to infringe upon religious freedom. According to Gisha, Israel issued approximately 400 permits for Muslims in Gaza to travel to Jerusalem for prayer at the end of Ramadan – the first such permits for Muslim Gazans since 2018. Gisha reported that the 400 permits were part of more than 1,000 persons who were able to file an application during the two-hour application window. Many who wished to exit Gaza for Eid al-Adha were unable to due to what Gisha described as “Israel’s arbitrary quota.”

Gisha reported that Israel designated a quota of 500 permits for Christians in Gaza to visit Jerusalem for Easter celebrations. They reported that some applicants received permits while their family members were left waiting for a response or denied outright, forcing them to choose between forgoing family and religious visits or leaving their family members behind during the travel. During Christmas, Gisha reported that Israel issued 649 permits for Christians to exit Gaza for the holiday.

Supporters of the Law on Citizenship and Entry said it is necessary for security reasons, but according to the NGO the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), security records released by Shin Bet document that only 35 Palestinians with legal status in Israel were involved in activities that posed a security risk during the previous 20 years. ACRI and other civil rights organizations, including Adalah,

PHRI, HaMoked, and Society of St. Yves, petitioned to the Supreme Court on behalf of families affected by the law and called for its revocation, characterizing it as discriminatory, racist, contrary to international law, a violation of constitutional rights, and unfair because it labels all Palestinians as security risks. Human rights NGOs criticized restricting the rights of entire populations on the assumption that they are prone to terrorism as “collective punishment.” In December, the Supreme Court requested the state to explain its position within 90 days; the proceedings were ongoing at year’s end.

According to the NGO HaMoked, there were approximately 12,000 Palestinians living in the country, including in Jerusalem, on temporary stay permits because of the citizenship and entry law, with no legal guarantee they could continue living with their families. There were also cases of Palestinian spouses of Palestinian residents living in East Jerusalem without legal status. Some Palestinian residents moved to Jerusalem neighborhoods outside the security barrier to live with their nonresident spouse and children while maintaining Jerusalem residency.

According to Christian religious leaders, this situation remained an especially acute problem for Christians because of their small population and consequent tendency to marry Christians from the West Bank or elsewhere (i.e., Christians who held neither citizenship nor residency). Christian religious leaders expressed concern that this was a significant element in the continuing decline of the Christian population, including in Jerusalem, which negatively affected the long-term viability of Christian communities.

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

## **Actions of Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors**

Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other militant and terrorist groups continued to be active in Gaza. Hamas remained in de facto political control of Gaza. Both Hamas and PIJ are U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations.

Hamas leaders and other militant groups continued to call for the elimination of the State of Israel, and some called for killing “Zionist Jews” and advocated violence through traditional and social media channels as well as during rallies and other events. On September 22, prior to Rosh Hashana, Hamas, PIJ, and PFLP released a joint statement calling upon Palestinians to support Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque through popular resistance against Israeli interests everywhere. Hamas Gaza Politburo member Mahmoud al-Zahar warned of a “religious war” over Israeli actions at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and Hamas Chairman of the Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh routinely called for Arab states to terminate normalization agreements with Israel.

During the year, Hamas continued to enforce restrictions on Gaza’s population based on its interpretation of Islam and sharia, including a judicial system separate from the PA courts. Hamas courts occasionally prohibited women from departing Gaza due to ongoing divorce or family court proceedings, despite their having Israeli authorization to travel. Community members reported the Hamas-affiliated Islamic University of Gaza required hijabs for all women. According to press and NGO reports, school personnel forced some women students in Gaza to wear a hijab or other conservative dress, and in some cases teachers in Hamas-run schools in Gaza sent girls home for not wearing conservative attire, although enforcement was not systematic.

Hamas enforced a conservative interpretation of Islam in Gaza that discriminated against women. Hamas’ Sharia Supreme Court approved travel restrictions on women, requiring permission from a senior male relative to travel, but authorities lifted these restrictions following a campaign from human rights organizations. There were sporadic reports of security officers requiring a man to prove a woman with him in a public space was his spouse. Gazan civil society leaders, however, said that Hamas had moderated its restrictions on dress and gender segregation in public in comparison to previous years.

