

ISRAEL 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

A report on the Occupied Territories, including areas subject to the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority (PA), is appended at the end of this report.

The Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty establishes freedom of religion, and the government continued to enforce legal protection for religious freedom. The government arrested dozens of persons, including minors, in connection with “price tag” attacks by settler groups against Christian and Muslim religious sites during the year, and government officials quickly and publicly criticized the attacks. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious institutions, and press reports noted that those arrests rarely led to successful prosecutions. The government limited Jewish religious observance at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, though some Jewish groups sought to either legally overturn this policy or modify it to permit Jewish prayer, actions that were at times followed by a violent response from Muslim worshippers. The government continued to enforce a prohibition on mixed gender prayer services at the Western Wall; however, a public debate about accommodating “egalitarian prayer,” i.e., permitting men and women to pray as they wished, continued throughout the year. A platform, south of the Mughrabi ramp and adjacent to but not touching the Western Wall, was open to both men and women where each person could practice individual religious rituals as desired. Governmental and legal discrimination against non-Jews and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism continued and was debated by public officials and civil society organizations. The government provided proportionately more funding to Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox religious institutions, sites, and services than to non-Orthodox and non-Jewish institutions, sites, and services. The Orthodox Chief Rabbinate maintained hegemony over Jewish marriage and conversion procedures and, while civil union legislation remained pending, non-Orthodox or interfaith couples could not exercise their right to marry in their denomination or in a civil ceremony within the country.

There was an increase in interethnic tension and violence involving different religious communities. On November 18, two Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem killed four Israeli worshippers, three of them also U.S. citizens, and one Israeli policeman, and wounded dozens, some seriously, in an attack on a synagogue in the Har Nof neighborhood of West Jerusalem during morning prayers. Events including the June kidnapping and killings of three Jewish Israeli minors, one of them also a U.S. citizen, in the West Bank, the kidnapping and

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killing of a Palestinian minor in East Jerusalem, and over 4,600 rocket attacks and several terror tunnel infiltration attempts by Gazan militants into Israel in June, July, and August and the resulting Israeli military response strained Arab-Jewish relations. Because religion, ethnicity, and nationality are closely linked in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, it was difficult to categorize many societal actions against specific groups as being solely based on religious identity. “Price tag” attacks continued within Israel. Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land (CRIHL) documented 25 “price tag” attacks against religious sites within the country, including five against Muslim, eight against Christian, and 12 against Jewish religious sites. (“Price tag” attacks refer to property crimes and violent acts, often but not exclusively committed by settler groups, primarily against Muslim and Christian Palestinians and Israeli Arabs, their religious sites, and cemeteries.) There was an increase in violent attacks between segments of the Jewish population and segments of the non-Jewish Arab population, many of whom self-identify as Palestinian, including an increase in attacks on Muslim and Christian religious sites and Arab-affiliated property during Israeli military operations in the Occupied Territories. On October 29, a Palestinian East Jerusalem resident shot an Israeli activist (and U.S. citizen) after the activist spoke at a conference advocating expanded Jewish visitation and prayer on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Police killed the attacker during a subsequent attempt to arrest him in East Jerusalem.

Embassy officials engaged the highest levels of the Israeli government to raise concerns about an increase in societal, religious, and ethnic tension during Israeli military operations in the Occupied Territories and after the summer’s high profile killings of three Israelis and one Palestinian. In response to a rise in tensions at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in October and November, the U.S. Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor, the Ambassador, and embassy officers engaged government officials and relevant Knesset leaders on the importance of maintaining the agreed-upon status quo at the religious site and not escalating an already tense situation through provocative actions and statements. The embassy supported programs countering the “price tag” attack phenomenon, including programs supporting interreligious solidarity, interreligious dialogue, mixed Jewish-Arab educational and communal initiatives, and programs leveraging the influence of religious leaders to combat familial and societal violence. The U.S. Special Advisor for Faith-Based Initiatives met with local leaders in interreligious engagement during a November visit to Tel Aviv. The Ambassador and other embassy officials highlighted the importance of religious plurality and encouraged

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respect for non-Orthodox streams of Judaism in their regular engagement with Israeli officials and religious leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population is 7.8 million (July 2014 estimate that includes settlers living in the Occupied Territories). According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), approximately 75 percent of the population is Jewish, 17 percent Muslim, 2 percent Christian, and 1.6 percent Druze. The remaining 4 percent consists of relatively small communities of Bahais, Samaritans, Karaites, Jehovah's Witnesses, and those the CBS classifies as "other" – mostly persons who identify themselves as Jewish but do not satisfy the Orthodox Jewish definition of "Jewish" the government uses for civil procedures, including many immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The majority of non-Jewish citizens are of Arab origin.

According to an April poll by the Rafi Smith Institute conducted for the media outlet Ynet, more than half of Jewish Israelis define themselves as secular (53 percent), 26 percent define themselves as "traditional, religious," and 21 percent define themselves as "ultra-Orthodox/religious." Among those aged 34 and younger, 30 percent define themselves as ultra-Orthodox/religious while among adults over 50 only 15 percent defined themselves as such. A 2013 Israel Democracy Institute's (IDI) Guttman Center poll shows that between 500,000 and 600,000 traditional and secular Jews feel a sense of belonging to the Conservative or Reform streams of Judaism. There is also a community of approximately 20,000 Messianic Jews.

Religious communities often are concentrated in geographical areas according to religious beliefs, with a high concentration of communities of Bedouin Muslims in the Negev (south) and many majority Druze, Christian, and Muslim communities in the Galilee (north), some of which are homogenous and some a mix of these religious groups. There are many Druze Syrian and mixed Christian and Druze communities in the Occupied Golan Heights. The country continues to undergo demographic changes due to the higher birth rate of the Haredi community and certain Muslim communities.

According to the CBS, there are approximately 109,000 foreign workers and an additional 93,000 illegal foreign workers and 54,000 African migrants and asylum seekers residing in the country. Foreign workers were members of many different

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religious groups, and include Protestants, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

There is no constitution. The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty protects freedom to practice religious beliefs, including freedom of conscience, faith, religion, and worship, regardless of an individual's religion. The law incorporates religious freedom provisions of international human rights covenants into the country's body of domestic law, and customary international law is enforceable as long as it does not contradict a domestic law. The Supreme Court has ruled domestic law operates under the presumption of compatibility with international norms. The Basic Law describes the country as a "Jewish and democratic state" and references the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, which promises freedom of religion and conscience and full social and political equality, regardless of religious affiliation.

The law recognizes the following religious communities according to the adopted Ottoman millet (court) system: Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), Gregorian-Armenian, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Chaldean (Chaldean Uniate Catholic), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, Druze, Evangelical Episcopal, and Bahai. Other religious communities, including Muslims and major Protestant Christian denominations, have a presence in the country, but are not recognized by the government as distinct religio-ethnic communities according to the millet system per se, though Muslims have a separate legal court system recognized under Israeli law that deals with personal status issues of the Muslim community. Protestant Christians do not have a separate legal court system for personal status issues. Five religious communities have applied for official recognition but their applications have been pending for years: Ethiopian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Evangelical Alliance of Israel, and Jehovah's Witnesses. All recognized religious communities are exempt from taxation for places of worship and may have separate courts that apply their religion's personal status law. It is not mandatory to seek recognition. While members of recognized religious communities only require approval for visas from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visas for members of unrecognized religious communities also require Ministry of Interior (MOI)

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approval for stays longer than five years. Members of unrecognized religious groups may practice their beliefs.

Proselytizing is legal for all religious groups. The law prohibits offering a material benefit as an inducement to conversion. It is also illegal to convert a person under 18 unless one parent is an adherent of the religious group seeking to convert the minor.

Under laws inherited from the Ottoman Empire and British Mandate periods, the legal system gives jurisdiction over personal status issues to certain religious communities. Under this system, each officially recognized religious community operates religious courts and has legal authority over its members in matters of marriage, divorce, and burial. Jewish, Druze, Muslim, and Christian families may ask for personal status cases, including alimony, child custody, guardianship, domestic violence, paternity, and property division, to be adjudicated in civil courts. Exceptions to this provision include cases of divorce where Jewish women are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the rabbinical courts if their spouses file the case there first, and paternity cases among Muslim citizens which are the exclusive jurisdiction of Islamic law courts. Societal pressures frequently prevent Muslim women from adjudicating personal status issues in civil courts, and Jewish women often prefer the civil courts because they are considered fairer to women. Members of religious groups that do not permit divorce, such as Catholics, cannot obtain a divorce unless they change their religious affiliation to a different religious authority that authorizes divorces.

Secular courts have primary jurisdiction over questions of inheritance, but parties may file such cases in religious courts by mutual agreement. Decisions by these bodies are subject to Supreme Court review. The rabbinical courts, when exercising their power in civil matters, apply religious law, which varies from civil law, including in matters relating to the property rights of widows and daughters.

Some, but not all, unrecognized religious communities are authorized by the Ministry of Religious Services (MRS) to perform marriage ceremonies (and the marriages could later be civilly registered), although judicial jurisdiction in marriage and divorce is granted only to recognized communities. Members of these groups may attempt to process their personal status issues, including marriage, with authorities within one of the recognized religious communities if the authority agrees. Since the state does not permit civil marriages, interfaith marriages, or marriages performed by non-Orthodox rabbis or unrecognized

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religious authorities, many marriages must take place outside the country in order to be legally recognized. This provision restricts the ability of individuals to choose their own religious authorities and prevents several hundred thousand Israeli citizens from marrying within the country. The law allows for civil registration of couples only if both partners are recognized as being of “no religion,” which applies to a few dozen people each year.

The MOI has jurisdiction over religious matters concerning non-Jewish groups, while the Ministry of Tourism is responsible for the protection and upkeep of non-Jewish religious sites. The MRS has jurisdiction over the country’s 133 Jewish religious councils, which oversee the provision of religious services for Jewish communities. The MOI Department of Non-Jewish Affairs oversees one non-Jewish religious council for the Druze. Legislation establishing religious councils does not include non-Jewish religious communities other than the Druze. The government finances approximately 40 percent of the religious councils’ budgets, and local municipalities fund the remainder.

The law provides the right for any Jew, or any child or grandchild of a Jew, to immigrate to Israel from a foreign country with his or her spouse and children. Non-Orthodox converts to Judaism are entitled to the civil right of return, citizenship, and registration as Jews in the civil population registry. Descendants of Jews qualify for immigration under the Law of Return regardless of the religious beliefs into which they were born, though those who convert to other religious groups, including Messianic Judaism, as adults are considered to have “opted out” of the protections of the Law of Return.

The Chief Rabbinate determines who is buried in Jewish state cemeteries, limiting this right to individuals considered Jewish by Orthodox standards. The law provides for the right of any individuals to be buried in a civil ceremony.

