



ACRI General Report

January 2023-December 2023

Table of Contents

1. Overview
2. Anti-Democratic Legislation and the Judicial Overhaul
3. Arab Society
4. The Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and East Jerusalem
5. Refugees & Asylum Seekers
6. Education
7. Human Rights in the Digital Age
8. Public Hotline

Overview

Since the formation of the 25th Knesset in December 2022 and 37th government in January of 2023, the entire country has observed a flood of anti-democratic initiatives that seek to harm democracy and human rights in Israel. The government has prioritized its “judicial reform,” which is effectively a judicial overhaul, and has worked energetically to advance its proposed changes, despite extensive – both in length and in participation – protests across Israel. The anti-democratic legislation revolution and subsequent Judicial Overhaul has had significant ramifications on some of the most vulnerable populations including Arab society and residents of the OPT and East Jerusalem.

At the same time as the Judicial Overhaul, the government also promoted a wide range of initiatives based on their agenda of authoritarianism and Jewish Supremacy. These initiatives have far-reaching and significant ramifications for human rights and democracy. These initiatives are not officially part of the so-called “judicial reform.” However, in reality, they are an integral part of the judicial overhaul.

The current government aims to accelerate the process of annexation of the West Bank and to cross the point of no return in terms of the imposition of Israeli sovereignty in the OPT. One of the motivations behind the government’s efforts to weaken the judicial system is the desire to remove legal obstacles to its annexation policies.

The de facto advancement of annexation in the West Bank is planned through a series of structural changes in the operation of the military government; completing the process whereby Israeli law is applied in the West Bank to Israelis alone; approving all the unauthorized construction in the settlements and outposts; and securing massive expansion of the settlements while expropriating Palestinian land. [See here](#) for further details.

If adopted, the anti-democratic legislation will change Israel’s character and weaken human rights and democracy. Accordingly, ACRI recognizes these initiatives and understands the full picture concerning the attack on democracy and human rights.

Minorities are always the first to suffer when extreme ideologies are put into practice, and in Israel this is particularly true of Arab society and those residing in the OPT and East Jerusalem, which already faces discrimination, neglect, and selective enforcement. The government’s agenda includes numerous proposals that are liable to cause serious harm specifically to the rights of these populations.

Amidst the outbreak of the Israel Hamas War and the subsequent implementation of emergency regulations, ACRI has been challenged to protect human rights while simultaneously preventing the further destruction of democracy in times of crisis. While Israeli authorities continue to exploit states of emergencies, ACRI staunchly uses human rights as the only compass to move forward in rebuilding Israeli society. Although ACRI's mission of safeguarding human rights remains the same, the strategies and areas of focus have greatly shifted as a result of the state of emergency. ACRI's staff has worked vigorously to protect the rights of the entire population affected by the war through protection of welfare systems, fighting against violations of freedom of movement, expression and protest. The main areas of focus and rebuilding include the protection of prisoner's rights, lack of protection systems and shelters throughout the country, closure of checkpoints, and the escalation of gun distribution. For the full list of ACRI's work during the Israel Hamas War [click here](#).

Anti-Democratic Legislation and the Judicial Overhaul

Immediately after Israel's 37th government was formed, it launched a blitz of legislative initiatives designed to remove the checks and balances that restrict the ability of the executive branch to act as it pleases. In particular the initiatives sought to curtail the independence of the Supreme Court and its ability to undertake judicial review. The government's campaign has been led by Justice Minister Yariv Levin and Constitution, Law and Justice Committee Chair MK Simcha Rothman.

The government plans to undermine the judicial system in stages, with each stage comprising of significant legislation. The first stage, which the government has begun to implement, includes abolishing the grounds of reasonableness, changing the composition of the Judicial Appointment Committee; preventing the Supreme Court from reviewing Basic Laws; and limiting the Court's ability to review ordinary laws, including the Override Clause. Subsequent stages that have been announced include changing the method of appointment of the Chairperson of the Central Elections Committee; changing the status of the legal advisors, and other changes. Each of these components on their own would have a devastating impact. Taken together, they will dramatically change the judicial system and the system of government in Israel. The separation of branches and the principle of checks and balances will be replaced by the elimination of the independence of the courts and unbridled executive power.

Professional judges will be replaced by ones who owe their position to the government and a government system that is required to justify its actions will give way to one that will be free to act in an arbitrary and capricious way.

Below is a list of ways in which ACRI has combatted against the shrinking democratic space in Israel in 2023:

Judicial Overhaul

In May of 2023, ACRI [wrote a letter to various members of Knesset](#) outlining the grave threats to democracy that the Yarin Levin and Member of Knesset (MK) Rothman's proposal entail. The

letter explicitly states that ACRI believes that the proposed amendment is unconstitutional, and its severity cannot be overstated. If accepted, it will deal a fatal blow to democracy and human rights in Israel.

ACRI submitted a [historical petition to the High Court of Justice](#), on behalf of ourselves and 37 other human rights organizations against the cancellation of the "Reasonableness Clause." For the first time in Israeli history, the petition was heard by all 15 Supreme Court Judges, granting ACRI "amicus of the court" status. The petition focused on the threat that the "Reasonableness Clause" poses to human rights and to the mechanisms we have to protect them. ACRI voiced grave concerns, asserting that the potential damage to human and civil rights qualifies as the kind of extreme and exceptional circumstance that warrants Supreme Court intervention. On January 1st, it was announced that the High Court of Justice annulled the revocation of the reasonableness clause.

In August, [ACRI published a lengthy report](#) outlining all of the attacks to the democratic system in Israel since the formation of the 37th government in December of 2022. The report highlights various topics including the judicial reform, attacks on Arab society, police and law enforcement, damage to the educational system, attacks on women's rights and more. The report will continue to be updated as the legislation is advanced and or proposed.

