

targeted for promoting the human rights of women. The authorities failed to bring the perpetrators to justice.

■ The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for attempting to assassinate 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai on 9 October. They vowed to continue to target her for promoting education for women and girls. In response, a new law was signed by the President on 20 December, guaranteeing free and compulsory education to boys and girls between the ages of five and 16.

Death penalty

More than 8,300 people remained on death row, some for 20 to 30 years, and 242 were sentenced to death during the year. In November, military authorities executed Muhammad Hussain for killing a superior officer and two others in Okara district, Punjab province, after appeals for clemency from the Army Chief and President were rejected. It was the first death sentence carried out in Pakistan since 2008. The government distanced itself from the decision to proceed with the execution, as it had been carried out by the military authorities, but activists were concerned it risked opening the door to a resumption of executions.

In July, the government began consultations on a draft parliamentary bill to commute all death sentences to life imprisonment.

Amnesty International visits/reports

✈️ Amnesty International delegates visited Pakistan in February/March, July/August and December. Amnesty International consultants maintained a continuous presence in the country.

📄 Pakistan: Human rights and justice – the key to lasting security: Amnesty International submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review (ASA 33/003/2012)

📄 Open Letter: Pakistan must resolve the crisis of enforced disappearances (ASA 33/012/2012)

📄 “The hands of cruelty”: Abuses by Armed Forces and Taliban in Pakistan’s tribal areas (ASA 33/019/2012)

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

Head of Palestinian Authority:

Head of government:

Mahmoud Abbas

Salam Fayyad

Arbitrary arrests and detentions by both the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and the Hamas de facto administration in the Gaza Strip continued, particularly of their respective political opponents. In both areas, security forces tortured and otherwise ill-treated detainees with impunity. Four detainees died in custody in suspicious circumstances; two in Gaza and two in the West Bank. Palestinian armed groups in Gaza continued to commit war crimes by firing indiscriminate rockets into Israel, especially during an eight-day armed conflict with Israel during November. During that conflict, Hamas’ armed wing summarily killed seven men accused of “collaborating” with Israel. Both the PA and Hamas arbitrarily restricted the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, and their security forces used excessive force against demonstrators. Women in both areas continued to face violence and discrimination; at least six women were reportedly killed in “honour” killings. In Gaza, at least five people were sentenced to death and six people were executed. One man was sentenced to death in the West Bank; there were no executions there. The 1.6 million residents of the Gaza Strip continued to suffer severe deprivation due to Israel’s ongoing military blockade and the sanctions imposed on Hamas by other states; however, conditions eased in comparison to previous years.

Background

On 29 November, the UN General Assembly granted Palestine non-member observer state status. The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip remained under Israeli occupation, and two separate Palestinian authorities operated with limited powers – the Fatah-led PA government in the West Bank and the Hamas de facto administration in Gaza.

Efforts to reconcile Fatah and Hamas and form a unified Palestinian government continued with Egyptian and Qatari mediation.

The PA held local elections in the West Bank in October but political parties associated with Hamas and Islamic Jihad did not participate; the Hamas authorities in Gaza prevented the registration of voters there. The judiciary in the West Bank briefly suspended work in October in protest against alleged government interference.

Israel maintained its military blockade of Gaza, in force since 2007, controlling its land and sea borders and airspace. The blockade continued to impact severely on Gaza's civilians, including children, the elderly and sick, although more people were able to travel through the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt than during previous years. Around 20 Palestinians were killed in accidents while using tunnels to smuggle goods between Egypt and Gaza.

In the West Bank, Israel maintained extensive restrictions on the movement of Palestinians and continued to develop and extend Israeli settlements built on Palestinian land in breach of international law.

Israeli forces carried out aerial and artillery attacks on the Gaza Strip periodically throughout the year and during an eight-day military campaign in November, killing many civilians and destroying homes and other civilian property. Palestinian armed groups periodically fired indiscriminate rockets into Israel from Gaza, and fired over 1,500 rockets during the November conflict.

