



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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The Board		16 February 2011
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Organization Chart	Israel: Treatment of sexual minorities; state protection and services available	
Employment	Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa	
Legal and Policy	Treatment of Sexual Minorities	
References		
Publications	Sources indicate that Israel has an active gay community (National Association of GLBT in Israel 5 Jan. 2010; AP 2 Aug. 2009). Tel Aviv reportedly has a reputation for tolerance (Reuters 2 Aug. 2009; <i>The Jerusalem Post</i> 13 June 2010; AP 2 Aug. 2009; <i>Ynetnews</i> 22 May 2009). <i>The Jerusalem Post</i> characterizes Tel Aviv as "a haven for the gay community," noting that one of its nicknames is the "Pink City" (3 Apr. 2009). Tel Aviv has hosted an annual gay pride parade since 1998; the parade drew "thousands" of participants in 2010 (<i>Haaretz.com</i> 11 June 2010; <i>The Jerusalem Post</i> 13 June 2010). Tel Aviv also has several gay bars, clubs and cafes (National Association of GLBT in Israel 5 Jan. 2010).	
Tribunal		
Refugee Protection Division		
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Research Program	However, Reuters states that the more conservative areas of Israel are less accepting of open homosexuality, which is viewed as "an abomination against God" by "ultra-Orthodox" Jews (2 Aug. 2009). An Israeli lawyer and advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights explains that, despite "excellent" legal rights, there are still cultural and social problems that particularly affect marginalized LGBT people, such as transgender people, gay Arabs, and the poor (<i>The Independent</i> 5 Dec. 2009).	
National Documentation Packages	The online version of the Israeli daily newspaper <i>Haaretz</i> reports that in a 2009 survey of 498 Israelis, 46 percent view homosexuality as a "perversion," a viewpoint particularly high among specific groups within Israeli society: 71 percent of ultra-Orthodox Jews, 67 percent of Orthodox Jews, 64 percent of Arabs and 57 percent of Russian immigrants see it as a perversion (<i>Haaretz.com</i> 6 Aug. 2009). In comparison, 44 percent of traditional Jews and 24 percent of the secular population answered affirmatively (ibid.). In a later survey, <i>Haaretz.com</i> reports that 25 percent of Israelis stated that they do not want homosexuals as their neighbours (1 Dec. 2010).	
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Media Relations	Unlike in the "cosmopolitan" Tel Aviv (Reuters 2 Aug. 2009), the 2010 gay pride parade in Jerusalem attracted counter-demonstrations of ultra-Orthodox Jews holding signs that read "'sick perverts, get out of Jerusalem'" (VOA 29 July 2010; <i>Ynetnews</i> 29 July 2010). While there were approximately 3,000 participants in the parade (<i>The Jerusalem Post</i> 29 July 2010; VOA 29 July 2010; <i>Ynetnews</i> 29 July	
Proactive Disclosure		

2010), there were also 1,500 police officers providing security (VOA 29 July 2010). Organizers reportedly used the occasion of the parade to mark the one-year anniversary of an attack on an LGBT youth centre in Tel Aviv (ILGA 6 July 2010). As the Executive Director of the LGBT organization Jerusalem Open House explained, the parade route was also changed to end at the Knesset, Israel's parliament, to show participants' demands for "full equal rights" and to end incitement and violence against the LGBT community (ibid.).

The Jerusalem Post notes that plans to hold the World Pride Parade in Jerusalem in 2005 and 2006 were met with resistance by a coalition of Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders who characterized the parade as a "blasphemy" (23 July 2010).

Palestinian attitudes

Aswat, a Haifa-based advocacy group for Palestinian lesbians, explains that sexual orientation is a taboo topic in Palestinian society and that homosexuality is viewed as a "shameful deviation" (Aswat n.d.). Similarly, *Nowhere to Run: Gay Palestinian Asylum-Seekers in Israel*, a 2008 report published by Tel Aviv University's Public Interest Law Program, characterizes Palestinian societal views towards homosexuality as "hostile" (Kagan and Ben-Dor Mar. 2008, 10). The report provides details on the situation of gay Palestinians seeking asylum in Israel, saying they are "persecuted in the Occupied Territories by militant groups, Palestinian security forces and members of their own families," but excluded from applying for asylum in Israel because of their nationality (ibid., 5, 7).

Legislation and Court Decisions

Sources indicate that sexual minorities are afforded a variety of rights in Israel (National Association of GLBT in Israel 5 Jan. 2010; Freedom House 2010; WSJ.com 11 July 2010; *The Independent* 5 Dec. 2009; AP 2 Aug. 2009). For example, consensual sexual acts between people of the same sex were decriminalized in 1988 (AFP 2 Aug. 2009; National Association of GLBT in Israel 5 Jan. 2010); Israeli legislation prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation (ibid. 5 Jan. 2010; ILGA n.d.); and gay people are allowed to openly serve in the military (National Association of GLBT in Israel 5 Jan. 2010; Freedom House 2010; WSJ.com 11 July 2010; *The Independent* 5 Dec. 2009; AP 2 Aug. 2009).

The National Association of GLBT in Israel (which is also known as The Aguda), a nationwide organization established in 1975 to provide services to Israel's GLBT community "regardless of ethnic origin, religious or political affiliation" (14 Sept. 2009), states that same-sex couples are allowed many of the same benefits as heterosexual couples, including the right to partner and property tax benefits, inheritance tax and housing assistance (National Association of GLBT in Israel 5 Jan. 2010). The Supreme Court has reportedly granted a same-sex couple the right to adopt each other's biological children (ibid.; Israel 21 Nov. 2008, para. 537-538; Freedom House 2010). Although same-sex marriages are not legally performed in Israel (WSJ.com 11 July 2010), the Supreme Court has recognized the right of same-sex couples who were married abroad to be registered as married in Israel (Israel 21 Nov. 2008, para. 532; National Association of GLBT in Israel 5 Jan. 2010).