According to a November 2 cabinet decision, local Orthodox rabbinic courts have full authority to perform conversions in Israel, allowing for a more flexible determination regarding whether someone has met the *halachic* (Jewish law) standards for conversion. The Chief Rabbinate retains the authority to issue certificates of conversion to Judaism within the country under Orthodox rabbinic law, leaving the possibility that it could refuse to accept the decision of a local rabbinic court. The Israel Democracy Institute, a domestic think tank, supported the decision, but stated it did not address the question of retroactive annulment of conversions or provide recognition of non-Orthodox conversions. The Chief

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Rabbinate does not recognize non-Orthodox converts to Judaism as Jews and, as such, Reform and Conservative converts cannot marry or divorce in the country or be buried in Jewish cemeteries.

The government provides funding for Orthodox and non-Orthodox conversion programs following a 2009 High Court of Justice ruling requiring it to cease discriminating against non-Orthodox conversion courses. Relatives of Jewish converts cannot receive residency rights, except for the children of female converts born after the mother's conversion is complete.

The law provides for the protection of sites considered holy places of all religious groups by criminalizing the “desecration or other violations” of religious sites (subject to seven years imprisonment) and actions to “harm the freedom of access” of worshippers to religious sites (subject to five years imprisonment). Certain religious sites considered antiquities are provided further protection under the antiquities law. The law also provides for up to five years imprisonment for actions “likely to violate the feelings of the members of the different religions with regard” to their religious sites. The government, not the courts, has the authority to decide the scope of the right to worship at certain religious sites, and the Supreme Court has upheld that governmental authority. The government provides some resources for the upkeep of religious sites of Muslims and all recognized religious communities but provides significantly greater levels of government resources to Jewish religious sites. The government also funds construction of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries.

A court has upheld the right of minors to choose a secular education regardless of parental preference. Public Hebrew-language secular schools teach Jewish history and religious texts. These classes primarily cover Jewish heritage and culture rather than religious belief. Public Arabic-speaking schools with Arab student bodies teach religion classes on the Quran and the Bible to both Muslim and Christian Arab students. A few independent mixed Jewish-Arab schools also exist and offer religion classes.

Military service is compulsory for Jews, Druze (except those living in the Israeli occupied Golan Heights), and the 5,000-member Circassian community (Muslims originally from the northwestern Caucasus region who migrated in the late 19th century). The law provides the minister of defense some discretion to provide exemptions from compulsory military service for conscientious objectors. A special committee evaluates applications for conscientious objection and can

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recommend exemptions if it determines that an applicant objects to the inherent use of violent force in the military framework and to war in a way that prevents him or her from serving in the military. The committee is also authorized to recommend certain accommodations to conscientious objectors' concerns, including permission to not hold weapons or wear uniforms. The committee chair is authorized to grant exemptions, and committee decisions can be appealed. Arab Christian and Muslim citizens are exempt from compulsory service. Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from service on the basis of their conscientious objection upon periodic presentation of documentation that they remained affiliated with that religious community. In March the Knesset overturned previous law allowing Haredi males to avoid military service for religious reasons. By June 40 percent of the 3,357 Haredi males requested to present themselves at the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) induction center had done so and a total of 1,972 Haredi men enlisted in 2014. To receive similar national benefits accorded military veterans, Arabs and Haredi Jews could enlist in a national civil service program run by the Ministry of Science and Technology for one or two years as volunteers in health, education, and welfare with NGOs and institutions focused on improving their local communities

The law criminalizes calling for, praising, supporting, or encouraging acts of violence or terrorism where such actions are likely to lead to violence, including calls for violence against religious groups. The government operates a special department in the state attorney's office for prosecution of "incitement-related" crimes and a police unit based in Jerusalem for the investigation of such crimes in Israel and the West Bank, including "price tag" attacks. The law criminalizes incitement to racism, defined as "persecution, humiliation, vilification, the display of enmity or violence, or the causing of animosity" by reason of color, race, or national-ethnic origin.

Government Practices

The government restricted access to certain religious sites and implemented some policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. The government investigated attacks on religious sites and prosecuted perpetrators. The perpetrator of a 2012 violent attack against a 62-year-old female Jehovah's Witness targeted for her religious beliefs was indicted and prosecuted.

From July 8 to August 26, Israel conducted a military operation in response to increased rocket attacks from Gaza toward Israeli civilian areas beginning in late

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June, as well as militants' attempts to infiltrate the country through tunnels from Gaza to commit terrorist acts. The government recognized a murdered Palestinian teenager as a victim of terrorism, granting his family compensation.

Dozens of persons, including minors, were arrested in connection to "price tag" attacks during the year, including attacks on Christian institutions before Pope Francis' May visit. In April individuals slashed the tires of four cars and wrote slogans such as "Jesus is a cow" and "Mary is a monkey" on the walls of a Catholic monastery in Deir Rafat. In April the door of the Abu-Bakr Al-Siddiq mosque in Umm al-Fahm was set on fire and vandals wrote the words "Arabs out" on the mosque walls. There were multiple examples of Arab cars damaged or painted with a Star of David when parked in Jewish towns. The government designated "price tag" vandals as members of "illicit organizations" and a police unit specializing in nationalist crimes, including "price tag" attacks and attacks on places of worship, investigated these acts. Government officials quickly and publicly criticized the attacks. The police reported investigating all known instances of religiously motivated attacks and making arrests when possible. For example, in April police arrested three Jewish minors suspected of desecrating graves in a Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem. In May the attorney general said the law permits using administrative detention for "price tag" suspects, a practice widely used in cases of Palestinians arrested for security offenses but rarely applied to Israeli citizens. The prime minister, minister of justice, public security minister, and attorney general, as well as the CRIHL spoke out against "price tag" attacks. (The CRIHL is an umbrella body of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious institutions that includes the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) Ministry of Islamic Waqf (endowments), the PA sharia courts, and the leaders of the major Christian denominations in Jerusalem.

NGOs, religious institutions, and press reports stated that arrests for "price tag" attacks rarely led to successful prosecutions, many for lack of sufficient evidence. Some "price tag" perpetrators were sentenced, some investigations were ongoing, and some prosecutions were pending at year's end. On December 21, the Lod District Court sentenced two men to 30 months in prison for perpetrating an arson attack motivated by racism, the most significant sentence handed down for "price tag" related violence to date.

On November 29, members of Lehava (an anti-intermarriage organization) set afire two first grade classrooms in the Arabic-Hebrew bilingual Max Rayne Hand in Hand school in West Jerusalem and scrawled graffiti with racist messages,

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including “Death to Arabs.” Prime Minister Netanyahu condemned the attack, as did Justice Minister Tzipi Livni and Housing Minister Uri Ariel in their visits to the school the following day. In December three members of Lehava were arrested and reportedly confessed to setting fire to the school. Police also arrested other Lehava members, including the organization’s leader Bentzi Gopstein on December 16, on charges of incitement to racism against non-Jews.

The MOI relied on the guidance of the Jewish Agency, a non-profit NGO with strong ties to the government, to determine who qualifies to immigrate as a Jew. Prospective immigrants routinely faced questioning about their religious beliefs to determine their qualifications for citizenship. MOI officials continued to deny citizenship or deny or delay services such as child registration and issuance of social benefits, identity cards, and passports to some citizens based on their religious beliefs, according to the Jerusalem Institute of Justice, an NGO. This included cases of individuals who immigrated under the Law of Return as Jews but were discovered to hold Messianic or Christian beliefs.

As in previous years, the MRS failed to fully implement a 1996 law which established the right of any individual to be buried in a civil ceremony. A September court ruling granted damages to citizens who wanted civil burials but were only offered religious burials, but found they were responsible for payment for burials outside of their municipality. There were 44 cemeteries that contained plots for people without religious status. The government employed civilian non-Jewish clergy as chaplains at military burials when a non-Jewish soldier died in service. The MOI provided imams to conduct funerals according to Muslim customs. All Jewish chaplains in the IDF were Orthodox.

The IDF sponsored expedited Orthodox Jewish conversion courses for Jewish soldiers who were not recognized as Jewish by the Orthodox rabbinical authorities.

The government continued to control access to the site referred to as Haram al-Sharif by Muslims (containing the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque) and the Temple Mount by Jews (who recognize it as the foundation of the first and second Jewish temples). The location has been under Israeli control since 1967 when Israel captured the eastern sector of the city (the Israeli government formally annexed East Jerusalem in 1980, and Israel applies its laws in East Jerusalem). The Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, a Jordanian-funded and administered Islamic trust and charitable organization, continued to administer the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. The government continued to prevent non-Muslim worship and prayer at

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the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, although it ensured limited access to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif to everyone regardless of religious belief. This policy has repeatedly been upheld by the Supreme Court and was enforced by the police, who cite security concerns. The government instead directed Jewish worshippers to the Western Wall, the place of worship nearest the holiest site in Judaism. The Waqf restricted non-Muslims from entering the Dome of the Rock shrine and al-Aqsa Mosque and prohibited non-Muslim religious symbols from being worn on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif (a practice enforced by the Israeli National Police).

The Israeli National Police (INP) was responsible for security at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, with police stationed both inside the site and outside each entrance. The INP conducted routine patrols on the outdoor plaza, regulated traffic in and out of the site, screened non-Muslims for religious paraphernalia, and generally prohibited them from praying publicly on the site. Israeli police had exclusive control of the Mughrabi Gate entrance – the only entrance through which non-Muslims could enter the site – and in general allowed visitors through the gate during set visiting hours, although the INP sometimes restricted this access, citing security concerns.

Citing security concerns, the Israeli government restricted access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount by Muslims from Jerusalem and the West Bank, frequently barring entry of male, and sometimes female, residents under the age of 50. The Israeli government in November stated the INP had imposed age restrictions 76 times until that point in the year, compared with 12 times in 2013 and three times in 2012. According to media reports, the Israeli government provided Muslims from Gaza very occasional access to the site, including permitting entry to 1,500 Muslim Gazans over 60 during Eid al-Adha on October 5, 6, and 7, and 200 Gazans on Fridays in December – primarily Muslims over 60. Israeli security authorities frequently restricted Muslim residents of Jerusalem from entering the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site for Friday prayer, and imposed age restrictions on male prayer on several days during Ramadan, including every Friday and on the Night of Destiny (Laylat al Qadr). On several days in August, Israeli police prohibited all Muslim women regardless of age from visiting the site during non-Muslim visiting hours. Israeli authorities cited altercations between specific groups of female worshippers and Jewish tourists attempting to break the injunction against non-Muslim prayer on site as a reason for these temporary blanket bans. Authorities infrequently closed the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif entirely, often after skirmishes at the site between Palestinians and Israeli police.