Policing

[ACRI petitioned the High Court](#) on January 18, 2023, demanding the annulment of Amendment 37 to the Police Ordinance. This amendment expanded the Minister of National Security's authority, transferring him powers that had previously remained under the Police Commissioner's jurisdiction. The petition claims that the amendment introduces political considerations into sensitive professional decisions on behalf of the police. A politically motivated police force that uses its power to advance political and partisan interests is indicative of an authoritarian regime. Following a response from the court and a subsequent hearing, on November 27, 2023, ACRI filed the second interim injunction request, demanding orders for Minister Ben Gvir to refrain from giving instructions or directives regarding the exercise of the right to demonstrate and freedom of protest. This comes after the minister continued to violate the legal counsel's instructions to the government and the Supreme Court, and publicly instructed the police to prevent protests against the war.

Following the outbreak of the Israel Hamas War:

States of Emergency

On November 12, 2023, ACRI sent [legal correspondence](#) to the director of the courts following complaints from citizens who sought to attend hearings in the courthouse but were denied entry. They were told that due to the security situation, all hearings are held behind closed doors, and a judicial decision is required to allow their entry into the proceedings.

On October 16, 2023, ACRI [sent legal correspondence](#) to the Attorney General, requesting guidance to dissuade the government from advancing emergency regulations granting the Minister of Communication authority to shut down communication facilities during wartime. These regulations were presented under the guise of ceasing broadcasts of the Al Jazeera network from Israel but, in essence, sought to empower the Minister to close any communication medium for ambiguous reasons of security compromise, public peace disturbance, public order appeal, or for enemy propaganda purposes. Such a closure would be immediate, without judicial order, without a hearing, and even without the approval of a senior legal authority.

Judicial Overhaul

In December, in light of International Human Rights Day, [ACRI published a report](#) regarding the continual attacks on Judicial system in the shadow of the Israel Hamas War. The report highlights the subsequent exacerbation of violations of freedom of expression, prisoner's rights, and attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem following the outbreak of the war.

Arab Society

The various initiatives promoted by Israel's zealot and racist government have had detrimental effects on Arab society in 2023. Minorities are always the first to suffer when extreme ideologies are put into practice, and in Israel this is particularly true of Arab society, which already faces discrimination, neglect, and selective enforcement. The government's agenda includes numerous proposals that are liable to cause serious harm specifically to the rights of the Arab population. These initiatives specifically neglect significant issues in including the exponential increase in crime and violence rates in Arab society, marking 2023 the worst year for murder rates in history. [According to the report published by the Abraham Initiatives, 244 members of Arab society were murdered in 2023 more than doubling the amount killed in 2022.](#) The crime epidemic is affecting all Arab communities, their relationship with Israeli security forces and their general protection and safety. With Itamar Ben Gvir, the far-right extremist head of the Jewish Power party serving as the Minister of National Security, the crime epidemic in Arab communities has elicited a harsh, authoritarian and discriminating response from police, which has proved itself to be extremely ineffective. The security establishment has left Arab society partnerless in addressing both the root causes of the violence and the possible police response. It has instead used the crisis to further incite against Arab society and advance their authoritarian agenda.

ACRI is opposing these changes affecting Arab society with all the tools at its disposal. Below is a list of the various ways in which ACRI has protected the rights of Arab society in Israel during 2023:

Policing

Based on the context of this amendment stated in the anti-democratic legislation section, the ordinance was a start of a process of politicization of the police force in Israel which has included selective enforcement against Arab society. There has been a significant increase in cases of police harassment of demonstrators waving the Palestinian flag. This practice, which was previously seen at protests in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem, has expanded all over the country. Despite the fact that this is a clear violation of freedom of expression and completely lacks legal basis. Following ACRI's petition the HCJ published its ruling and clarified that "the Minister must refrain from granting operational directives to the police, whether directly or indirectly, and that this holds especially true regarding protests and demonstrations against the government."

On April 2, 2023, the government passed decision No. 422 to establish the National Guard "as a dedicated, skilled and trained force to deal with various emergency scenarios, nationalist crime, the fight against terrorism, as well as to strengthen governance in areas where this is required within the framework of the roles currently held by the Israeli Police". The main purpose of the proposed force is to undertake policing actions in the mixed cities and to respond to disturbances by Arab citizens. The establishment of a National Guard as a military-police hybrid comprised of armed volunteers who will be entrusted with far-reaching powers to exercise force and restrict freedoms is a recipe for a serious violation of the protection of individual rights. As a

result, [ACRI sent a letter to the Attorney General](#) stating that a special danger lies in the purpose of the National Guard which shows the clear intention of the government and the Minister of National Security to exercise excessive and violent force against Arab society.

An enforcement initiative proposed by Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) party and agreed upon in the coalition agreements is the involvement of the Shin Bet in the fight against crime in Arab society. The Shin Bet is an internal security authority that deals with security threats to the state and to the democratic regime and its institutions. The police work against crime and violations of the law and their main work is investigating crimes and prosecuting them. They are not authorized to engage in countermeasures activities like the Shin Bet. Accordingly, the tools and means that are at the disposal of each of these bodies differ. To thwart serious threats to state security, the Shin Bet is permitted to use powerful tools of mass surveillance against citizens. They are also permitted additional methods of investigation that the police are not authorized to use. Spillover of these tools against citizens as part of the fight against crime produces a disproportionate injury to civil liberties, the right to fair procedure, the right to privacy and to normal democratic life. Moreover, [ACRI filed a petition to the Supreme Court](#) stating involvement of the Shin Bet in fighting crime in Arab society completely blurs the boundaries between crime and terrorism – both in practice and in public mentality.

