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## THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE WEST BANK AND IN GAZA

### ISSUE

The past year has been marked by rapid developments in the situation in Gaza and the West Bank with the gradual expansion of the Palestinian self-ruled territories under the various agreements in the peace process, the most recent being the interim agreement of September 1995. The international community has kept close track of the human rights situation in the Israeli-occupied territories since 1967. Canada maintains that as a signatory of the 4th Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians in Wartime (the Geneva Convention of 1949), Israel must apply its terms in the territories under military occupation. The number of human rights violations has diminished in the Israeli-occupied territories. The question of human rights violations by the Palestinian Authority is becoming increasingly a cause for concern.

### BACKGROUND

The political situation in the West Bank and Gaza has developed rapidly since the signature of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 and the subsequent agreements. The Palestinian Authority has extended its jurisdiction to new areas, in particular after the signature of the Interim Agreement of September 1995. Along with its more extensive responsibilities, it is developing its administration, especially in the maintenance of public order. The first half of the year was marked by deadly terrorist attacks in Israel and the occupied territories leading to increased repression by the Israeli and Palestinian police forces, which was criticized from the viewpoint of human rights.

The number of human rights violations committed in the occupied territories by Israel has declined this year, although violations are continuing. Respect for political and civil rights has also improved, especially in the territories shortly to be placed under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. On the other hand, the Israeli security forces have again begun to demolish the houses of persons suspected of committing violent crimes or sheltering wanted individuals. The administrative restrictions have also continued, often in a more severe way than the previous year. With the Gaza Strip and West Bank being closed for long periods of time, the freedom of movement and economic situation of the people in these areas have suffered.

The human rights situation in the areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority is also a cause for concern. Charges of arbitrary arrests and mistreatment of detainees, which have led to six deaths, have been brought against the Palestinian security forces, and restrictions have been placed on freedom of the press and freedom of speech. The judicial system set up by the Palestinian Authority to judge radical opponents has been criticized for its failure to guarantee the rights of the accused.

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