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Following the October 29 shooting of an Israeli-American activist and a subsequent shootout in the Abu Tor neighborhood of East Jerusalem during which police killed the attacker during an arrest attempt, the INP on October 30, denied entry to the Temple Mount /Haram al-Sharif for all Muslims for a full day. Waqf officials described the closure as unprecedented since 1967, although some reports indicate the site was also completely closed to Muslims in 2000. On November 14, the government lifted all age restrictions on Muslims seeking to enter the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

A wide range of Muslim officials, including representatives of the Waqf, objected to Israeli-imposed access restrictions for Muslim worshippers to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, and opposed calls from some Israeli groups to divide visiting hours between Muslims and non-Muslims and to allow non-Muslim prayer there. Waqf officials complained that Israeli police violated status quo agreements regarding control of access to the site, as the INP did not fully coordinate with the Waqf its decisions to allow non-Muslim visitors onto the site. Waqf employees were stationed inside each gate and on the plaza. They could object to the presence of particular persons, such as individuals dressed immodestly or causing disturbances, but they lacked the authority to remove persons from the site.

Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif site, most frequently Jerusalem Islamic Waqf employees, and also barred Jewish activists who had repeatedly violated rules against non-Muslim prayer on the site, including members of Knesset (MKs). Israeli authorities banned all non-Muslim visitors to the site for the last two weeks of Ramadan, citing security concerns. Israeli reinforcement of the ramp leading to the Mughrabi Gate of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, as well as excavations in the immediate vicinity, continued during the year despite calls from the Islamic Waqf to coordinate any excavation or construction and concerns that the excavations could destabilize the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Israeli authorities briefly constructed a second ramp on the site in August, before removing it a few weeks later after criticism from the Waqf and Jordanian officials.

Many Jewish leaders continued to promote the view that Jewish law prohibited Jews from entering the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, a view strongly supported by the ultra-Orthodox or Haredi community. Increasing numbers of the “national religious” community, however, supported ascending to the site. Some prominent members of the ruling coalition in the Knesset called for reversing the policy of

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banning non-Muslim prayer at the site, and the Knesset's Interior Committee held hearings to discuss the issue and press the INP to allow Jewish visitors to pray there. These discussions intensified following the October 29 attack on a Jewish activist (and U.S. citizen) well known for advocating Jewish prayer at the site. Some Israeli officials, including cabinet members, visited the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and issued statements asserting Israeli control over it. For example, on September 24, Minister of Housing and Construction Uri Ariel visited the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and stated, "the sovereignty over the Temple Mount is in our hands and we must strengthen it." Some coalition members of the Knesset (MKs) and Israeli NGOs, such as the Temple Institute and Temple Mount Faithful, called on the Israeli government to implement a time-sharing plan at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif that would set aside certain hours for Jewish worship, similar to one used at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. The Ministry of Tourism also reportedly was considering a plan to open another gate to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif to non-Muslims – a move condemned by Muslim leaders as a change from the status quo at the site. Despite an Israeli High Court ruling stating that "Jews, even though their right to the Temple Mount exists and stands historically, are not permitted to currently actualize their right to perform public prayer on the Temple Mount," the government considered international agreements with Jordan restricting Jewish prayer at the site to remain authoritative. The prime minister reiterated repeatedly his support for maintaining the status quo arrangement at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif – as did Police Commissioner Yohanan Danino – and following the October attack on a Jewish activist, specifically called on Knesset members and Israeli officials to avoid inflaming tensions through provocative actions such as visits to the site. MK Moshe Feiglin, however, visited the site several times following the attack, and the attorney general, on November 25, upheld the right of MKs to visit the site according to the visitation rules for members of the non-Muslim public.

Despite Israeli government prohibitions against non-Muslim worship at the site, some Jewish groups escorted by Israeli police performed religious acts such as prayers and prostration. The police then acted to prevent Jewish persons from praying and arrested those who did. Waqf officials criticized the visits. In some instances the visits sparked violence between Palestinians at the site who responded to the visits of Jews by directing violence – usually rocks and firecrackers – at the visitors and at the Israeli police, sometimes leading to clashes with the police. Jewish visits to the site increased compared to 2013, particularly during Jewish holidays in September and October. During this period, Israeli

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police at times imposed restrictions on Muslim and non-Muslim access to the site, for example on September 24, limiting access to Muslims under age 50. In several instances Israeli police prevented non-Muslim access to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in anticipation of clashes. Israeli police also temporarily denied Muslims access to the site on at least one day during September to accommodate Jewish visits. Clashes sometimes occurred in areas of the Old City and East Jerusalem where Muslim worshippers who had been denied entry to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif had gathered to pray, such as on the last Friday of Ramadan when worshippers from Jerusalem's Wadi Joz neighborhood, blocked from the Old City by Israeli police, prayed in the street, and then clashed with police after the conclusion of prayers. Following the U.S. Secretary of State's November engagement with Palestinian, Jordanian, and Israeli leaders in Amman, all sides took significant steps to reduce tensions, and the government facilitated freer access for Muslims to the site.

The Western Wall, the place of worship nearest the holiest site in Judaism, was open to visitors from all religions during the year, and the Israeli government permitted Muslims and Christians to make individual prayers at the site. The rabbi of the Western Wall, appointed by the prime minister and chief rabbis, continued to set the guidelines for religious observance at the Western Wall, including the strict separation of women and men. The government continued to enforce this prohibition on mixed gender prayer services at the site on all visitors. Men and women at the Western Wall had to use separate areas to visit and pray, with the women's section being less than half the size of the men's section. Women were not permitted to bring a Torah scroll onto the plaza and were prevented from accessing the public Torah scrolls at the religious site. Women were permitted to pray with tefillin and prayer shawls pursuant to an April 2013 Jerusalem District Court ruling stating it was illegal to arrest or fine them for such actions. The police continued to assist Women of the Wall, an NGO and prayer group, in entering the women's area of the Western Wall for their monthly service.

A platform, south of the Mughrabi ramp and adjacent to but not touching the Western Wall, was open to both men and women where each person could practice religious rituals as desired. The platform was equipped to accommodate approximately 450 worshippers and designated for members of the Conservative and Reform movements of Judaism. Non-Orthodox and mixed gender groups used this structure for religious ceremonies such as bar and bat mitzvahs.

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A public debate about accommodating “egalitarian prayer,” i.e., men and women praying as they wished, continued throughout the year. Cabinet Secretary Mandelblit continued to chair a committee on “egalitarian prayer” at the Western Wall. The government developed plans to construct an “egalitarian prayer” space at the Robinson’s Arch area of the wall in accordance with a 2013 agreement between the government and Jewish groups dissatisfied with restrictions placed on prayer, including gender segregation and a prohibition on women singing out loud, or holding or reading from Torah scrolls. The government halted an effort to give administration of this new area to Elad (the City of David Foundation), an association dedicated to asserting Jewish presence in the Silwan area abutting the Old City. Some groups stated this compromise did not sufficiently accommodate women who wanted to lead prayers in a women-only setting.

Israeli police obstructed access through security checkpoints to the Old City’s Church of the Holy Sepulchre during major religious holidays, including the April 19 Orthodox Easter “holy fire” service and the April 20 Orthodox Easter holiday, which reduced Christians’ ability to enter Jerusalem and the Old City to participate in religious services. Christian leaders said these restrictions significantly reduced the ability of congregants and clergy to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Some Christians also noted, however, that restrictions on pilgrims and coordination with the Israeli police had improved compared to 2013. During busy periods the Israeli police site commander provided security for and facilitated access to the site, employing metal barricades and specially-designed fire extinguishers, and managing tensions among followers of different streams of Christianity at the site. Some Christians accused police of using excessive force during efforts to regulate crowds in the Old City during the Easter events.

Israeli government restrictions on movement between Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza limited the access of both Israelis and Palestinians to religious sites and gatherings. The Israeli government prohibited Israeli citizens in unofficial capacities from traveling to the parts of the West Bank under the civil and security control of the Palestinian Authority (Area A). This restriction prevented Jewish Israelis from routinely visiting several Jewish religious sites, although the IDF occasionally provided security escorts for groups to visit selected Jewish religious sites. Beginning in 2009, the Israeli Ministry of Defense gradually lifted restrictions on Arab Israelis visiting Area A cities in the West Bank.

According to the government, travel to hostile countries, including travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj, required a permit from the minister of interior or prime

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minister, and illegal travel was punishable by a prison sentence or fine if the traveler did not request prior approval. There were no reports of this requirement hindering the ability of citizens to participate in the Hajj.

The MRS upheld a complaint made against an advertising campaign for Yad L'Achim, an NGO opposed to missionary activity and intermarriage with Muslims, in which it promised that a prominent state-employed rabbi would pray for anyone who donates money to the group. According to the laws pertaining to the state civil service, it was forbidden for state employees to raise money for any organization or purpose other than for the state.

A Netanya court ruled that a public school was justified in refusing to rent an event hall to Jehovah's Witnesses, saying that the "conduct" of the community "conflicts with the character of the school" which educates a majority Jewish population. The decision cited the Jehovah's Witnesses' conscientious objection, "principled non-participation in State ceremonies," avoidance of certain medical treatments, and other religious and theological beliefs that it said contradict the goal of state-sponsored education. An appeal of the decision was pending at year's end.

According to the 2014 *Religion and State Index* published by Hiddush, a local NGO, 89 percent of secular Jewish Israelis, 80 percent of immigrants, and 61 percent of traditionally religious Jewish Israelis were unhappy with the policies of the Chief Rabbinate. Hiddush also reported that the majority of Jewish citizens objected to exclusive Orthodox control over fundamental aspects of their personal lives, particularly the right to marry, and public opinion polls showed a majority of Jewish citizens also supported the formal recognition of other strands of Judaism as valid, such as Reform and Conservative Judaism.

The government implemented some policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. This system limited the personal freedom of individuals who otherwise would not subject themselves to the authority of a religious community, despite a 2013 IDI poll showing a majority of Israeli Jews supported equalizing the legal status of different denominations. For example, the only in-country Jewish marriages the government recognized were those performed by the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate, which excluded citizens without maternal Jewish lineage since such persons are not considered Jewish according to *halacha*. Those who did qualify to marry under the Rabbinate were required to follow a strict procedure which included sessions with a rabbi and classes the bride was required to take to learn about her duties and responsibilities under *halacha*.

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Divorces also had to take place through the framework of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate. According to CBS figures released in August, 2 percent fewer couples married or registered for marriage in country in 2012 and 5 percent more chose to wed abroad as compared with the prior year. One-fifth of the 7,698 couples who married outside Israel and then registered as married in Israel in 2012 were couples in which both spouses were Jewish. A total of 50,474 couples registered their marriages in 2012. In the case of Anna Varsanyi, despite being considered Jewish by the standards of the Rabbinate and having been married in an Orthodox Jewish ceremony in 2012, during the year the government refused to consider her Jewish because her mother had converted to Christianity. To marry in government-recognized ceremonies, Jews were required to undergo marriage counseling from Orthodox religious authorities.

The High Court has repeatedly ruled that the segregation of men and women on public streets and sidewalks in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea She'arim in Jerusalem was illegal, and that gender segregation on public buses could not be imposed or ordered. Authorities generally enforced the law. Communities that desired segregation on public transportation could do so voluntarily, but buses were required to post signs informing passengers they are free by law to sit in any available seat. In March a court convicted a Haredi man from Jerusalem of sexually harassing a female soldier because she was standing among a group of men on a public bus in 2012.