Ben-Gvir is advancing a bill that will empower him to order administrative detentions as part of the war on crime. This track circumvents the criminal justice system and permits the denial of liberty of citizens from a protracted period and the violation of their basic rights, including freedom of movement and freedom of vocation – not because of offenses they have committed, but because of offenses they are liable to commit; no indictment is served against them. The bill seeks to grant the Minister of National Security antidemocratic powers of the kind found in totalitarian regimes. The bill was raised several times for discussion in the Ministerial Committee for Legislation, but each time the discussion was postponed due to public pressure. After the postponement on July 16, 2023, it was decided that the bill will be raised for discussion with the Prime Minister. [ACRI has produced numerous advocacy efforts](#) regarding the issues on administrative detention, informing the public of the significant harms of this legislation.

In May of 2023, [ACRI produced and published a position paper](#) entitled "Two Police Forces For Two Peoples." The paper outlines the array of initiatives in question: expanding the authority of the Minister of National Security, establishing a National Guard, empowering the Shin Bet in combating violence and crime, transferring additional enforcement powers to the Minister of National Security, intensifying punishment for offenses labelled as "Arab offenses," and promoting a lenient approach towards the conduct of Arab citizens. The paper was published in both English and Hebrew, drawing together a range of legislative proposals and initiatives showing the pattern of the creation of two police forces. The paper was distributed to decision makers and journalist, emphasizing the need to understand the larger processes taking place around each initiative. On April 26th, ACRI also held a briefing for local diplomats in which representatives from 16 different embassies attended and heard ACRI's Attorneys Gadeer Nicola and Anne Suciu present the main threats surrounding two police forces.

Equal Representation

Section 7A of the Basic Law: Knesset, establishes the grounds upon which a person or party can be disqualified from running for Knesset. The coalition agreements, as well as comments and legislative proposals by various MKs, reflect an intention to remove the grounds of incitement to racism, which in most instances has been applied to disqualify Jewish candidates. At the same time, the coalition is planning to expand the other grounds, which are more often used to disqualify Arab candidates and parties. The proposals also seek to restrict the possibility of appealing against the decisions of the Elections Committee. The amendment is on the government's agenda, but no action has been taken to date. It is vital to monitor the developments in this field closely, since these changes could create a situation in which Israel's Arab population will not be represented in the Knesset. Moreover, [ACRI has specifically outlined our perspectives and the discriminatory nature of this proposal.](#)

In July, the law to extend the use of admissions committees – representative committees in communities with up to 400 families in the Negev and Galilee who are authorized to select who can and can't live in their community was passed. The bill broadens the use of admission committees to communities of up to 700 families in a much wider range of locations, including settlements in the Territories. [ACRI submitted a position paper to the Chair of the Ministerial Committee for Legislation](#) stating that the outcome will be that people wishing to live in small villages and rural communities in Israel will face screening and exacerbated discrimination against minority groups, such as Mizrahim, people with disabilities, religious/secular Jews, new immigrants, and above all Arabs.

Building and Planning

The government is advancing two proposed amendments to the Planning and Building Law concerning the composition of planning committees in which [ACRI submitted a position paper](#) that was partially accepted amid a Knesset committee discussion. A government bill seeks to increase the number of government representatives on the committee, while a private member's bill (submitted by MK Yaakov Asher) seeks to ensure due representation for Ultra-Orthodox on the committees. The government is advancing these initiatives without addressing the severe discrimination against members of Arab society in all the planning institutions. It is worth adding that numerous bills have been tabled over the years to secure due representation for Arabs in the planning institutions, but these have not been advanced.

On May 24, 2023, ACRI submitted an appeal to the District Court in Beer Sheva regarding the zoning plans in Wadi Al Nam. With over 10,000 residents, Wadi Al Nam is the largest unrecognized village in the Negev. Despite the lack of recognition by the state, the lack of basic services, and the constant threat of eviction and demolition of the houses the Bedouin residents have continues their livelihood on the land. Since 1987, the villagers have been in contact with the state authorities, with the aim of establishing a rural-agricultural settlement, suitable for their needs, their traditions and their way of life, and time and time again the state tries to impose inappropriate "solutions" on them. After numerous appeals and petitions, we submitted an administrative petition asking the court to declare the zoning plan null and void, or to order that the plan be suspended until the end of air pollution tests to be done in the region. Together with

the petition, we submitted a request for an interim order, to freeze the zoning plan until the petition is decided upon. The request was denied.

Following the outbreak of the Israel Hamas War:

Freedom of Speech

The attack on free speech has intensified and broadened since October 7, by suppressing any dissenting voice of the government, specifically members of Arab society and those calling for ceasefire and political solutions. Below is a list of ways in which ACRI has fought to uphold freedom of speech since October 7th:

On October 18, 2023, ACRI [sent legal correspondence](#) to the State Prosecutor and demanded that he retract the directive that requires the police to obtain approval before opening investigations into speech offenses.

In October of 2023, [ACRI sent remarks to the Ministry of Justice](#) regarding the Bill that seeks to determine that "systematic and prolonged consumption of certain publications by terror organizations" constitutes a criminal offense. ACRI opposed the intention to enact such an extreme and anti-democratic law which has no equivalent in any democratic country.

On November 15, 2023 [ACRI filed petition to the High Court](#) demanding to allow a demonstration in central Tel Aviv calling for a ceasefire, the release of the abductees and the promotion of peace. In the Tel Aviv district, the police refused to grant a permit for the demonstration, citing concerns about the potential for clashes and harm to public security and public order, limiting the police's capabilities during wartime and affecting the feelings of families displaced from the south and residing in Tel Aviv. In the hearing on November 16, 2023, the police agreed to approve the demonstration at a different location and with a limitation on the number of participants.