Abuses by armed groups

Both before and during the November conflict, Palestinian armed groups associated with Hamas, Fatah, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Salafi-affiliated groups committed war crimes by firing indiscriminate rockets and mortars into Israel. Some fell short in Gaza, killing at least two Palestinians. Others struck homes and other buildings in Israel, killing four Israeli civilians during the November conflict, injuring scores and damaging civilian property. Those responsible were not held to account by the Hamas authorities.

■ Two-year-old Hadeel Ahmad Haddad was killed and her eight-year-old cousin was severely injured when a rocket fired by a Palestinian armed group hit their home in al-Zeitoun neighbourhood in Gaza City on 19 June.

■ On 15 November, three Israeli civilians, Mirah Scharf, Itzik Amsalem and Aharon Smadja, were killed and other civilians were injured when an indiscriminate rocket fired by a Palestinian armed group in Gaza hit their house in Kiryat Malachi.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

In the West Bank, PA security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained hundreds of people, including members of Fatah; most were denied due legal process. Hundreds of Hamas supporters were detained, mostly for up to two days, when President Abbas visited the UN in September. In Gaza, Hamas security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained hundreds of suspected Fatah supporters, usually holding them without access to lawyers. Detainees were frequently beaten and otherwise ill-treated with impunity by both PA and Hamas security forces.

The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), a PA-established monitoring body, said it received complaints of more than 685 arbitrary arrests in the West Bank and more than 470 in Gaza in 2012.

Prison conditions

In the West Bank, the PA denied the ICHR access to detention centres run by Preventive Security, while inmates went on hunger strikes to protest against harsh conditions and continued detention despite court orders for their release. In Gaza, Hamas allowed the ICHR to resume visiting detention centres run by Internal Security in October for the first time in five years.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Detainees were tortured or otherwise ill-treated with impunity, particularly by the Police Criminal Investigation Department and Preventive Security in the West Bank, and by police and Internal Security in Gaza. The ICHR reported receiving 142 allegations of torture or other ill-treatment in the West Bank and 129 in Gaza. Methods alleged included beatings, suspension by the wrists or ankles, and enforced standing or sitting in painful positions for long periods.

■ Mohammad Said al-Zaqzouq died in suspicious circumstances in Gaza while held at Khan Younis police station in October. An investigation was announced but no results were reported by the end of the year.

■ Tareq Khriesheh said he was made to stand for more than eight hours with one hand tied to a wall and beaten while being interrogated by Criminal Investigations Department officers in Ramallah in January.

Justice system

PA security forces continued to detain people without charge or trial for prolonged periods and to delay or fail to implement court orders for release. PA military courts continued to try civilians whose prosecutions began before a January 2011 decision to cease sending civilians to military courts. In Gaza, Hamas held detainees without charge or trial and tried civilians before military courts.

In both the West Bank and Gaza, civilian and military prosecutors failed to act impartially or to prevent the police and security services arresting people without warrants, abusing people and bringing politically motivated charges against them.

■ A court ordered the release of Abd al-Fatah al-Hassan in 2010 but he continued to be held throughout 2012 by Preventive Security in Ramallah. He had been sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment by a military court in September 2009. In October, the Palestinian Constitutional Court refused to rule on an appeal filed by his lawyer for his release.

■ Isma'il Abd al-Rahman was taken from his home in Gaza City by Internal Security officials in September, detained without charge or trial and denied access to a lawyer. He was released in December.

Freedoms of expression, association and assembly

Both the PA and Hamas maintained tight restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly, harassing and prosecuting journalists, bloggers and other critics. In both the West Bank and Gaza, security forces used excessive force against demonstrators, scores of whom were arbitrarily arrested and detained.

■ Journalist Mohammad Qunayta was detained and ill-treated after Internal Security officers arrested him at his house in Gaza in June. He was released on bail in August.

■ PA police in uniform and plain clothes used excessive force against demonstrators and journalists in Ramallah on 30 June and 1 July. Dozens of protesters were injured and others were detained. Journalist Mohammad Jaradat was tortured in police detention; he was held down and beaten all over his body with a baton.

■ Hamas authorities prevented women from demonstrating on 2 October in Gaza to call for Palestinian unity. Police briefly detained five women.

Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders were harassed by the PA and Hamas authorities and their supporters, and in some cases attacked.