Following the attorney general's 2013 adoption of the recommendations of a Ministry of Justice team established to investigate the exclusion of women in the public sphere (including by religious communities), in March several ministers introduced a proposal by which each ministry would be required to report to the government steps it took to prevent the exclusion of women. Also in March a government resolution declared that segregation of women constituted a serious negative phenomenon requiring governmental action; the government required all local authorities to ensure segregation of women did not occur in public events, funerals, public transportation, or any other area of the public sphere.

According to government figures, the year's budget for religious services for the Jewish population, including funding for religious councils, salaries for religious personnel, funding for the development of cemeteries, and funding for the construction of synagogues and ritual baths, was approximately 344.1 million new Israeli shekels (NIS) (\$88.7 million). Religious minorities, which constituted slightly more than 20 percent of the population, received approximately NIS 66.2

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million (\$17.1 million), which included NIS 6.7 million (\$1.7 million) for development of religious sites and structures and 3.76 million (\$968,800) for the development of non-Jewish cemeteries. Allocation of a special budget for the restoration of Arab religious sites, including a special budget for maintaining Muslim cemeteries, was pending at year's end. Some Muslims stated there was insufficient state funding for Muslim affairs, including for building and restoring mosques and cemeteries, although the state provided municipalities with religious development budgets and religious institutions with operational support funds. Many mosques lacked an appointed imam, a responsibility of the MOI's Muslim Affairs Department. The government allowed non-state employees to be imams in mosques if the community preferred.

The State Attorney's Office in 2012 adopted a High Court recommendation that the state pay the salaries of non-Orthodox rabbis in rural areas. Following a December 2013 High Court ruling that the MRS ease the funding conditions for activities by the Reform and Conservative communities, the government, through a mechanism whereby funding is routed through the Ministry of Culture and Sport, began paying the salary of a non-Orthodox rabbi for the first time. The government also provided funding for non-Orthodox Jewish religious institutions, which it designated "seminaries," according to the Israeli Religious Action Center.

The government provided resources to both religious and nonreligious schools. The government subsidized between 55 and 100 percent of the operating costs of recognized Haredi schools, which were required to teach a corresponding percentage of the national curriculum, with many schools receiving funding for all operating costs from the government. Government resources available for religious or heritage studies to Arab and non-Orthodox Jewish public schools were significantly less than those available to Orthodox Jewish public schools. Public and private Arab schools offered studies in both Islam and Christianity, but state funding for such studies was proportionately less than the funding for religious education courses in Jewish schools.

Although Arab, Christian, and Muslim citizens were exempt from compulsory military service, the government began sending letters to Christian citizens encouraging them to volunteer for service to increase their participation in the military, and in September the prime minister recorded a video message encouraging Christian pro-military service groups.

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The government launched a nationwide campaign to implement a 2007 MOI decision to eliminate “national identification” on official identity cards in response to complaints that the majority of identity cards still in circulation identified non-Jews. The new identity cards noted only name and birthday. Religious identification was listed in the central population registry. A petition to require the government to issue official birth documents listing both parents’ names, even when one was not Jewish, remained pending before the High Court of Justice, and birth certificates still regularly omitted the names of non-Jewish fathers.

On September 17, the Minister of Interior ordered the Population, Immigration, and Border Authority to allow Christians to register as Aramean instead of Arab as their national or ethnic group. Many church leaders complained that the measure was aimed at dividing the Arab minority, while a small number of Christians applauded the decision.

The government was a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The government participated in the OSCE Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism.

Actions by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

Militant and terrorist organizations, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and members of global extremist organizations, carried out attacks against citizens of the country in the form of missile, rocket, and mortar attacks from the Gaza Strip and by kidnapping and killing civilians, as in the case of the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teenagers. Terrorists’ statements often contained anti-Semitic rhetoric and appeals to Islamic religious beliefs in conjunction with the attacks. According to Israeli government sources, 88 individuals were killed as a result of terrorist attacks during the year, including 67 soldiers during military operations in the Occupied Territories from July to August. Militant and terrorist organizations from Gaza and the Sinai launched more than 4,660 projectiles at the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Relations between religious and ethnic groups, including between Muslims and Christians, Arabs and non-Arabs, and secular and religious Jews, continued to be strained. On November 18, two Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem killed four Israeli worshippers, three of them also U.S. citizens, and one Israeli policeman, and

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wounded dozens, some seriously, in an attack on a synagogue in the Har Nof neighborhood of West Jerusalem during morning prayers. There were reports of anti-Semitic acts by members of minority religious groups and of acts of intolerance against minority religious groups. Following the killing of three Jewish Israeli minors in the West Bank and a Palestinian minor in East Jerusalem, which were designated as terror attacks and condemned by the prime minister and other government officials, rioters in the Arab town of Qalanswa attacked some Jewish visitors to the town and set fire to a Jewish-owned vehicle. In response, the police set up temporary checkpoints at the entry points to certain Arab towns and advised Jewish Israelis not to enter.

During Israeli military operations in the Occupied Territories from July to August, there was an increase in tension, intolerant statements in the media, and violent attacks between segments of the Jewish population and segments of the non-Jewish Arab population, many of whom identified themselves as Palestinian, including an increase in attacks on Muslim and Christian religious sites and Arab-affiliated property. An unidentified cartoonist created an image of Gaza as a veiled Muslim woman in a lascivious pose asking for sexual favors. In November a Palestinian artist depicted al-Aqsa mosque as a jailed woman about to be raped by Israeli soldiers. Because religion, ethnicity, and nationality are closely linked, it is difficult to categorize such societal actions against specific groups as being solely based on religious identity.

Vandals used swastikas in graffiti targeted at Jews and non-Jews, including in an attack at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in October. An unidentified person sent a threatening letter to the Latin Patriarchate in Nazareth, warning that if Arab Christians did not leave the country by May 5, 100 Christians would be killed for each hour of delay. Attacks on Jewish religious sites continued, including attacks that appear to have been perpetrated against non-Orthodox Jewish sites by other Jewish groups. For example, on January 30, apparent Jewish vandals defaced a reform synagogue in Ra'anana with rulings by Maimonides that in context implied the worshippers there were nonbelievers.

“Price tag” attacks continued within Israel. SFCG and the CRIHL documented 25 “price tag” attacks against religious sites within the country, including five against Muslim, eight against Christian, and 12 against Jewish religious sites. In April vandals defaced a mosque in Fureidis with graffiti saying, “close mosques, not yeshivas.” Members of another nearby Arab community in Shefamr subsequently renovated an unused synagogue in the town as a statement against violence, and

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Jewish residents of the area joined in peaceful activities protesting the attack. Unknown attackers threw a firebomb at the renovated synagogue November 12. There were arson attacks against a synagogue in Petah Tikva and a Chabad trailer near Baka al-Gharbiyye on May 31. The organization Tag Meir organized visits to victimized areas and activities to promote tolerance in response to the attacks; the group's name is a play on the Hebrew phrase for "price tag" and a reference to the traditions of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. At a time of increased tensions in October and leading up to the confluence of the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur and the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, civil society organizations, including the Abraham Fund Initiative, convened Jewish and Muslim religious leaders to call for religious tolerance and respect for each other's traditions during the holiday period. The holidays passed uneventfully.

Societal attitudes toward missionary activities and conversion to other religions were generally negative. Many Jews opposed missionary activity directed at Jews, considering it tantamount to religious harassment, and some were hostile to Jewish converts to Christianity. Various religious groups proselytized, however, and invited members of the public to participate in religious observance in public spaces regularly and peacefully. On December 27, a Jehovah's Witness reported being physically assaulted in Beer Sheba while discussing the Bible with residents door-to-door. Individual Messianic Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses were reportedly harassed regularly by Lehava, Yad L'Achim and Lev L'Achim, Jewish religious organizations opposed to missionary activity and intermarriage.

Yad L'Achim continued to offer assistance to Jewish women in "escaping" situations of cohabitation with Arab men, in some cases reportedly facilitating the kidnapping of children away from the women's spouses. The anti-intermarriage organization Lehava continued to operate a hotline for citizens to inform on Jewish women who were suspected of having romantic relationships with Arab men and made the names and phone numbers of the men available to facilitate members of the general public contacting them and discouraging intermarriage. Lehava organized a protest of an August marriage between a Muslim man and a Jewish woman who converted to Islam; the police provided protection for the wedding. A court upheld the organization's right to protest but ordered protestors not to approach within 200 meters of the wedding party. The president issued a statement supporting the couple's civil right to marry. According to an August Haaretz poll, 75 percent of Jews and 65 percent of Arabs would avoid having a relationship with someone of a different religion.

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There continued to be tension between the Haredi community and the majority of Israelis, including concerns related to housing, service in the IDF, and participation in the workforce. In April Haredi demonstrators protesting against military conscription threw stones and bottles at police.

The first woman was appointed in February to advise the council that selects sharia court judges.

Expressions of animosity between secular and religiously observant Jews continued. As in past years, there were instances of Haredi Jews throwing rocks at passing motorists driving on the Sabbath in predominantly Haredi neighborhoods, and harassing or assaulting women whose appearance they considered immodest. There continued to be numerous reports of Haredi men spitting at non-Haredi Jews and persons of different faiths.

Although many Orthodox rabbis continued to discourage Jewish visits to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site, other prominent rabbis reiterated their view that entering the site was permissible, and Jewish proponents of accessing and performing religious rituals at the site were increasingly vocal. For example, groups such as the Temple Mount Faithful and the Temple Institute regularly called for increased Jewish access and prayer at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, as well as the construction of a Third Jewish Temple on the site. The Temple Institute in August began a crowdfunding campaign to finance architectural plans for the Third Temple, and a promotional video on its website depicted the Third Temple built atop the al-Aqsa Mosque site. The northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, a political and religious group opposed to participation in local or national governance, frequently called on members to “defend” al-Aqsa mosque and spoke of the religious site as “under attack.” Multiple reports indicated tens of members of the movement may have received funding to remain present at the site to counter violations of the status quo.

Interfaith dialogue often was linked to ongoing regional peace efforts and combatting extremism and violence. A number of NGOs sought to build understanding and create dialogue among religious groups and between religious and secular Jewish communities. These organizations included Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam; the Abraham Fund Initiative; Givat Haviva; the Hagar and Hand-in-Hand bilingual schools; Hiddush; the Israeli Religious Action Center of the Reform Movement; and the Interreligious Coordinating Council, which promoted interfaith dialogue among Jewish, Muslim, and Christian institutions.