On November 27, 2023, [ACRI filed an interim injunction request](#), demanding orders for Minister Ben Gvir to refrain from giving instructions or directives regarding the exercise of the right to demonstrate and freedom of protest. The injunction was filed after the Minister's continued violations of the legal counsel's instructions to the government and the Supreme Court, by publicly instructing the police to prevent protests against the war.

Following the Knesset approval of the law stipulating that systematic and continuous advertising of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, in certain circumstances, will constitute a criminal offense punishable by up to one year of imprisonment, [ACRI published an QNA](#) to the public regarding the most concerning stipulations of the law.

Amidst the war, the police unjustly interfered with a protest in Nazareth by arresting its Arab leaders, violating freedom of expression and acting irresponsibly against the law. As a result, ACRI [published information regarding the blatant violations of these arrests](#) "The past month represents an unprecedented juncture in the government's relationship with Arab society. Despite the responsible leadership demonstrated within the Arab community."

Following comments made by the Chief of Police, Yaakov Shabtai, which constitute explicit incitement and threats against the Arab community, [ACRI sent legal correspondence](#) to the Attorney General and

the Head of the Department of Internal Police Investigations with a request to initiate a criminal investigation against the Chief.

Civilian Armament

Following the outbreak of the Israel Hamas War, regulations for carrying weapons were distinguished, expanding the scope of those eligible for a private firearm license. The Ministry of National Security even launched a wide campaign to encourage arming. However, while the process of obtaining a firearm has been greatly simplified and accelerated, no changes have been made to establish mechanisms for monitoring firearm holders. In fact, the Ministry of National Security does not maintain any, even minimal, oversight over private firearm holders, but only over organizational weapon bearers. [ACRI and partnered organizations addressed the issue to the head of the Licensing and Supervision Department of Firearms at the Ministry of National Security](#) requesting there be additional provisions to obtaining firearms.

The police have also rapidly established more than 100 urban preparedness units, each receiving M16 rifles after an accelerated training process of 7 hours, lacking proper oversight. Before the War, Israel distributed firearm licenses based on far stricter guidelines specifically to those well experienced in using firearms, due to previous service in a combat unit in the IDF, or citizens able to prove a serious need for extra security in their daily life. Testimonies have emerged that members of these units conduct armed patrols throughout the cities and detain Arab citizens for identity checks. On November 12, 2023, [ACRI sent legal correspondence to the Commissioner of Police and the Attorney General](#) stating that the establishment of so many preparedness units reflect a blatant privatization of a distinct governmental role to civilian entities, with an unclear and unsatisfactory approval and training process. There have been numerous reports of armed Jewish civilians in mixed cities interrogating and harassing Arab civilians, resulting in the abuse of authority and weapons.

Access to Shelter and Protection Systems

The majority of Arab towns in Israel lack public bomb shelters, protected areas, and shelter facilities in educational institutions. For instance, only 11 out of 71 Arab local authorities examined in the State Comptroller's report in 2018 have public shelters. On October 22, 2023, on behalf of the National Committee for the heads of the Arab local authorities in Israel, [ACRI sent legal correspondence to](#) the Ministers of Defence, Interior, Construction and Housing, and the Head of the Home Front Command, demanding urgent promotion of adequate defence solutions for the Arab towns in the North and the allocation of the necessary budget for this purpose. The correspondence emphasized that the differing reality in Arab towns, particularly in terms of planning and construction, largely being the outcome of historical neglect in planning and resource allocation, necessitates the promotion of various and alternative solutions that provide a satisfactory response to residents.

On October 13, 2023, [ACRI sent legal correspondence to the Minister of Defence](#), the Minister of the Interior, and the Home Front Command, demanding the establishment of protection or temporary shelters and alarm systems in all unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev. Since the outbreak of the war, numerous missiles have struck these villages, resulting in the death of 17 residents, including 6 children. In December, ACRI was notified that the [unrecognized Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran received its first ever protected space](#) designed to fit around 200 individuals, marking a crucial step in providing these residents with equal access to protection and safety.

Prisoner's Rights

On October 7, 2023, with the beginning of the war, the Prisoners' Ombudsman and the Minister of National Security published an announcement, stating that "all prisons will enter a state of emergency." The implications of the state of emergency declared in the prisons were not clarified in the publications of the Prison Service (IPS) or the Ministry of National Security, and no further

information was given. Since the state of emergency, 7 Prisoners have died, 5 of which were held in IPS and 2 held by the army. One of the prisoners had severe indications of violent markings on his body; moreover, concluding the prisoner's death likely resulted from medical neglect. On October 11, 2023, [ACRI sent legal correspondence](#) to the Prisoners' Ombudsman, demanding the immediate cancellation of the strict restrictions imposed on prisoners' rights.

On October 10, 2023, [ACRI sent legal correspondence](#) to the Attorney General and the Police Commissioner, demanding that the police stop photographing images of Arab detainees suspected of expressing support for terrorism, while handcuffed and against the backdrop of the Israeli flag, and circulating them on social networks and in the media.

ACRI, Physicians for Human Rights, and the Committee Against Torture [petitioned the High Court](#) on October 10, 2023, to cancel the directive allowing prison authorities to detain security and criminal detainees on the floor in overcrowded conditions during a state of emergency. This practice degrades prisoners, endangers their health, violates their privacy and autonomy, and increases friction among themselves. It is claimed that this constitutes a cruel, inhumane, and degrading punishment that is forbidden in all circumstances, even during emergencies. The petition was dismissed by the court without a hearing, demonstrating the court's unwillingness to deal with human rights violations amidst the war. On December 11th, ACRI held a joint briefing, hosted by the European Union, on prison rights and subsequent their violations during the war. Approximately 15 embassies attended the briefing.