Palestinians in Gaza reported continued interference by Hamas in public schools at the primary, secondary, and university levels. Hamas reportedly interfered in teaching methodologies or curriculum it deemed to violate Islamic identity, the religion of Islam, or “traditions,” as defined by Hamas. Hamas also interfered when there were reports of classes or activities that mixed genders. UNRWA, however, reported no Hamas interference in the administration of its Gaza schools. Many Muslim students in Gaza continued to attend schools run by Christian institutions and NGOs.

Christian groups reported Hamas generally tolerated the small Christian presence in Gaza and did not force Christians to abide by Islamic law. According to media accounts, Hamas continued neither to investigate nor prosecute Gaza-based cases of religious discrimination, including reported anti-Christian bias in private sector hiring and in police investigations of anti-Christian harassment.

The mufti of Khan Younis, Ihsan Ahshour, accused Palestinian journalist Muhammad Abu Jiab, a program presenter on the al-Kofiya channel and youth radio in Gaza, of spreading debauchery and immorality, after Abu Jiab used Facebook to encourage investment in Gaza’s tourist sector and specifically in local cinema and theater.

On April 27 in a television program on al-Quds al-Youm Television (run by Islamic Jihad in Gaza), political analyst Ahmad Abd Al-Rahman said that the Holocaust and the image of Jews as poor and downtrodden were lies used by the Zionists to blackmail the world into bringing the Jews to the “so-called Promised Land.” He praised al-Quds al-Youm Television and other “resistance media” for exposing these “lies.” On a May 16 broadcast on al-Quds al-Youm Television, academic Riyadh Abu Ras said that the Jews can either “go back to Europe” or be killed and buried in “Palestine.” He said that the British sent the Jews to Palestine because they had been a “nuisance” in Europe and in order to create “a dagger in the Arab and Islamic nation’s back.” He elaborated that the Jews had been a criminal “bunch of murderers and schemers” in Europe, and he said that Israel must be “dismantled.”

In a July 15 episode of a children’s show on Hamas’s al-Aqsa Television, a man dressed in a puppet costume spoke about Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque with children. A little girl said that the Jews “must not be allowed to destroy” the

al-Aqsa Mosque. The man said that the “criminal Jews” have a plot, explaining that, “They are digging tunnels under the al-Aqsa Mosque in order to ... I forgot, what do they want to build?... They want to replace the Dome of the Rock with the tem...the tem...what is it called?” In response, a boy said that the Jews want to build the “false temple” and added that this would never happen as long as Palestinians defended Jerusalem.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

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

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

On October 25, police arrested a Palestinian man for stabbing an Israeli man as he left a store in the Palestinian village of al-Funduq, near the settlement of Kdumim. Israeli authorities classified the attack as an act of terrorism.

On January 15, the *Times of Israel* reported that unknown persons ignited a fire in a building used as a synagogue at a memorial site near the West Bank settlement of Ma’ale Hever and the Palestinian village of Birin. Firefighters said perpetrators threw several burning car tires into the building, destroying the contents, including Jewish prayer books and an empty Torah ark.

On March 22, after an attack in Be’er Sheba killed four Israelis, Israeli media reported that Israeli settlers shattered the windows of cars and hurled stones at homes in the Palestinian town of Mukhmas, near Jerusalem. The following day, according to Israeli media, settlers slashed the tires of at least 10 cars belonging to Palestinian residents of the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

On January 23, the *Times of Israel* reported that Jewish extremists slashed tires and vandalized vehicles of Palestinian residents in the West Bank village of Qira

with Stars of David and chanted slogans calling for an end to administrative orders that allow authorities to bar suspects of settler violence from areas without formal charges.

On March 24, *Haaretz* reported that unknown persons attempted to burn a mosque in the Palestinian village of Zeita Jamain, near Nablus, and vandalized the mosque and nearby Palestinian homes with graffiti, including “Jews won’t be silent when our brothers are murdered.” The attack was one of four that week in the West Bank that included masked men attacking cars and homes with batons and stones in Muhmas; assailants uprooting 200 olive trees in the village of Turmus Ayya near the Ariel settlement; and vandals defacing and destroying cars in the town of al Bireh.