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Construction of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in West Jerusalem continued. The center intends to open a museum on the grounds of the Mamilla cemetery, a 1,000-year-old Muslim cemetery containing the gravesites of several prominent Palestinian families and, according to Islamic tradition, several of Prophet Muhammad's companions and tens of thousands of Salah ad-Din's warriors. The Israeli Supreme Court has upheld the validity of the building plans. Supporters of the center cited an 1894 ruling by an Islamic court stating that the cemetery was no longer sacred because it was abandoned, and claimed that its service as a municipal parking lot for almost 50 years and pre-1948 plans by local authorities to build a hotel, offices, a bank and other buildings on the site set the precedent for civil use of the area. The museum continued to face opposition from human rights groups and relatives of those buried in the cemetery, which disputed the Wiesenthal Center's assertions and demanded the site be treated as a heritage site. The chief Israeli excavator assigned by the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) to evaluate the site concluded it should not be approved for construction based on his preliminary excavations, but his findings were not part of IAA's advisory opinion to the Supreme Court in its 2008 hearing on the case.

The CRIHL standing committees met quarterly and the organization continued to implement its Universal Code on Holy Sites in partnership with Search for Common Ground, which included research and documentation of attacks on religious sites and joint interreligious responses to religious site attacks.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officials engaged with the highest levels of the Israeli government to raise concerns about an increase in societal, religious, and ethnic tensions after the summer's high profile killings of three Israelis and one Palestinian, and the subsequent Israeli military operation in the Occupied Territories from June to August. The Ambassador attended the funeral of a U.S. citizen killed by Palestinian militants affiliated with Hamas, visited the families of U.S. citizens killed in the attack on a Har Nof synagogue, and paid a condolence call on the family of the Druze policeman who was wounded responding to the Har Nof attack and later died of his injuries.

In response to a rise in tensions at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and several high profile violent incidents in Jerusalem in October and November, the U.S. Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor, the Ambassador, and embassy

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officers engaged government officials and relevant Knesset leaders on the importance of maintaining the agreed-upon status quo at the religious site and not escalating an already tense situation through provocative actions and statements. In light of concerns about possible clashes between Jews and Muslims during the coinciding observances of Yom Kippur and Eid al-Adha, embassy-supported organizations focusing on police-society relations, community development, and mediation advised public authorities on how order could be maintained while respecting religious customs, and thereby helped prevent a repeat of clashes that had erupted before in mixed cities on Yom Kippur. Embassy officials consistently highlighted the importance of religious pluralism and respect for non-Orthodox streams of Judaism in their engagements with top Israeli officials.

The U.S. Special Advisor for Faith-Based Initiatives met with local leaders involved in interreligious engagement during a November visit to Tel Aviv, and in February a U.S. government-sponsored speaker from George Mason University conducted workshops in narrative mediation with community mediation organizations working with diverse religious and ethnic communities.

Embassy officials participated in religious events of various Jewish, Muslim, Druze, and Christian denominations and used widely-viewed embassy social media channels to amplify U.S. support for freedom of religion, openness to other religions, and tolerance in connection with these events. The Ambassador and U.S. Agency for International Development director paid a solidarity visit to the Hand in Hand school within 48 hours of the November attack on it. The Deputy Chief of Mission hosted 80 guests from various religious groups and denominations for an interfaith Thanksgiving dinner that received wide praise from the religious leaders, government officials, and celebrities who attended. The event emphasized U.S. interest in fostering an ongoing dialogue with the diverse communities in the country and promoting interreligious and intercultural communication and partnership within society. The embassy facilitated the inclusion of four *hanukkiyot* (menorahs) representing organizations committed to tolerance and diversity in two Hanukkah receptions hosted by the President in Washington. The receptions and the President's remarks on the importance of religious tolerance received widespread media and social media coverage.

The embassy supported programs countering the “price tag” attack phenomenon, including programs supporting interreligious solidarity, interreligious dialogue, mixed Jewish-Arab educational and communal initiatives, and programs leveraging the influence of religious leaders to combat familial and societal

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violence. The embassy used official U.S. assistance grants to support the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel's Religious Voice for Peace interfaith initiative, a film project in Abu Ghosh on religious coexistence, the Bible Lands "Image of Abraham" elementary school religious coexistence program, and programs aimed at increasing the Haredi community's participation in the economy and integration into society, including in Israel's high-tech workforce. The embassy supported Yod-Bet B'Heshvan, an organization responding to religiously and ethnically-motivated "price tag" attacks through demonstrations of solidarity with the victims and development of anti-racism curricula. The embassy regularly brought Jewish and Arab audiences together for English language classes and visiting artist events, using language, dance, music, and visual arts to encourage interaction between communities often geographically segregated by religion.

The embassy managed a conflict management and mitigation grant program as part of a Congressionally mandated effort to support people-to-people reconciliation activities that bring together individuals of different ethnic, religious, or political backgrounds to address the root causes of tension and instability. Under this program, grants were often provided to organizations advocating religious tolerance among different ethnic groups. For example, the embassy supported the Rosh Pina Mainstreaming Network's efforts to bring together Israeli Arab and Jewish (religious and secular) early childhood teachers in Acre for joint training on reducing aggressive behavior and bullying. A grant to the Association for Community Development in Acre also focused on building strong community networks in areas of potential ethnic conflict, including mixed public housing units in the city center and rival teens in Jewish and Arab high schools.

A grant to the Jezreel Valley Center for the Arts supported that organization's efforts to reduce social, ethnic, and religious tensions among Arab and Jewish youth living in the lower Galilee through joint musical activities. Teachers and students (ages 10 to 18) in this program learned to play each other's music in their respective schools and met throughout the year for joint rehearsals and performances.

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OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (INCLUDING AREAS SUBJECT TO THE
JURISDICTION OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY)

Executive Summary

The Israeli government, which exercised varying degrees of legal, military, and economic control in the Occupied Territories, restricted Palestinian access to religious sites, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, more frequently than last year. The Israeli government, in accordance with the status quo understandings with Jordanian authorities that manage the site, limited Jewish religious observance at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Some Jewish groups sought to legally overturn this policy or modify it to permit Jewish prayer. Some Jewish groups sought to visit the site for religious purposes, actions that were at times followed by a violent response from Muslim worshippers. Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, and the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land (CRIHL, an umbrella body of Jewish, Christian and Muslim institutions including the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, the PA Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs, and leaders of the major Christian denominations in Jerusalem) continued to denounce so-called “price tag” attacks (property crimes and violent acts, often by settler groups, primarily against Muslim and Christian Palestinians and Israeli Arabs, their religious sites, and cemeteries). The Israeli government made some arrests in connection to “price tag” attacks, but many perpetrators continued to escape prosecution. The PA refused to recognize certain religious groups, forcing them to seek personal status documents, such as marriage certificates, through other denominations or abroad. The PA policy of preventing preaching that could be perceived as encouraging violence or sermons with intolerant or anti-Semitic messages continued. Intolerant and anti-Semitic material, however, was still sometimes broadcast over official PA media. The PA condemned the June killing of three Israeli teenagers. Hamas, a U.S. designated terrorist organization with de facto control of Gaza (despite the appointment of an interim technocratic government in May), enforced restrictions on Gaza’s Muslim population based on its strict interpretation of Islam.

There were incidents of violence which perpetrators justified on religious grounds, as well as vandalism and graffiti using intolerant speech, harassment of clergy, and religious intolerance. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity. In June Palestinian militants affiliated with Hamas kidnapped and subsequently

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murdered three Jewish Israeli teenagers, one a U.S.-Israeli dual citizen. In an apparent revenge attack two weeks later, three Jewish Israelis kidnapped and murdered a Palestinian minor. On October 29, a Palestinian East Jerusalem resident shot an Israeli activist (and American citizen) after the activist spoke at a conference advocating expanded Jewish visitation and prayer on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Police killed the attacker during a subsequent attempt to arrest him in East Jerusalem. Incidents of violence against Jewish visitors to the Mount of Olives by Palestinian youths continued to increase, according to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that monitor these incidents, resulting in some injuries.

Officials from the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem regularly discussed issues of religious freedom and tolerance with PA officials, including concerns about access to religious sites in the Occupied Territories. Consulate officers met with representatives of religious groups to monitor their concerns, and raised with local authorities the views and experiences related in these meetings, including concerns about access to religious sites, respect for clergy, and attacks on religious sites and houses of worship. Consulate general officers encouraged respect for religious freedom and the need for tolerance, and issued public condemnations of actions that impinged on religious freedom, such as so-called “price tag” attacks.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population is 2.7 million in the West Bank and 1.8 million in the Gaza Strip (July 2014 estimates). Roughly 98 percent of the Palestinian residents of these territories are Sunni Muslims. According to the 2014 Statistical Yearbook of the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 515,200 Jews live in Jerusalem, accounting for approximately 62 percent of the city’s population. The Israeli Ministry of Interior reported in 2012 that 350,150 Jews reside in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Although there is no official count, in 2008 there were approximately 52,000 Christians in the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem according to a survey conducted by the Diyar Consortium, a Lutheran ecumenical institution. According to local Christian leaders, Palestinian Christian emigration has accelerated since 2001. A lower birth rate among Palestinian Christians is also a factor in their shrinking numbers. A majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox; the remainder includes Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Armenian Orthodox, Copts, Maronites, Ethiopian Orthodox, and members of Protestant denominations. Christians are concentrated primarily in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus, although smaller

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communities exist elsewhere. Approximately 400 Samaritans (practitioners of Samaritanism, which is related to but distinct from Judaism) as well as a small number of evangelical Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses reside in the West Bank.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The PA does not have a constitution but states that the Palestinian Basic Law functions as its temporary constitution. The Basic Law states that Islam is the official religion, and the principles of sharia shall be the main source of legislation. The Basic Law provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites unless they violate public order or morality. The Basic Law also proscribes discrimination based on religion and stipulates that all citizens are equal before the law. A PA presidential decree stipulates that all laws in effect before the advent of the PA continue in force until the PA enacts new laws or amends the old ones.

PA President Mahmoud Abbas has advisers on Christian affairs. Six seats in the 132 member Palestinian Legislative Council (which has not met since 2007) are reserved for Christians; there are no seats reserved for members of any other religious group.

Christian religious groups in the West Bank and Gaza fall into three categories: churches the PA recognizes in accordance with status quo arrangements reached during Ottoman rule and Protestant churches with established episcopates; churches that the PA does not recognize but which are present and operate, such as some Protestant churches, including evangelical churches, established between the late 19th century and 1967; and a small number of churches that have become active within the last decade and whose legal status is less certain. There is no specified process by which religious organizations gain official recognition; rather, each religious group must seek bilateral agreements with the PA individually.

The PA respects the 19th century status quo agreements reached with Ottoman authorities. These agreements specifically established the presence and rights of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian, Coptic, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Syrian Orthodox churches. The Episcopal (Anglican) and Evangelical Lutheran churches were added later to this

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list. These religious groups are permitted to have ecclesiastical courts whose rulings are considered legally binding on personal status and some property matters for members of their religious communities. Civil courts do not adjudicate such matters.