On December 12th 2023, ACRI sent an official request to the acting President of the Supreme Court requesting that judges conduct official and regular visits to the prisons, as they are authorized to by law, in order to closely observe the conditions of imprisonment. The same request was also sent to the District and Magistrate court judges who also hold this authority to enter prisons and conduct oversight. On December 14th the administration of the Supreme Court responded to the request stating that "[Supreme Court justices are expected to visit various detention facilities in the near future](#)" and that the acting Court President "will also emphasize the importance of ensuring visits to detention facilities, even in times of emergency, to the Presidents of both the District and Magistrate Courts".

Access to Education

The Rahma Kindergarten is a state-run kindergarten in the Rahma settlement in the Negev, attended by approximately 100 children ages three to five. Testimonies received by ACRI indicate severe safety deficiencies in the kindergarten, posing a real danger to the lives and health of the children and staff. In light of the severity of the deficiencies and the real danger perceived for their children, parents were forced to initiate a strike starting from December 6, 2023, in which they did not send their children to the kindergarten. On December 10, 2023, [urgent legal correspondence was sent](#) to officials in the regional council and the Ministry of Education, requesting immediate correction of the severe safety and infrastructural deficiencies in the kindergarten.

Since March 2023, the student transportation system of the Neve Midbar Regional Council has been sporadically halted due to budget disputes between the Ministry of Education, the council, and the transportation company. During the suspensions, over 20,000 children from recognized and unrecognized villages in the Negev region have been absent from schools. On November 7, 2023, ACRI and the Negev Coexistence Forum [filed a petition](#) to the Be'er Sheva District Court demanding an immediate renewal of transportation services. As a result of the petition, The Ministry of Education has renewed transportation for all the children affected.

The Occupied Palestinian Territories and East Jerusalem

2023 has marked a year of unprecedented and heightened settler violence in the West Bank with a total of [199 Palestinian casualties before October 7th](#). Following the outbreak of the war, settlers in the West Bank have exploited the state of emergency to attack, destroy and threaten Palestinian communities, expediting the process of annexation and expulsion that has been heavily increasing each year. While the public's attention is consumed by war efforts, an average of 7 attacks a day have been occurring in the West Bank, an all-time high with the already escalated average of 3 settler attacks a day within the first 8 months of 2023. More than 283 violent attacks by settlers have occurred, taking the lives of 9 Palestinians. From October 7th to mid-November, 160 families comprising of 352 children were forced to flee and abandon their homes. As of December 25th the number of Palestinian deaths has more than doubled in 2023 alone, resulting in a [loss of 457 lives in the West Bank only](#).

During the times of heightened violence, ACRI is unwavering in its duty to uphold the Israeli government to its responsibility to deter violence in the West bank. Although Israeli Ministers continue to dismiss acts of settler violence imposed on Palestinians on a daily basis, we continue to staunchly defend and protect all citizens affected by these crimes. Below is a list of the ways in which ACRI has protected the rights of residents in both East Jerusalem and the OPT in 2023:

Unprecedented Settler's Violence Against Palestinians in the West Bank Since Hamas Attack on October 7th, 2023

In the first eight months of 2023, an average of three violent incidents related to settlers occurred per day

3

Since October 7 until mid-November, 283 incidents occurred - an average of seven violent incidents per day

7

The violent attacks by settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank have

TAKEN THE LIVES OF 9 PALESTINIANS.

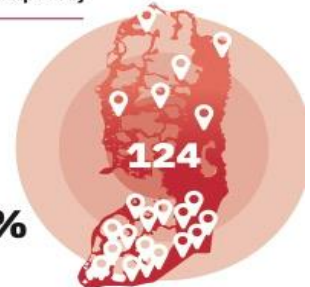


In **53** incidents, military forces were present actively or involved.



In at least **46** of the incidents, live ammunition was used by settlers.

So far, **124** communities in Area C have suffered from violence, property damage, and threats.



Almost **40%** of the reported violent incidents since the outbreak of the war occurred in the South Hebron Hills area.

A significant portion of the military force serving in the South Hebron Hills area is composed of settlers. This creates a situation in which the attackers and the forces tasked to protect against them are the same individuals.



16 COMMUNITIES WERE FORCIBLY DISPLACED FROM THEIR HOMES

and in six additional communities multiple families fled, while the remainder of the community remains under threat.



160 FAMILIES



611 ADULTS



352 CHILDREN

Were forced to leave their homes



In **67%** of the attacks

(189 incidents), private and agricultural property have been destroyed, damaged, looted, or broken into.

האגודה לזכויות האזרח בישראל

جمعية حقوق المواطن في اسرائيل

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel



Reports

ACRI published a [report](#) on Jerusalem Day (May 18, 2023), highlighting the plight of children in East Jerusalem. The report surveys the stark difference in services provided to Jews and Palestinians, addressing the gaps in education, welfare, and health, among others, and concluding that the residents of East Jerusalem - and particularly the neighborhoods beyond the Green Line - suffer from a deliberate policy of neglect and ethnic discrimination.

Property Damage

In late July, Israeli forces arrived at private lands in the village of Al-Fawwar in the West Bank. The forces destroyed four cisterns and sealed them with concrete, claiming that these were unauthorized drilling activities. On July 31, 2023, [ACRI sent legal correspondence](#) to the operations coordinator in the territories and the Central Command, emphasizing that the right to water is grounded in international humanitarian law, and the prohibition of denying water access is not limited to the summer season.