Violence Against Sexual Minorities

In a 2010 interview with *Haaretz.com*, Nitzan Horowitz, an openly gay representative of Israel's parliament, said that sexual minorities in Israel encounter difficulties, including threats and violence, in various sectors of Israeli society (1 Dec. 2010). *Ynetnews*, an Israeli English-language news source, reports that LGBT advocates provided state officials with statistics indicating that 50 percent of gay teenagers have experienced physical or sexual abuse and that 80 percent have experienced verbal abuse because of their sexual orientation (3 Aug. 2009).

More specifically, sources report that a teenaged girl and a man in his twenties were murdered and several others seriously injured in August 2009 when a masked gunman opened fire at an LGBT youth centre in Tel Aviv (AP 2 Aug. 2009; National Association of GLBT in Israel 8 Feb. 2010; Reuters 2 Aug. 2009; AFP 2 Aug. 2009; IGLHRC 3 Aug. 2009). The National Association of GLBT in Israel, the organization that oversees the youth centre where the victims were shot, reports that there were 10 people with moderate to severe injuries, two of whom may be paralyzed for life (National Association of GLBT in Israel 8 Feb. 2010). A spokesman for the Israeli police told Agence France-Presse (AFP) that the crime was most likely a deliberate attack targeting the LGBT community, rather than a terrorist attack (AFP 2 Aug. 2009). Following the incident, police reportedly increased security at other potential targets in the city (IGLHRC 3 Aug. 2009). The Associated Press (AP) notes that the attack was condemned by several Israeli leaders, including the Prime Minister, Tel Aviv's mayor, the chief rabbis, and Cabinet ministers (2 Aug. 2009). As of 2010, the case had not been solved (*The Jerusalem Post* 29 July 2010; US 11 Mar. 2010, Sec. 6).

In 2009, *Ynetnews* reported on two other attacks against homosexuals in Tel Aviv: in one case, a same-sex couple who kissed in public was chased by a group armed with bats; in the other case, a couple was injured by attackers armed with chains and bats (22 May 2009). *Ynetnews* also provided details on the 2010 case of an Arab gay teenager who was threatened, kidnapped, and physically abused by family members intent on forcing him to change his cross-dressing lifestyle (*Ynetnews* 25 Aug. 2010; *ibid.* 2 Sept. 2010). Police officers, responding to a call from a friend of the young man, reportedly rescued him from his family (*ibid.* 25 Aug. 2010). Eight of the family members were subsequently charged with a number of crimes, including kidnapping and false imprisonment (*ibid.* 2 Sept. 2010).

Media sources also report of violence occurring at gay pride parades in Jerusalem (Reuters 2 Aug. 2009; AFP 2 Aug. 2009; *The Jerusalem Post* 29 July 2010; AP 2 Aug. 2009). Sources indicate, for example, that in 2005, an ultra-Orthodox Jew stabbed three people at a gay pride parade in Jerusalem and was sentenced to a prison term of 12 years (Reuters 2 Aug. 2009; AFP 2 Aug. 2009). More recently, *The Jerusalem Post* reports that two men counter-protesting the Jerusalem gay pride parade in 2010 attacked a woman carrying a sign in support of the parade; the woman was not seriously injured and police brought the men in for questioning (29 July 2010).

Support Services

Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) reportedly provide services to the LGBT community in Israel (National Association of GLBT in Israel 5 Jan. 2010; US 11 Mar. 2011, Sec. 6). These include the previously mentioned National Association of GLBT in Israel and the Jerusalem Open House (*ibid.*).

The National Association of GLBT in Israel is headquartered in Tel Aviv and has branches in Kiryat Shmona, Beer Sheva and Eilat (National Association of GLBT in Israel 14 Sept. 2009). With over 500 volunteers (*ibid.*), the organization provides a variety of social and legal services to LGBT people, including a distress and information hotline, counselling, and AIDS awareness (*ibid.* 31 July 2010a). The organization also provides legal assistance in cases related to abuse or discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity (*ibid.* 31 July 2010b). According to its website, the organization is developing, through state funding, a network of community welfare services, including emergency services for people in the settlements and more remote areas (*ibid.* 31 July 2010a).

The Jerusalem Open House (JOH) describes itself as the only LGBT organization in Jerusalem (JOH n.d.). As such, it provides community support and advocates for the human rights of all LGBT people regardless of political, ethnic or religious affiliation (JOH n.d.). The JOH relies on institutional support, including from organizations based in the United States; it does not receive municipal funding

(ibid.).

In addition to the National Association of GLBT in Israel and the JOH, *The Independent*, a London-based newspaper, mentions an Israeli gay youth organization known as IGY that receives national and municipal funding to support 36 IGY groups nationwide (5 Dec. 2009). Other LGBT organizations include the Community of Feminist Lesbians (CLAF), the Political Council for GLBT Rights in Israel, the Other 10 Percent, and Tehila, a group providing support to family members of GLBT people (National Association of GLBT in Israel 5 Jan. 2010). As well, Aswat has provided lectures and workshops in Israel and the Palestinian territories that address the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity within the context of Arab culture and the situation of Palestinians in Israel and occupied territories (Aswat n.d.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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