■ Mahmoud Abu Rahma, a director at Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, was stabbed and wounded in January by unidentified assailants in Gaza City after he published an article criticizing the Hamas administration.

Violence against women and girls

Women and girls continued to face discrimination in law and practice and to face gender-based violence, including murder, committed by male relatives. The defence of "preserving the family's honour" was suspended by a presidential decree as mitigating evidence in murder cases heard by courts in the West Bank. However, the police failed to protect women who complained of domestic violence and threats to their lives. In Gaza the excuse of "honour" continued to allow for very low sentencing – under 24 months – in rare cases of convictions.

■ Randa al-Mahareq, from Samu in the West Bank, sought the protection of the police and other authorities for months until her father and brother were arrested in July on charges of beating her. They were released four days later and killed her soon afterwards, apparently because they disapproved of her divorce.

■ A 22-year-old woman was shot and killed on 23 March in al-Nasser hospital in Khan Younis. Her uncle and brother were detained. Police said the crime was carried out in the name of "honour".

Summary killings

In November, seven men accused of "collaborating" with Israel who were in Internal Security custody in the Gaza Strip were taken by members of Hamas' military wing and summarily killed. The Hamas authorities pledged to investigate the killings but no action was known to have been taken against those responsible.

Impunity

The Hamas authorities failed to investigate allegations of war crimes and possible crimes against humanity committed by Hamas' forces and other Palestinian armed groups in Gaza during Israel's military Operation "Cast Lead" in 2008–2009 and during the eight-day conflict in November. Neither the PA nor

Hamas credibly investigated allegations of torture and other abuses by their security forces or held perpetrators to account.

Death penalty

In Gaza, military and criminal courts sentenced at least five people to death after convicting them of “collaboration with Israel” or other offences. Six people were executed. One man was sentenced to death in the West Bank; there were no executions there.

Amnesty International visits/reports

🚗 Amnesty International visited the West Bank and Gaza in June/July and Gaza in November/December.

📄 Palestinian Authority: Three men hanged; more facing execution (MDE 21/004/2012)

📄 Palestinian Authority: Deliver justice for victims of Ramallah police violence (4 July 2012)

PANAMA

REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

Head of state and government:

Ricardo Martinelli

Several people were killed or injured during the year in the context of protests. The authorities failed to ensure effective investigations and to bring those responsible for deaths of protesters to account. There was some limited progress in setting up mechanisms for locating and identifying victims of past enforced disappearances.

Excessive use of force

Possible excessive use of force by the security forces remained a concern.

■ Two Indigenous people were killed and 40 people, including police officers, were wounded during protests by the Ngöbe-Buglé Indigenous People in January and February. The protests were sparked by proposed laws that would make it easier for companies to build hydroelectric projects on Ngöbe-Buglé land. Reports indicated that the police used tear gas in close proximity to medical centres and that those arrested

were denied access to legal representation. In February, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples urged the government to open a dialogue with the Ngöbe-Buglé affected, to investigate the circumstances of the deaths and to ensure that those responsible were held to account.

■ Three people, including a nine-year-old boy, were reportedly killed during protests in October against the proposed sale of state-owned Free Trade Zones in the city of Colón. The police reported that several officers had been injured by gunshots and missiles thrown by some of the protesters.

Impunity

Efforts to ensure justice for victims of human rights violations during the military governments (1968-1989) made slow progress. In January, the government established a Special National Commission to assist in locating and identifying the remains of victims of enforced disappearance. A Truth Commission, which reported in 2002, estimated that 207 people had been forcibly disappeared and killed under the military governments.

Manuel Noriega, head of state from 1983 to 1989, who had been extradited from France in 2011, remained in custody throughout the year awaiting trial. He was charged with human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

INDEPENDENT STATE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Head of state: **Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Governor General Michael Ogio**
Head of government: **Peter Charles Paire O'Neill (de facto since August 2011, elected in August 2012)**

The government did little to address high rates of violence against women; sorcery-related killings remained common. Residents of informal settlements continued to live with the threat of arbitrary and violent eviction. Police accountability remained a serious concern, particularly in cases of forced eviction.