The Jerusalem Intercultural Center (JICC) reported that on July 14, a group of about five or six Jewish Israeli youths attacked a tour group of about 140 Christian pilgrims visiting the Jewish Quarter, in the Old City. According to JICC, the attackers cursed the tourists, spit at them, demanded they put away all Christian elements, and threw “toxic cleaning liquid” at them. One of the tour guides filed a complaint with Israeli police. The MFA reported that one suspect was arrested and the state attorney was still reviewing the case.

On March 7, the Higher Presidential Committee on Churches Affairs in the Palestinian Territories denounced what it described as the “sinful attack” on the Abbey of the Dormition on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Vandals targeted the monastery several times with stones and glass bottles, in addition to throwing garbage in its orchard, causing some damage to the property. The committee appealed to regional and international organizations, including Islamic and Christian institutions, to work on providing protection for the holy sites. The committee also stressed the need for the international community to assume its responsibilities and protect the Palestinian people and their places of worship.

On June 6, local media reported that Israeli Jewish extremists broke into the Greek Orthodox Chapel of the Pentecost on Mount Zion and threatened the church groundskeeper. Greek officials reported multiple break-ins, vandalism, and threats against clergy and staff during the year at the site, which hosts a garden and playground for the nearby Greek Orthodox school, with minimal response by Israeli police.

According to local press and social media, some settlers in the West Bank continued to justify their attacks on Palestinian property, or “price tag” attacks, such as the uprooting of Palestinian olive trees, vandalism of cars and buildings, arson, and slashing of tires, as necessary for the defense of Judaism. On August 24, according to *Haaretz*, vandals sprayed nationalist slogans and damaged cars in the Palestinian village of Marda, north of the Jewish settlement of Ariel in the West Bank. Slogans and graffiti painted on walls included “Jews wake up, Arabs leave” and the Star of David. The newspaper noted that Marda had become a frequent target of price tag attacks.

On March 9, Israeli vandals slashed tires, broke windows, and sprayed anti-Palestinian graffiti in Hebrew on nearly 30 vehicles in the West Bank village of Jaljulia near Ramallah. According to local media reports, the graffiti included Stars of David and slogans including, “Arab watch out, my sister is off-limits.”

Fatah General Secretary in Jenin Atta Abu Rumeileh stated in a video on social media that “Jews and Zionists are waging a war against the Palestinians, and the Palestinians have the right to hold weapons and engage in war with Israel in all of Palestine, from the river to the sea.

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

Political and religious groups in the West Bank and Gaza continued to call on members to “defend” al-Aqsa Mosque and holy sites in Jerusalem. According to the Wadi Hilweh Information Center, there were 48,238 Jewish visitors to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount during the year. The Israeli MFA reported 48,205 Jewish visitors.

Following the announcement of the normalization agreements establishing relations between Israel and four Arab countries (the Abraham Accords), Palestinian Muslims continued to harass and, on social media, vilify Muslims from the Gulf for visiting the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount as part of visits to Israel.



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

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

Christian clergy and pilgrims continued to report instances of Jewish Israelis 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Senior U.S. officials spoke publicly and with Israeli and Waqf officials about the importance of maintaining the historic status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Throughout the year, the State Department used various social media platforms to express U.S. support for tolerance and the importance of openness to members of other religious groups.

The 2021-2022 Department of State-UNRWA Framework for Cooperation addresses “shared goals and priorities; continued support; monitoring and reporting; and communication and partnership” in the UN agency’s delivery of education, primary health care, relief and social services, and other humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees. The framework noted, “The United States and UNRWA condemn without reserve [sic] all manifestations of religious or racial intolerance, incitement to violence, harassment or violence against persons or communities based on ethnic origin or religious belief, including antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Catholicism, anti-Arabism, or other forms of discrimination or racism against Palestinians, Israelis, or other individuals or communities based on ethnic origin or religious belief.”

U.S. government-supported initiatives focused on interreligious dialogue and community development and advocated constructive relationships among Palestinian and Israeli populations. U.S. government officials advocated for the right of persons from all faiths to practice their religion peacefully while also respecting the beliefs and customs of their neighbors.