Churches in the second category (which includes the Assemblies of God, the Nazarene Church, and some Baptist churches) have unwritten understandings with the PA based on the principles of the status quo agreements, although they are not officially recognized. They generally are permitted to operate freely, and some are able to perform certain personal status legal functions, such as issuing marriage certificates, but obtaining official recognition would provide a simplified process.

The third category consists of a small number of groups that normally proselytize, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christian groups. These churches are forbidden to proselytize, but otherwise generally operate unhindered by the PA. The PA refuses to recognize personal status legal documents issued by some groups in this category, which these communities report makes it difficult to, for example, register newborn children under their fathers' names.

Islamic or Christian religious courts handle all legal matters relating to personal status, including inheritance, marriage, dowry, divorce, and child support. For Muslim Palestinians, personal status law is derived from sharia, while various ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status matters for Christians. All legally recognized religious groups are empowered to adjudicate personal status matters, and most do so in practice. The PA does not have a civil marriage law. Legally, members of one religious group may agree to submit a personal status dispute to a different denomination for adjudication. Churches the PA does not recognize must obtain special permission to perform marriages or adjudicate personal status matters; many unrecognized churches advise their members to marry or divorce abroad.

Religious education is compulsory for students in grades one through six in schools the PA operates. There are separate courses on religion for Muslims and Christians.

Islamic institutions and places of worship receive preferential financial support from the government by law. The Ministry of Waqf (religious endowments) and Religious Affairs pays for the construction of new mosques, the maintenance of

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approximately 1,800 existing mosques, and the salaries of most Palestinian imams in the West Bank.

The ministry also provides limited financial support to some Christian clergy and Christian charitable organizations. The PA does not provide financial support to Jewish institutions in Israeli settlements in the West Bank; the Israeli government controls most Jewish religious sites in the West Bank.

The PA requires Palestinians to declare their religious affiliation on identification papers.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal, military, and economic control in the Occupied Territories. Israelis living in East Jerusalem fall under Israel's civil and criminal law system, whereas Israelis living in West Bank settlements are subject to a combination of Israeli civil and criminal law and military orders. Arab citizens of Israel living in Jerusalem and Palestinian residents (not holding Israeli citizenship) of Jerusalem are subject to Israel's civil and criminal system. Palestinians living in Area C of the West Bank fall under Israel's military legal system, whereas Palestinians who live in Area B fall under PA civil law and Israeli military law for criminal and security issues. The PA has formal responsibility for security and civil control in Area A, however, since 2002 Israeli security forces have regularly conducted security operations in Area A cities, often without coordinating with PA security forces.

Hamas, a U.S. designated terrorist organization, exercises de facto authority over the Gaza Strip, despite the fact that the PA appointed an interim technocratic government in May. Hamas "morality police" enforce a strict interpretation of Islamic law. For example, Hamas arrested women for "ethical crimes" such as "illegitimate pregnancy."

Government Practices

The Israeli government continued to apply travel restrictions that impeded access to particular places of worship in the West Bank and Jerusalem for Muslims and Christians. The Israeli government's strict closures, curfews, and permitting system hindered residents from practicing their religions at key religious sites, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Both in Israeli- and PA-administered areas, small numbers of proselytizing groups continued to meet official resistance in their

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efforts to obtain recognition, such as marriage registration, forcing them to seek personal status documents through other denominations or abroad. The PA also continued to refuse to register marriages of Jehovah's Witnesses, although Jehovah's Witnesses had some success this year in obtaining birth certificates for children born to unrecognized couples.

The PA continued to implement a policy of unifying the message in weekly sermons in West Bank mosques to prevent preaching that could be perceived as encouraging violence or sermons with intolerant or anti-Semitic messages. It provided imams with themes they were required to use in Friday sermons and prohibited them from broadcasting Quranic recitations from minarets prior to the call to prayer.

The PA condemned the June killing of three Israeli teenagers.

Official PA media generally sought to control and eliminate statements and material that could encourage violence, including criticism about the policies and actions of the Government of Israel and Israeli citizens. There were some instances, however, in which official media carried explicitly intolerant material. For example, on December 25, an op-ed was published by the PA official daily *Al Hayat al-Jadida* for Christmas that made an attempt to link the crucifixion of Jesus to the persecution of Palestinian Christians; the article suggested that followers of the Jewish faith were responsible for both.

PA President Abbas, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, and the CRIHL continued to denounce so-called “price tag” attacks, which are property crimes and violent acts, often but not exclusively committed by settler groups, primarily against Muslim and Christian Palestinians and Israeli Arabs, their religious sites, and cemeteries. The Israeli government continued to designate “price tag” vandals as members of “illicit organizations,” and an Israeli police unit specializing in nationalist crimes, including “price tag” attacks and attacks on places of worship, investigated such criminal acts. The Israeli National Police (INP) reported investigating all known instances of religiously motivated attacks and making arrests where possible, although NGOs, religious institutions and press reports noted that those arrests rarely led to successful prosecutions. Dozens of persons, including minors, were arrested in connection with “price tag” attacks during the year, including attacks on Christian institutions before Pope Francis’ May visit. For example, in July police arrested three Jewish residents of the Israeli settlement of Ma’ale Adumim for spray painting “Death to Arabs” and “Price Tag” on

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neighborhood walls on June 22. On January 15, vandals set fire to a mosque in the West Bank village of Deir Istiya and spray-painted the mosque walls with hate messages against Palestinians and Muslims. Some perpetrators of “price tag” attacks were sentenced, some investigations were ongoing and some prosecutions were pending at year’s end. On December 21, two Israelis were sentenced to 30 months in prison for perpetrating an arson attack motivated by racism (burning Palestinian cars in the West Bank), the most significant sentence handed down for “price tag” related violence by the end of the year. On December 11, the INP arrested three members of Lehava, an Israeli anti-miscegenation group, who reportedly confessed to setting fire to Jerusalem’s Arabic-Hebrew bilingual Max Rayne Hand in Hand school. Many “price tag” attacks, however, continued to go unprosecuted, many for lack of sufficient evidence.

The Israeli government continued to control access by Muslims to the site referred to as Haram al-Sharif (containing the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque), and by Jews to the Temple Mount (which is the foundation of the first and second Jewish temples). The location has been under Israeli control since 1967 when Israel captured the eastern sector of the city (the Israeli government formally annexed East Jerusalem in 1980, and Israel applies its laws in East Jerusalem, although no other country, including the U.S., has recognized this annexation). The Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, a Jordanian-funded and administered Islamic trust and charitable organization, continued to administer the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. In accordance with status quo agreements with the Waqf, the Israeli government continued to prevent non-Muslim worship and prayer at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, although it ensured limited access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount to everyone regardless of religious belief. This policy repeatedly has been upheld by the Israeli Supreme Court and was enforced by the police, who cited security concerns. The Israeli government instead directed Jewish worshippers to the Western Wall, the place of worship nearest the holiest site in Judaism. The Waqf restricted non-Muslims from entering the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque, and prohibited non-Muslim religious symbols to be worn on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount (a practice enforced by the INP).

The INP was responsible for security at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, with police stationed both inside the site and outside each entrance to the site. The INP conducted routine patrols on the outdoor plaza, regulated traffic in and out of the site, screened non-Muslims for religious paraphernalia, and generally prohibited them from praying publicly on the site. Israeli police had exclusive control of the Mughrabi Gate entrance – the only entrance through which non-Muslims could

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enter the site – and generally allowed visitors through the gate during set visiting hours, although the INP sometimes restricted this access due to security concerns.

Citing security concerns, the Israeli government restricted access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount by Muslims from Jerusalem and the West Bank, frequently barring entry of male, and sometimes female, residents under the age of 50. The Israeli government in November stated that the INP had imposed age restrictions 76 times up until that point in the year, compared with 12 times in 2013 and three times in 2012. According to media reports, the Israeli government provided Muslims from Gaza very occasional access to the site, including permitting entry to 1,500 Muslim Gazans over age 60 during Eid al-Adha on October 5, 6, and 7, and 200 Gazans on Fridays in December – primarily Muslims over age 60. Israeli security authorities frequently restricted Muslim residents of Jerusalem from entering the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site for Friday prayer, and imposed age restrictions on male prayer on several days during Ramadan, including every Friday and on the Night of Destiny (Laylat al Qadr). On several days in August Israeli police prohibited all Muslim women regardless of age from visiting the site during non-Muslim visiting hours. Israeli authorities cited altercations between specific groups of female worshippers and Jewish tourists attempting to break the injunction against non-Muslim prayer on site as a reason for these temporary blanket bans. Infrequently authorities would close the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount entirely for short periods, often after skirmishes at the site between Palestinians and Israeli police. Following the October 29 attack on a Israeli-American activist and a subsequent shootout in the Abu Tor neighborhood of East Jerusalem in which police killed his attacker during an arrest attempt, on October 30, INP denied entry to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for all Muslims for a full day. Waqf officials described the closure as unprecedented since 1967, though some reports indicate the site was also completely closed to Muslims in 2000. On November 14, the Israeli government lifted all age restrictions on Muslims seeking to enter the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

A wide range of Muslim officials, including representatives of the Waqf, objected to Israeli-imposed access restrictions for Muslim worshipers to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and opposed calls from some Israeli groups to divide visiting hours between Muslims and non-Muslims and to allow non-Muslim prayer there. Waqf officials reported Israeli police violated status quo agreements regarding control of access to the site, as the INP did not fully coordinate with the Waqf its decisions to allow non-Muslim visitors onto the site. Waqf employees were stationed inside each gate and on the plaza. They could object to the

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presence of particular persons, such as individuals dressed immodestly or causing disturbances, but they lacked the authority to remove persons from the site.

Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site, most frequently Jerusalem Islamic Waqf employees; they also sometimes barred Jewish activists who had repeatedly violated rules against non-Muslim prayer on the site, including Israeli members of the Knesset. Israeli authorities banned all non-Muslim visitors to the site for the last two weeks of Ramadan, citing security concerns. Israeli reinforcement of the ramp leading to the Mughrabi Gate of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, as well as excavations in the immediate vicinity, continued during the year despite calls from the Islamic Waqf to coordinate any excavation or construction and concerns that the excavations could destabilize the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Israeli authorities briefly constructed a second ramp on the site in August, before removing it a few weeks later after criticism from the Waqf and Jordanian officials.

Some prominent members of the Israeli government coalition in the Knesset called for reversing the policy of banning non-Muslim prayer at the site, and the Knesset's Interior Committee held hearings to discuss the issue and to press the INP to allow Jewish visitors to pray at the site. These discussions intensified following the October 29 assassination attempt against a Jewish activist (and U.S. citizen) well known for advocating Jewish prayer at the site. Some Israeli officials, including cabinet members, visited the site and issued statements asserting Israeli control over it. For example, on September 24, Minister of Housing and Construction Uri Ariel visited the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and stated, "The sovereignty over the Temple Mount is in our hands and we must strengthen it." Some government coalition Knesset members and Israeli NGOs, such as the Temple Institute and Temple Mount Faithful, called on the Israeli government to implement a time-sharing plan at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount that would set aside certain hours for Jewish worship, similar to one used at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. The Israeli Ministry of Tourism also reportedly was considering a plan to open another gate to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount to non-Muslims – a move condemned by Muslim leaders as a change from the status quo at the site. Despite an Israeli High Court ruling stating that "Jews, even though their right to the Temple Mount exists and stands historically, are not permitted to currently actualize their right to perform public prayer on the Temple Mount," the Israeli government considered international agreements with Jordan restricting Jewish prayer at the site to remain authoritative.