Permits

ACRI contacted the military authorities and the police regarding Palestinians residing in Israel under family reunification permits and welfare permits (welfare permits are given to Palestinians whose lives are in danger in the OPT, including those with restraining orders, women threatened with gender-based violence/death, etc.). ACRI requested to refrain from deporting them to the OPT during the war. Together with the Attorney General's office, the organization requested to renew the existing welfare permits that are expiring and to provide temporary permits for those whose requests are pending. In [response](#) to the inquiry, the Ministry of Justice clarified that there is no intention to deport Palestinians falling under "special populations," including those holding family reunification permits and welfare permits to the OPT.

Following the outbreak of the Israel Hamas War:

Freedom of Movement

Following the outbreak of the war, the army has placed various roadblocks on access roads to several villages in the West Bank. These blockades do not allow vehicular traffic and at times even impede pedestrian movement. ACRI sent legal correspondence to the Central Command Officer, requesting the removal of the blockades on access roads to three villages - Walaja, Kur, and Al-Khaf. ACRI argued that even in challenging wartime days, there is no justification for the complete closure of a village, particularly one situated far from combat zones. Following the correspondence, the blockade was removed from the village of Walaja.

On November 7, 2023, ACRI [petitioned](#) the High Court of Justice, demanding a return to normal operation of the checkpoint. The petition described the severe restrictions on movement at the checkpoint and the substantial disruption caused to the residents' daily lives. It asserted that while the need to bolster security at the perimeter checkpoints due to the current emergency Israel is facing is understandable, security needs cannot justify the sustained and severe infringement on the rights of thousands of people to freedom of movement. These restrictions prevent their access to urgent healthcare services, employment, educational institutions, welfare

services, and other essential services. On October 22nd the checkpoint resumed operating in a partial, limited capacity: pedestrians were forbidden to cross, only one of three lanes for cars is open and the public transportation route was shut down. Additionally, instead of operating 24 hours a day, the checkpoint closes at 5:00 P.M.

Since the outbreak of the war, Palestinian residents in the H2 area of Hebron are prohibited from leaving their homes. The exit from their homes is allowed only on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays for one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening – a total of six hours per week. Palestinian activities in the city are completely suspended. There is no trade or education, residents cannot go to work, receive medical treatment, or visit family members. On November 13, 2023, ACRI sent [legal correspondence](#) to the Central Command requesting the removal of the curfew imposed on the Palestinian residents in Hebron in which ACRI received a response stating that there was never a curfew imposed on the residents. Moreover, ACRI has already sent a response with personal testimonies of Palestinian residents of Hebron attempting to leave their homes and being restricted shortly after.

Settler Violence

On November 21st ACRI, together with Yesh Din, Bimkom, and Haqel [sent the fourth round of legal correspondence](#) to the members of the War Cabinet, the IDF Chief of Staff, and the Police Commissioner, demanding that in light of the unprecedented violence, property damage and threats by settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank, they will order the military forces to protect Palestinians from settler attacks (which often take place in the presence or with the assistance of soldiers) and act to prevent the mass forced displacement of herding communities that has been taking place under cover of the war.

Following the unprecedented increase in settler violence after the outbreak of the War, [ACRI created and published a video](#) and an [infographic](#) outlining every settler attack, the details of the violence and the statistics of attacks before and after the war.

ACRI [sent legal correspondence to Major General Yehuda Fox](#) as a result of a slew of serious incidents that have occurred since the war broke out, in which settlers living in outposts in the South Hebron Hills, have presented themselves in Palestinian communities dressed in military uniforms, sometimes masked, and intimidated residents, violently attacked them, damaged property and even ordered them to leave their homes.

Access to Shelter and Protection Systems

In the majority of the residential buildings in East Jerusalem neighborhoods, there are no safe rooms or shelters. These neighborhoods also lack public shelters (except for one public shelter in Shuafat, which is also temporarily inactive). The few places where residents can find protection during missile attacks are a limited number of schools in several neighborhoods, which have been opened to the public. On October 11, 2023, ACRI [sent legal correspondence to](#) the Mayor of Jerusalem, requesting immediate action to establish protected spaces in the neighborhoods of East Jerusalem.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

As one of the initiators of and a signatory to the United Nations Refugees Convention (1951), Israel is bound by law to provide refuge for individuals fleeing countries deemed unsafe. Moreover, ACRI ardently advocates for the fair treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. In particular, ACRI actively protests the deportation or incarceration of asylum seekers and refugees, including children, from countries recognized as unsafe-- an abhorrent practice made legal by the Prevention Against Infiltration Law, one of many laws that undermines international law and strips this population of basic human rights. ACRI is an active member of the Refugee Rights Forum, which works to promote recognition of the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees in Israel, including access to employment, the right to housing, and the right to adequate healthcare. Below are the ways in which ACRI safeguarded the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Israel in 2023:

Welfare

In 2019, [ACRI joined the Worker's Hotline in a petition](#) against the practice of forfeiting migrant pension and severance contributions held in a fund. The law requires employers to make contributions to a pension and severance fund for migrant workers who are entitled to receive these funds upon departure from the country. The law further stipulates that if a migrant worker fails to leave the country at the appointed time, they can be fined up to the total sum of these contributions. On July 12, 2023, the High Court issued a ruling, striking down the relevant section of the law. The court ruled that a deduction arrangement that could result in all contributions being denied to a migrant worker who worked in Israel lawfully but did not leave on time disproportionately violates the constitutional right to property. The court ordered the Knesset and the relevant ministers to formulate an alternative scheme within six months; otherwise, the deduction arrangement would be revoked.

