

HUMAN RIGHTS IN ISRAEL

THE POPULATION OF ISRAEL

- Israel is one of the most open societies in the world.
- The population of Israel in 2014 is approximately **8.2 million**, with 75 percent of the population being Jewish Israelis. The Israeli population is growing at about 1.8 percent a year
- Arabs in Israel have equal voting rights; in fact, it is one of the few places in the Middle East where Arab women may vote. Today women hold 29 of the 120 Knesset seats. There are 17 Arabs in the current Knesset. Israeli Arabs have also held various government posts, including one who served as Israel's Consul General in Atlanta. Arabic, like Hebrew, is an official language in Israel.
- Today, more than 200,000 Arab children attend Israeli schools. At the time of Israel's founding, there was but a single Arab high school in the country. Today, there are hundreds of Arab schools.
- The sole legal distinction between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel is that the latter are not required to serve in the Israeli army. This was to spare Arab citizens the need to take up arms against their brethren. Nevertheless, Bedouins have served in paratroop units and other Arabs have volunteered for military duty. Compulsory military service is applied to the Druze and Circassian communities at their own request.



- Although Israeli Arabs have occasionally been involved in terrorist activities, they have generally behaved as loyal citizens. During the 1967, 1973 and 1982 wars, none engaged in any acts of sabotage or disloyalty. Sometimes, in fact, Arabs volunteered to take over civilian functions for reservists.
- Some economic and social gaps between Israeli Jews and Arabs result from the latter not serving in the military. Veterans qualify for many benefits not available to nonveterans. Moreover, the army aids in the socialization process. On the other hand, Arabs do have an advantage in obtaining some jobs during the years Israelis are in the military. In addition, industries like construction

and trucking have come to be dominated by Israeli Arabs.

- Another impediment to the full integration of non-Jews in Israeli society is the fact that Arab municipalities have historically received less financial support from the government than Jewish ones. Efforts are being made, however, to redress the imbalances. According to the State Department's 1996 Human Rights Report, "Government efforts to close the gaps between Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens have resulted in an estimated 160 percent increase in resources devoted to Arab communities between 1992 and 1996."

- The United States has been independent for well over 200 years and still has not integrated all of its diverse communities. Even today, more than three decades after civil rights legislation was adopted, discrimination has not been eradicated. It should not be surprising that Israel has not solved all of its social problems in only 49 years.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

- "The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right," according to a State Department report. In fact, each religious community has legal authority over its members in matters of marriage and divorce. They also control their own holy places in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the country.

POLITICAL RIGHTS

- "The law provides citizens with the right to change peacefully their government, and citizens exercise this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage for adult citizens," the State Department observed. In 1996, voters elected the Prime Minister by direct ballot for the first time.



- The State Department report also notes that "Israel is a parliamentary democracy, with an active multiparty system representing a wide range of political views. Relatively small parties, including those whose primary support is among Israeli

Arabs, regularly win seats in the Knesset. Elections are by secret ballot."

Legal Rights

- "Israeli law prohibits arbitrary arrest of citizens," according to the State Department, "and the Government observes this prohibition....The law provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government respects this provision in practice. The judiciary provides citizens with a fair and efficient judicial process."
- Israel inherited and continued certain laws adopted by the British. One is the use of administrative detention, which is permitted under certain circumstances in security cases. Israel's policy is that administrative detention is only to be used against violent offenders. The detainee is entitled to be represented by counsel, and may appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court. The burden is on the prosecution to justify holding closed proceedings. Often, officials believe presenting evidence in open court would compromise its methods of gathering intelligence and endanger the lives of individuals who have provided information about planned terrorist activities. Still, many detention orders are reduced or reversed on appeal.
- In addition, Israel's prisons are probably among the most closely scrutinized in the world. One reason is the government has allowed representatives of the Red Cross and other groups to inspect them regularly. The State Department observes that "laws and administrative regulations prohibit the physical abuse of detainees." The courts and a variety of Israeli human rights organizations carefully monitor the treatment of prisoners. Nevertheless, abuses do occur, as they do in the United States.
- The death penalty, which had been used by Jordan, has been applied just once. That was in the case of Adolf Eichmann, the man largely responsible for the "Final Solution." No Arab has ever been given the death penalty, even after the most heinous acts of terrorism.



• Alan Dershowitz (former Professor of Law at Harvard Law School) put the Israeli legal system in perspective in a speech before

the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual meeting (May 23, 1989): "One does not judge a democracy by the way its soldiers immediately react, young men and women under tremendous provocation. One judges a democracy by the way its courts react, in the dispassionate cool of judicial chambers. And the Israeli Supreme Court and other courts have reacted magnificently. For the first time in Mideast history, there is an independent judiciary willing to listen to grievances of Arabs—that judiciary is called the Israeli Supreme Court."

LAND OWNERSHIP

- In the early part of the century, the Jewish National Fund was established by the World Zionist Congress to purchase land in Palestine for Jewish settlement. This land, and that acquired after Israel's War of Independence, was taken over by the government. Of the total area of Israel, 92 percent belongs to the State and is managed by the Land Management Authority. It is not for sale to anyone, Jew or Arab. The remaining 8 percent of the territory is privately owned. The Arab Waqf, for example, owns land that is for the express use and benefit of Muslim Arabs.
- Government land can be leased by anyone, regardless of race, religion or sex. All Arab citizens of Israel are eligible to lease government land.

EMPLOYMENT

- "Workers may join and establish labor organizations freely," the State Department noted in its report. "Nonresident workers in the organized sector, including Palestinians from the occupied territories, are represented by Histadrut and are covered under its collective bargaining agreements. They may join, vote for, and be elected to shop level workers' committees. Labor laws applicable in Israel are applied to Palestinians in East Jerusalem and Syrian Arabs and Druze on the Golan Heights."

DISCRIMINATION

- Israel has one of the broadest anti-discrimination laws of any country. According to the State Department, "The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, marital status, or sexual orientation. The law also prohibits discrimination by both government and nongovernment entities on the basis of race, religion, political beliefs, and age."

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