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The Israeli prime minister reiterated his support for maintaining the status quo arrangement at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, as did Chief of the INP Yohanan Danino. Following the October attack on a Jewish activist, Danino specifically called on Knesset members and Israeli officials to avoid inflaming tensions through provocative actions such as visits to the site. Knesset member Moshe Feiglin, however, visited the site several times following the attack, and the Israeli Attorney General, on November 25, upheld the right of members of the Knesset to visit the site according to the visitation rules for members of the non-Muslim public.

Despite Israeli government prohibitions against non-Muslim worship at the site, some Jewish groups who were escorted by Israeli police performed religious acts such as prayers and prostration. Israeli police then acted to prevent them from praying and arrested those who did. Waqf officials criticized the visits, and in some instances the visits sparked violence between Palestinian worshippers and the Israeli police. Jewish visits to the site increased compared to 2013, particularly during Jewish holidays in September and October. Waqf officials documented more than 15,000 Jewish visits to the site in 2014 (compared to 9,000 in 2013), and Jewish visitors attempted to enter the Al Aqsa mosque building or broke away from their tour groups in an attempt to perform religious rituals at least 42 times during the year. During September and October, Israeli police at times imposed restrictions on Muslim and non-Muslim access to the site, for example on September 24, prohibiting access to Muslims under age 50. In several instances Israeli police prevented non-Muslim access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in anticipation of clashes. Israeli police also temporarily denied Muslims access to the site on at least one day during September to accommodate Jewish visits. Clashes sometimes occurred in areas of the Old City and East Jerusalem where Muslim worshippers who had been denied entry to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount had gathered to pray, such as on the last Friday of Ramadan when worshippers from Jerusalem's Wadi Joz neighborhood, blocked from the Old City by Israeli police, prayed in the street, then clashed with police after the conclusion of prayers.

The Western Wall, the place of worship nearest the holiest site in Judaism, was open to visitors from all religions during the year, and the Israeli government permitted Muslims and Christians to make individual prayers at the site. The rabbi of the Western Wall, appointed by the Israeli Prime Minister and chief rabbis, continued to set the guidelines for religious observance at the Western Wall, including the strict separation of women and men. The Israeli government

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continued to enforce this prohibition on mixed gender prayer services at the site on all visitors. Men and women at the Western Wall had to use separate areas to visit and pray, with the women's section being less than half the size of the men's section. Women were not permitted to bring a Torah scroll onto the plaza and were prevented from accessing the public Torah scrolls at the religious site. Women were permitted to pray with teffilin and prayer shawls pursuant to an April 2013 Jerusalem District Court ruling stating it was illegal to arrest or fine them for such actions. The Israeli police continued to assist Women of the Wall (WOW), an NGO and prayer group, in entering the women's area of the Western Wall for their monthly service.

A platform, south of the Mugrabi ramp and adjacent to but not touching the Western Wall, was open to both men and women where each person could practice their religious rituals as desired. The platform was equipped to accommodate about 450 worshippers and designated for members of the Conservative and Reform movements of Judaism. Non-Orthodox and mixed gender groups used this structure for religious ceremonies such as bar and bat mitzvahs.

A public debate about accommodating "egalitarian" Jewish prayer, i.e., permitting men and women to pray as they wished, continued throughout the year. Israel's Cabinet Secretary Mandelblit continued to chair a committee on "egalitarian prayer" at the Western Wall. The Israeli government developed plans to construct an "egalitarian prayer" space at the Robinson's Arch area of the wall in accordance with a 2013 agreement between the government and Jewish groups dissatisfied with restrictions placed on prayer, including gender segregation and a prohibition on women singing out loud, or holding or reading from Torah scrolls. The government halted an effort to give administration of this new area to the organization Elad (the City of David Foundation), an association dedicated to asserting Jewish presence in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan, abutting the Old City. Some groups alleged this compromise did not sufficiently accommodate women who wanted to lead prayers in a women-only setting.

The PA and Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) jointly provided Jews access for approved visits to religious sites in the West Bank in Area A, particularly to Joseph's Tomb in Nablus. Jewish groups visited the site during hours of darkness and with a significant PA and IDF security escort. Some Jews complained that securing an IDF escort required extensive coordination.

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Israeli authorities prevented most Palestinians from accessing Rachel's Tomb, a Bethlehem shrine of religious significance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims under Israeli jurisdiction, but allowed relatively unimpeded access to Jewish visitors.

The IDF continued to limit access to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, a site revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims as the tomb of Abraham. Under Oslo-era agreements, both Israel and the PA shared responsibility for the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, although in practice the IDF controlled access to the site, a situation opposed by Muslim leaders. The IDF restricted Muslim access for 10 nonconsecutive days, including Passover and Yom Kippur; Jews were restricted in their access for 10 nonconsecutive days corresponding to Muslim holidays. Muslims could enter only through one entry point and had to submit to intensive IDF security screening. Jews had access to several entry points and were not required to submit to security screening. Both Muslims and Jews were able to pray at the site simultaneously. In only one place, through the tomb of Abraham, was each able to see the other through a clear plastic divider. Israeli authorities repeatedly banned the Muslim call to prayer at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron on the grounds that it disturbed the Jewish settlers in the surrounding areas.

Israeli police obstructed access through security checkpoints to the Old City's Church of the Holy Sepulchre during major religious holidays, including the April 19 Orthodox Easter "holy fire" service and the April 20 Orthodox Easter holiday, which reduced Christians' ability to enter Jerusalem and the Old City to participate in religious services. Christian leaders said these restrictions significantly reduced the ability of congregants and clergy to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Some Christians also noted, however, that restrictions on pilgrims and coordination with the Israeli police had improved compared to 2013. During busy periods the Israeli police site commander provided security, facilitated access to the site, and managed tensions between followers of different streams of Christianity at the site. Some Christians accused police of using excessive force in its efforts to regulate crowds in the Old City during the Easter events.

The process by which the Israeli government granted Palestinians access to various sectors of the Occupied Territories at times involved de facto discrimination based on religion.

The Israeli authorities imposed a full closure on the West Bank October 3-4 during the Yom Kippur holiday. During the closure, authorities prohibited West Bank

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residents who held Israeli-issued access permits from entering Jerusalem or Israel, except those working for international organizations or in a humanitarian capacity.

The Israeli government announced that it increased the number of permits for non-citizen Palestinian Muslims from the West Bank for religious holidays, but in practice the Israeli government prevented many of these permits from being used. In contrast to 2013, the Israeli government imposed increased restrictions on Palestinian access to Jerusalem from the West Bank during Ramadan. Palestinian men 50 years and over and women 40 years and over (in some cases 45) were allowed access without a permit. Palestinians with Israeli-issued entry permits were denied entry to Jerusalem on some days if they did not meet these age restrictions. All Palestinians from the Hebron district were denied any travel rights for two weeks in June and again on some days in July. In 2013, men over age 40, women and girls of all ages, and boys under age 12 were allowed access to Jerusalem without permits for Ramadan. The Israeli government continued to deny Gaza residents' access to East Jerusalem during Ramadan except for 1,500 Gaza residents allowed to visit the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount during the Eid al-Adha holiday.

The Israeli government prohibited 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). This restriction prevented Jewish Israelis from routinely visiting several Jewish religious sites, although the IDF occasionally provided security escorts for groups to visit selected Jewish religious sites. Beginning in 2009, the Israeli Ministry of Defense gradually lifted restrictions on Arab Israelis visiting Area A cities in the West Bank.

Israel issued 20,000 permits for West Bank residents to enter Jerusalem during Easter. During Christmas and Easter Israeli authorities issued permits to only some members of many families. This may have reduced the overall number of permits used, as some families opted not to be separated during the holidays. Israel in April granted Christians in Gaza 600 permits to celebrate Easter in the Jerusalem and the West Bank from April 17 to April 28. No permits were granted to Gazans ages 16-35. Christian groups reported they faced access restrictions similar to those in place for Easter during the pope's visit to the West Bank and Jerusalem in May. Among other restrictions, Christians living in the Old City reported being confined to their homes for long periods during the pope's visit.

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The Israeli government extended the hours of certain checkpoints and granted 25,000 permits without age restrictions for West Bank Christian Palestinians to visit Israel and Jerusalem during Christmas. Israeli authorities issued 700 permits to members of Gaza's Christian community under the age of 16 and over the age of 35 to enter Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank for religious reasons and family visits during Christmas. Israeli authorities also issued 500 permits for West Bank Christians to visit Gaza. They issued no permits for Gazans between 16 and 35 years of age.

The Israeli government kept in place an amended visa issuance process for foreigners to work in Jerusalem and the West Bank, preventing many of them from entering, which also significantly impeded the work of Christian institutions. Christian advocates continued to express concerns about the difficulty of obtaining permits. Israeli authorities continued to limit to a single entry visas for Arab Christian clergy serving in the West Bank or Jerusalem, complicating their travel, particularly to areas under their pastoral authority outside the West Bank or Jerusalem. They stated this disrupted their work and caused financial difficulties for their sponsoring religious organizations. Clergy, nuns, and other religious workers from Arab countries faced long delays in receiving visas, and sometimes authorities denied their visa applications. The Israeli government indicated that delays or denials were due to security processing for visas and extensions.

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

The Israeli government continued building a separation barrier for security concerns. The barrier, like restrictions on permits, limited access to religious sites and impeded the work of religious organizations that provided education, health care, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians, particularly in and around East Jerusalem. The barrier and checkpoints also impeded the movement of clergy between Jerusalem and West Bank churches and monasteries, as well as the movement of congregants between their homes and places of worship. The separation barrier impeded Bethlehem-area Christians, including clergy, from reaching the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and made visits to Christian sites in Bethany and Bethlehem difficult for Palestinian Christians who live on the Jerusalem side of the barrier. Foreign pilgrims and religious aid workers occasionally experienced difficulty accessing Christian

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religious sites in the West Bank because of the barrier and Israeli restrictions on movement in the West Bank.

The Israeli High Court of Justice ruled in August that the Israeli government must justify its proposed construction of the separation barrier south of Jerusalem near the Cremisan convent of Salesian nuns and their school of approximately 170 students. The barrier, if completed as the IDF has proposed, would separate the convent and school from the Palestinian communities they serve, and cut off area residents from their lands. As of the end of the year, the High Court had not made its final ruling on the case.