Permits and Status

On January 18, 2021, the Israeli Immigration Authority, the Center for Refugees and Migrants, and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel [filed an appeal](#) to abolish the threshold conditions in the procedure for regulating status as established by the Population and Immigration Authority. According to the procedure, individuals seeking to submit an application must present a valid passport of two years (Clause 4.2 of the procedure). Additionally, the procedure grants the authority the discretion to summarily reject humanitarian applications without review, if the applicant entered Israel through an unfamiliar border crossing ("infiltrator") (Clause 5.4.b of the procedure). On August 13, 2023, the judgment was issued, which removed the "infiltration" clause from the procedure. The court instructed the authority to revise the clause, suggesting its relocation from its current place at the top of the reasons for rejection list to the end.

On August 21, 2023, ACRI, Physicians for Human Rights, and the Refugee and Migrant Hotline, [sent legal correspondence](#) to the Minister of the Interior and the Director General of the Population and Immigration Authority. The organizations demanded the establishment of a registry for marginalized children living in Israel and the issuance of unique identifying numbers for them. In the correspondence we argued that registration and a unique identifying number

are not rights derived from residency status but rather bureaucratic means, and as such, their use should not be limited to residents only, given their vital importance.

Administrative Detention

On September 7, 2023, together with partnered organizations, [we sent legal correspondence](#) to the Attorney General to immediately release over 50 Eritrean citizens who had been arrested after unusual clashes in Tel Aviv between supporters of the Eritrean regime and opponents of the regime. We claimed that the use of administrative detention under these circumstances constitutes a severe and grave violation of human rights protected under Israeli law and international law. We emphasized that Eritrean citizens living in Israel, most of whom have been in the country for at least a decade, reside in Israel legally and are under group protection due to the systematic and widespread violations of human rights in Eritrea.

Following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas War

Following the rejection of ACRI's petition to the Tel Aviv Administrative Court in July 2022, the organization appealed to the Supreme Court in November of that year in order to demand the de-segregation of schools in Tel Aviv and an opportunity for children of migrants and asylum seekers to go to school with Israeli children. In the proceedings, a pilot project for the school year 2023/24 was agreed upon, in which the Municipality of Tel Aviv will bus 96 asylum seeker children to attend first class in integrated schools in the center and north of the city together with Israeli children. The costs will be funded by the Ministry of Education and the Municipality, and the receiving schools will be provided with increased budgets. The pilot has begun in the 2023 academic year and is being monitored by ACRI staff. (November 2023)

Education

In 2023 ACRI has had to increase monitoring and intervention of changes in the Ministry of Education (MoE), as well as increasing support of education networks we have developed over many years. To respond to the threats on democratic and HR values in the Israeli education system, ACRI has increased our efforts in the legal, advocacy, educational and organizational levels. ACRI has monitored the escalating volume of legislation and policy developments within the MoE to ensure adherence to democratic principles and the State Education Law. For example, ACRI's appeal on behalf of the Parents Circle-Families Forum declares that the disqualification of the dialogue program and the reasons for it contradicts the goals of formal education as written in the State Education Law. The Bereaved Families Forum is a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization of over 600 families, all of whom have lost an immediate family member due to the conflict. The "dialogue meetings" for youth and adults are led by two members of the forum (Israeli and Palestinian) who share their personal stories of bereavement and their active choice to participate in dialogue rather than revenge. The decision of the MoE to remove the program raises concerns that committee members yielded to political pressure preventing foreign and objectionable considerations. Within the context of the drastic government changes, ACRI continues to prevent the curtailment of the progressive education structure in Israel via the representation of progressive communities such as the Parents Circle.

Within the new political context, ACRI increased educational programs, publication of pedagogical materials for educators, and created strong networks of teachers fighting to preserve democratic educational institutions. Our educational forum and WhatsApp groups have doubled in size while the demand for our educational programs in school systems has increased dramatically. In light of the increasing threats to the education system, and together with educators in our networks, we took an active part in organizing demonstrations, petitions, responses to the media, letters to the MoE, pedagogical and activist actions against the moves of the government and the ministry. We joined the "Education Protest for the Defense of State Education" - an emergency coalition of 13 organizations of parents, students, educational staff, and civil society organizations, with the aim of working together for the benefit of egalitarian state education and fight for education for HR and the values of democracy. ACRI's educational programs, distribution of human rights-based materials, and partnership with institutions such as the MoE has resulted in massive success in influencing adult Israelis from all demographic backgrounds to inclusive, tolerant, multicultural and democratic ideals as well as an increase in the demand of our academic programs.

Partnership with the Ministry of Education

ACRI's partnership with the MoE manifested in the Ministry's financing of three of our professional development programs for educators which has been used thus far on the program for "enhancing anti-racism education policy". It is noteworthy that this represents a precedent-setting achievement for ACRI, as the MoE has never taken such action before. Moreover, ACRI partnered with the Ministry in a conference to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination which included workshops for educators.

In March, ACRI and the MoE published the digital version of our second educational book "Life Lessons: A Varied Perspective on Anti-Racism Education." in both [Hebrew](#) and Arabic. The

book includes 13 articles on the subject of anti-racism education and offers analytical and pedagogical tools for educators. We launched the book at an academic conference at Oranim College of Education and distributed online to educators and institutions.

Freedom of Expression

The current attacks on educational staff regarding their rights in and out of the classroom and their ability to create an open and democratic learning environment. This is evident particularly (but not solely) regarding Arab teachers, through bills that offers monitoring mechanisms seeking to further limit their freedom of expression and serve as a tool for policing and intimidating them. The passing of legislation within the Judicial Overhaul has resulted in a public outcry encompassing massive amounts of students and their families as well as education staff participating in country-wide protest.

In August 2023, [ACRI co-created and published a video](#) outlining the attacks of the educational system amidst Israel's democratic crisis. The video highlights the various attacks on freedom of expression and specifically how teachers can navigate speaking about the democratic crisis in the classroom.

Teacher Trainings

ACRI is facilitating an extensive array of resources for educators, principals, and administrators including the establishment of an initiative: [Education for Human Rights Forum](#) in partnership with other organizations already endorsed by nearly 4,500 educators, male and female alike. Workshops and professional development programs for educational teams centered in education for democracy, human rights and the fight against racism have been conducted all over the country, creating a larger and stronger network of educators participating in the fight for upholding democratic education.

Over 1,000 educators, students and faculty members were provided with democracy, civil rights, and anti-racism trainings in 2023 in which over 50% are Arab educators. Moreover, 73.5% participants in ACRI's workshops and seminars declared that they are more capable to discuss and teach democratic values and human rights, and deal with racism in the classroom.

ACRI has also published a know your rights guide entitled "Teacher, you are allowed to say it," in both [Hebrew](#) and [Arabic](#), providing information on everything educators need to know about freedom of expression within the educational context amidst the attacks on democratic education.

Bereaved Families Forum

ACRI Israel and the Education Law and Policy Clinic at the University of Haifa [sent legal correspondence](#) against the decision of the Ministry of Education's committee to disqualify the "Dialogue Meetings" program of the Bereaved Families Forum from the external programs database for the year 2024. Over 8,500 of these meetings have taken place in schools, community centers and other frameworks comprising of about 250,000 participants over the span of 20 years. In the correspondence, we declare that the disqualification of the program and the reasons for it contradicts the goals of formal education. Moreover, the role of the education system is to expose students to a complex reality and diverse perspectives, to develop critical thinking and "a relationship of respect for human rights, basic freedoms, democratic values, the rule of law, culture, and the perspectives of others, and to educate for a striving for peace and tolerance in relations between people and among nations" (from the State Education Law).

Human Rights in the Digital Age

The use of excessive force and surveillance in the scope of protesting by the Israeli government and authorities has dramatically increased in 2023. The anti-democratic reform has contributed to an atmosphere of intimidation and self-censorship, producing a chilling effect on most forms of freedom of expression. The implementation of surveillance technology has been increasingly implemented; as a result, being used as a means of dissenting voices, suppress the Israeli public, specifically individuals holding minority opinions. Numerous anti-democratic surveillance bills have been proposed, serving a direct threat to fundamental human rights. ACRI has fought tirelessly to combat surveillance legislation that is used as a form of political repression.

Police and Shin Bet (Israeli General Security Service)

On January 18, Along with The Public Committee Against Torture and The Movement for Integrity, [ACRI petitioned the High Court](#), demanding the annulment of Amendment 37 to the Police Ordinance. The petition claims that such authorization unconstitutionally violates freedom of protest and expression, delegating control over the extent to which these freedoms are exercised to a political entity.

On June 28, [ACRI appealed to the head of the Shin Bet](#) (The Israel GSS) following reports of the Shin Bet's involvement in monitoring activists of the protest against the Judicial Overhaul. Following the appeal, the Shin Bet was obligated not to use its authority to summon protest activists for warning conversations, except in cases of suspicion linked to the core tasks of the Shin Bet.

On September 5, ACRI and the Clinic for Privacy at Tel Aviv University [filed a petition to the Supreme Court](#) requesting the cessation of the use of spyware by the police and the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) under the Wiretapping Law.

Surveillance Technology

Following a petition we filed together with the Association for Privacy Protection in Israel against the unauthorized implementation of the "Hawk Eye" surveillance system, the Supreme Court ordered the state to regulate the matter through legislation. On May 29, 2023, we submitted our [comments](#) on the proposed law to the National Security Committee, emphasizing existing issues with the proposed regulatory framework, which could potentially infringe on the right to privacy, suggesting specific revisions.

Following the Israel Hamas War:

Police and Shin Bet (Israeli General Security Service)

On October 18, [ACRI appealed to the State Prosecutor](#) with a request to reverse the revocation of the directive stating that the police must obtain approval from the prosecution before initiating an investigation into offenses of expression.

On December 11, the comprehensive amendment to the Shin Bet Law was published. This amendment marks the first modification to the law that passed in the Knesset 21 years ago. ACRI subsequently [published a report](#) on the most concerning aspects of the amendment, highlighting the differences in surveillance tools and expansive Shin Bet database.

Artificial Intelligence

According to various army publications and journalistic investigations, the military employs artificial intelligence systems in the context of the war in the Gaza Strip. According to the reports, one system, called "HASBORAH," is capable of generating attack targets at a high rate using an algorithm that extracts intelligence data from a wide range of sources. The system processes the information and proposes attack targets, which are then approved by a human authority based on the system's recommendations. The army disclosed its use of artificial intelligence two years ago, and in the current war, it updated the public that it relies on the "HASBORAH" system. On December 10, 2023, [we sent legal correspondence to the Chief Military Prosecutor and filed a Freedom of Information request](#) regarding the use of the system. Attorney Gil Gan-Mor, Director of the Civil and Social Rights Units, highlighted the difficulty in relying on artificial intelligence systems for making sensitive decisions that involve severe violations of human rights.

Public Hotline

The Public Hotline staff takes care of human rights violation complaints against the state and its authorities, or those acting on behalf of the authorities (and in cases of discrimination and livelihood, by private entities, as well). ACRI accepts requests from everyone, regardless of their status in Israel: citizens, residents, migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees, residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, etc. The hotline provides: information regarding individual rights, advice on exercising rights, accompaniment on case handlings with authorities, referrals to organizations specializing in specific requests. Since the outbreak of the war, there has been a dramatic increase in inquiries from Arab society, many of which are related to violations of freedom of speech and the right to protest. In 2023 the public hotline received approximately 2,400 calls in Hebrew, 50 in English and 220 in Arabic assisting various individuals of all socio-economic classes, races, religions and status.