Some observers of archaeological practices in Jerusalem continued to state the Israel Antiquities Authority, an Israeli government entity, exploited archaeological finds that bolstered Jewish claims to the city while overlooking other historically significant archaeological finds. The Western Wall Heritage Foundation continued to promote ongoing archaeological excavations north of the Western Wall plaza.

Church leaders and lay Palestinians maintained that the limited ability of Christian communities in the Jerusalem area to expand due to building restrictions, difficulties in obtaining Israeli visas and residency permits for Christian clergy, Israeli government family reunification restrictions, taxation problems, and difficult economic conditions due to Israeli-imposed movement restrictions were the impetus for increased Christian emigration. Both Muslim and Christian Palestinians continued to deny Israeli claims that Muslim persecution of Christians has spurred Christian migration from Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the heads of churches in Jerusalem, the PA Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs, and the PA sharia courts continued dialogue through the CRIHL.

Authorities generally enforced repeated rulings by Israel's High Court that the segregation of men and women on public streets and sidewalks in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea She'arim in Jerusalem was illegal, and that gender segregation on public buses could not be imposed or ordered, but could occur only on a voluntary basis.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

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Hamas maintained de facto control of Gaza throughout the year and used it as a base for attacks against Israel.

Militant and terrorist groups, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, launched indiscriminate rocket and mortar attacks from the Gaza Strip against Israeli citizens. Terrorists often issued statements containing anti-Semitic rhetoric in conjunction with the attacks.

Hamas enforced restrictions on Gaza's Muslim population based on a strict interpretation of Islam. For example, Hamas operated a women's prison during the year to house women convicted of "ethical crimes" such as "illegitimate pregnancy." Hamas "morality police" punished women for infractions such as dressing "inappropriately," (i.e., wearing Western-style or close-fitting clothing, such as jeans or T-shirts, or not wearing a head covering). Hamas largely tolerated the small Christian presence in Gaza and did not force Christians to abide by Islamic law. Christians raised concerns that Hamas failed to defend their rights as a religious minority, but on at least one occasion some praised Hamas' investigation of a terrorist attack on a Christian school. Many Christians stated that religious tolerance had improved in Gaza, but that Israel's military operations in July damaged many Christian buildings and destroyed Christian homes, leaving them concerned about their continued ability to live there. Muslim students continued to attend schools run by Christian institutions in Gaza.

Due to Hamas' continued de facto control of Gaza, the PA was unable to investigate and prosecute Gaza-based cases of religious discrimination.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were incidents of violence which perpetrators justified on religious grounds, vandalism and graffiti using intolerant speech, harassment of clergy, and religious intolerance. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity. In June Palestinian militants affiliated with Hamas kidnapped and subsequently murdered three Jewish Israeli teens, one a U.S. citizen. In an apparent revenge attack two weeks later, three Jewish Israelis kidnapped and murdered a Palestinian minor. Relations between Palestinian Christians and Muslims were generally good, with both groups focusing more on ethnic and political similarities than religious differences, according to Muslim and Christian clergy and congregants. Some Christians reported feeling increased tensions with Muslims in the wake of Israeli

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military operations in Gaza. Tensions were substantial between Jews and Palestinian Christians and Muslims, largely as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Israel's control of access to Christian and Muslim religious sites. Different interpretations of Judaism led to strained relations among Jews living in Jerusalem and the West Bank, and some non-Orthodox Jews and Christians experienced discrimination and harassment by some Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews.

Israeli settlers in the West Bank who attacked Palestinian persons and property continued to justify such violence as necessary for the defense of Judaism, for example when they uprooted Palestinian olive trees or conducted "price tag" attacks. Some Jewish groups continued to call for the destruction of the Islamic Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque to enable the building of a third Jewish temple.

Palestinians reportedly threw stones and clashed with IDF escorts during visits of Jewish groups to Joseph's Tomb in Nablus. For example, on September 17, Palestinians reportedly threw stones and Molotov cocktails at IDF soldiers escorting Jewish visitors to the tomb, and on December 22, Israeli visitors to the site reported that unknown persons had vandalized it. Palestinians on many occasions, for example on November 5, threw Molotov cocktails and stones at Israeli security forces on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, causing several injuries.

Incidents of violence against Jewish visitors to the Mount of Olives by Palestinian youths continued to increase, according to NGOs that monitor these incidents, resulting in some injuries.

Some settlers continued to carry out "price tag" attacks against Palestinians. These included acts of vandalism, arson, and anti-Muslim graffiti on mosques located primarily in the West Bank, as well as anti-Christian graffiti on churches and desecration of Muslim and Christian cemeteries in Jerusalem. For example, on May 5, vandals wrote "Death to Arabs, Christians and all those who hate Israel" in Hebrew on the Pontifical Institute Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center, and on May 9, "Price Tag, David the king of the Jews, Jesus is trash" was spray painted in Hebrew next to the Romanian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem. Local Christian clergy said they were subjected to frequent abuse by ultra-Orthodox youths in Jerusalem's Old City, including insults and spitting.

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WOW organized monthly women's services at the Western Wall and continued to hold prayer services every month except September, typically facing harassment from ultra-Orthodox men and women. WOW continued to advocate for the right for women to bring a Torah scroll onto the Western Wall plaza and to read aloud from it there.

Orthodox Jews continued to harass Messianic Jews in Jerusalem. Yad L'Achim, an NGO opposed to missionary activity and intermarriage with Muslims, continued to target and harass Messianic Jews, including by distributing posters that depicted threatened missionaries. Some ultra-Orthodox Jews at the Western Wall harassed visitors and Jewish worshippers who did not conform to Jewish Orthodox traditions. Members of the Jewish Conservative and Reform movements publicly criticized gender segregation and rules governing how women pray at the Western Wall.

In Jerusalem, some ultra-Orthodox Jews criticized Jerusalem residents who did not adhere to their strict interpretation of Orthodox Jewish law. For example, Ultra-Orthodox Jews opposed allowing a new movie theater to be open on Saturday. Ultra-Orthodox Jews in October threw stones at Jerusalem city buses because posters on them showed pictures of women.

Although many Orthodox rabbis continued to discourage Jewish visits to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site, other prominent rabbis reiterated the view that entering the site was permissible, and Jewish proponents of accessing and performing religious rituals at the site were increasingly vocal. For example, groups such as the Temple Mount Faithful and the Temple Institute regularly called for increased Jewish access and prayer at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, as well as the construction of a third Jewish temple on the site. The Temple Institute in August began a crowdfunding campaign to finance architectural plans for the third temple, and a promotional video on its website depicted the third temple built atop the al-Aqsa Mosque site. The northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, a controversial political and religious group opposed to participation in local or national governance, frequently called on members to "defend" al-Aqsa mosque and spoke of the religious site as "under attack," and tens of members of the movement may have received funding to remain present at the site to counter violations of the status quo.

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There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination involving Christians and Muslims who converted to other faiths, and societal attitudes continued to be a barrier to conversions.

Mainstream independent Palestinian news outlets, including *Al Quds*, *Al Ayyam*, and *Ma'an*, generally avoided publishing material that promoted hatred and limited their criticism to governmental policies and actions of individuals and not of ethnic or religious groups. They sometimes, however, carried anti-Semitic opinion pieces. Language in op-eds directed accusations of war crimes, barbarism and colonialism, at Israeli “Zionists,” “settlers,” and “the occupation army.” Media outlets sometimes carried cartoons demonizing Israel and broadcast anti-Semitic rhetoric, including by academics and clerics, accusing Jews of trying to take over the world and exploiting the Holocaust to their advantage. For example, in November a Palestinian magazine published a cartoon depicting Jewish activist Yehuda Glick, a controversial proponent of building a new Jewish temple on the site where the Al-Aqsa Mosque is currently located, as a snake wearing a Yarmulke with the star of David on it.

Nonofficial PA and nonmainstream Palestinian media outlets, particularly those controlled by Hamas, continued to use inflammatory language. Hamas-run media was overtly anti-Semitic in some of its programming, including children’s television shows, in demonizing Jewish people and encouraging violence against them.

Interfaith dating remained a sensitive issue. Yad L’Achim reportedly pressured Jewish girls not to date Palestinian men, ran a hotline encouraging people to inform on Jewish-Palestinian couples, and distributed fliers warning Palestinian men to stay away from Jewish women. The Jewish Israeli organization Lehava also demonstrated against relationships between Jews and Palestinians, and reportedly chanted racist slogans such as “Death to Arabs” at demonstrations in Jerusalem. Most Christian and Muslim families in the Occupied Territories pressured their children, especially their daughters, to marry within their respective religious groups. Couples who challenged this societal norm, particularly Palestinian Christians or Muslims who married Jews, encountered considerable societal and family opposition. Families sometimes disowned Muslim and Christian women who married outside their faith. NGOs reported that it was more difficult for Christian Palestinians to obtain a divorce because of restrictions by some churches.

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Established Christian groups often did not welcome less established churches. A small number of proselytizing groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christians, encountered opposition to their efforts to obtain official recognition from the PA, both from Muslims who opposed their proselytizing and from established Christian groups, according to groups of Jehovah's Witnesses and evangelical Christians.

Throughout the year the CRIHL strongly criticized acts of religious intolerance, including on October 14, when it condemned the vandalization and arson of a mosque in the Nablus-area village of Aqraba in the West Bank.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Officials from the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem regularly discussed issues of religious freedom and tolerance with PA officials, including concerns about changes to the status quo of religious sites in the Occupied Territories. Consulate general officers met with representatives of religious groups to monitor their concerns and raised with local authorities the views and experiences related in these meetings. As part of this outreach to local communities experiencing concerns about freedom of religion, consulate general officers maintained regular contact with representatives of the Waqf and Muslim leaders in Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank. Consulate general officers also maintained regular contact with leaders of the Christian and Jewish communities in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and where possible, the Gaza Strip. The Consul General attended meetings with members of the CRIHL, and met with the Greek Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), and Armenian Orthodox patriarchates, and with leaders of the Anglican and Lutheran churches. Consulate general officers met with a wide array of religious leaders and communities, including leaders of the Syrian Orthodox community and Christian evangelical groups. The Consul General and consulate general officers also met with Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and ultra-Orthodox rabbis, and with representatives of various Jewish institutions. The Consul General visited the Mount of Olives cemetery and environs to obtain firsthand knowledge of attacks on Jewish funeral attendees there. The Consul General and other consulate general officers visited the sites of "price tag" attacks and other incidents, including the Hand-in-Hand School and the Abu Baker al-Saddiq Mosque in the West Bank village of Aqraba. Throughout these engagements, consulate general officers discussed the groups' concerns about religious freedom and tolerance, including concerns about access to religious sites,

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respect for clergy, and attacks on religious sites and houses of worship. Consulate general officers also encouraged respect for religious freedom in these meetings.

During the year consulate general officers investigated a range of charges, including allegations of damage to places of worship, intolerant speech, and allegations concerning access to religious sites, and issued statements condemning these acts, including statements against “price tag” attacks.