

Al-Haq Field Report on Human Rights Violations in 2021

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Introduction

Compared to 2020, 2021 marked a setback in human rights both at the internal level as well as in relation to Israeli practices and international community's responsibilities towards the occupying Power. 2021 ushered in political optimism. On 15 January, President Mahmoud Abbas passed a decree on holding legislative, presidential, and Palestinian National Council (PNC) elections consecutively.¹ In early March, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced the opening of a full criminal investigation into the situation in Palestine.²

In late April 2021, however, the general elections were put off, reflecting a political setback. As a result, significant political activism on the Palestinian stage demonstrated a disappointment for Palestinians, who were thirsting for a democratic transition.³ Once reactions to cancelled elections came to end, Palestinian protests erupted in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of the occupied city of Jerusalem against Israeli colonial settlement activity. Protests spread throughout other cities in the West Bank, cities within the Green Line, and besieged Gaza strip.

In the meantime, the Israeli occupying authorities launched a military offensive on the Gaza Strip. Over 11 days, intensive bombardment by air, land and sea targeted civilian and military objects across Gaza, causing extensive damage and significant loss of human life. The uprising engaged all Palestinian people on both sides of the Green Line. Colonial practices and policies affected the Palestinian people from across the spectrum.

In June, Palestinian security agencies murdered Nizar Banat, a political activist, during an attempt to arrest him. Consequently, protests broke out in a number of West Bank cities, particularly Ramallah. Protestors called for justice and retribution against the perpetrators. Calls reached a climax when protestors demanded the overthrow of the regime of the Palestinian Authority. To eliminate them, protests were met with a campaign of systematic repression, violence, threats, defamation, and arbitrary detention of activists.

¹ Central Elections Commission (CEC), "CEC received President Mahmoud Abbas' decree, issued on 15 January 2021 and providing for holding the Palestinian general elections,"

<https://www.elections.ps/tabid/1128/language/ar-PS/Default.aspx>.

² "Justice for Palestine: Historic Day for Palestinian Victims of Israeli Crimes." Al-Haq, <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/17972.html>

³ "Mahmoud Abbas postpones the first Palestinian elections in 15 years until its holding is 'guaranteed' in East Jerusalem." *France 24*, <https://bit.ly/3HFXU24>.

Executive summary

In 2021, violations escalated on all levels. The Israeli occupying authorities killed 84 Palestinians, including 15 children. In addition, 240 Palestinians were killed during the Israeli military offensive on Gaza, bringing the total number of Palestinian martyrs to 324.

The Israeli occupying authorities demolished 233 Palestinian homes in the West Bank, including Jerusalem. During the military offensive on Gaza, 1,313 residential units were completely destroyed and another 6,367 units sustained partial damage.⁴

The Israeli occupying authorities also demolished 367 Palestinian privately-owned structures in the West Bank. Another 787 private structures were destroyed during the Israeli offensive on Gaza. In comparison to seven in the West Bank, the Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF) destroyed 871 public structures during the military offensive on Gaza.

In 2021, Palestinian security agencies committed hundreds of human rights abuses, including arbitrary detention against the background of freedom of opinion and political activism. Violations affected fair trial procedures, dispersal of peaceful protests by force, seizure of funds and electronic devices, house raids and searches, and other encroachments on the right to liberty and security.

Israeli violations

(Violations do not include victims and losses of the Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip.⁵)

Killings

In 2021, 84 Palestinians were killed by the IOF. Excluding Palestinian political Prisoners deaths inside Israeli prisons and the death toll of victims following the Israeli military aggression on Gaza, who are covered in a special section below. In comparison to 2020 where 32 Palestinians were killed, 2021 saw a spike in the number of Palestinians killed. This was attributed to the Israeli attack on the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and disproportionate suppression of protests, which spread throughout Palestine, on both sides of the Green Line in May. While settler colonial violence was also out of control, the Israeli occupying authorities persistently implemented a shoot to kill policy.

Of all Palestinian's killed, five females and 79 males were killed in 2021.

⁴ <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/19476.html>

⁵ A special section covers losses caused by the Israeli military offensive.

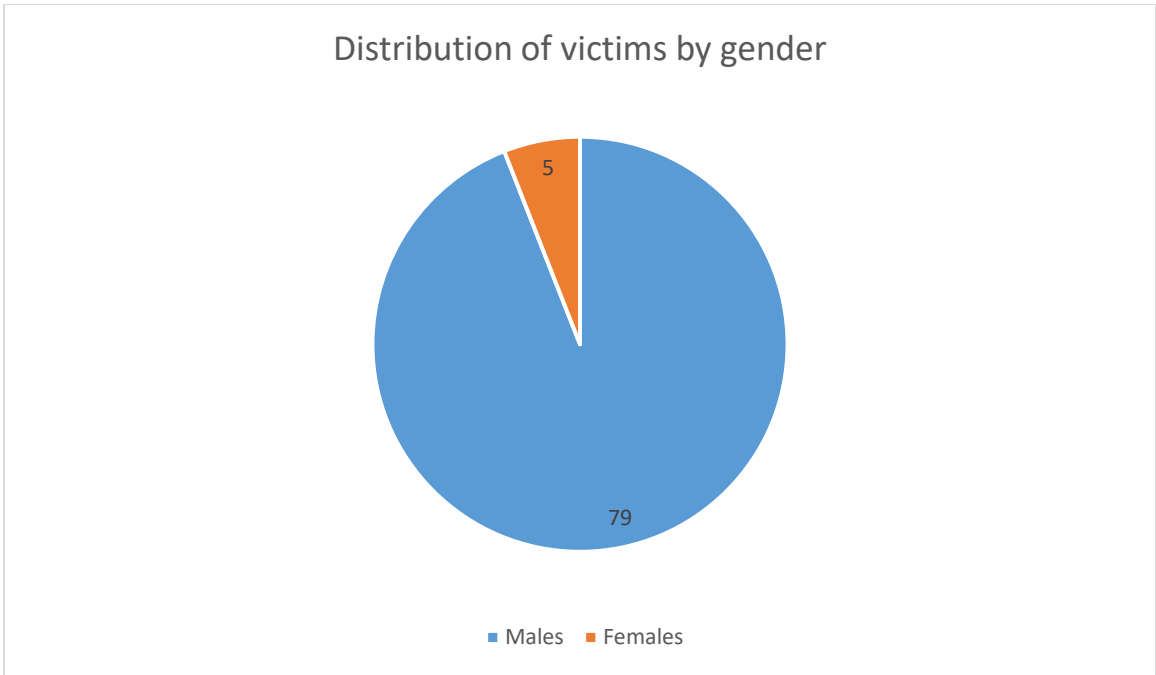


Figure 1

Of all Palestinians killed, 15 were children and 69 adults.

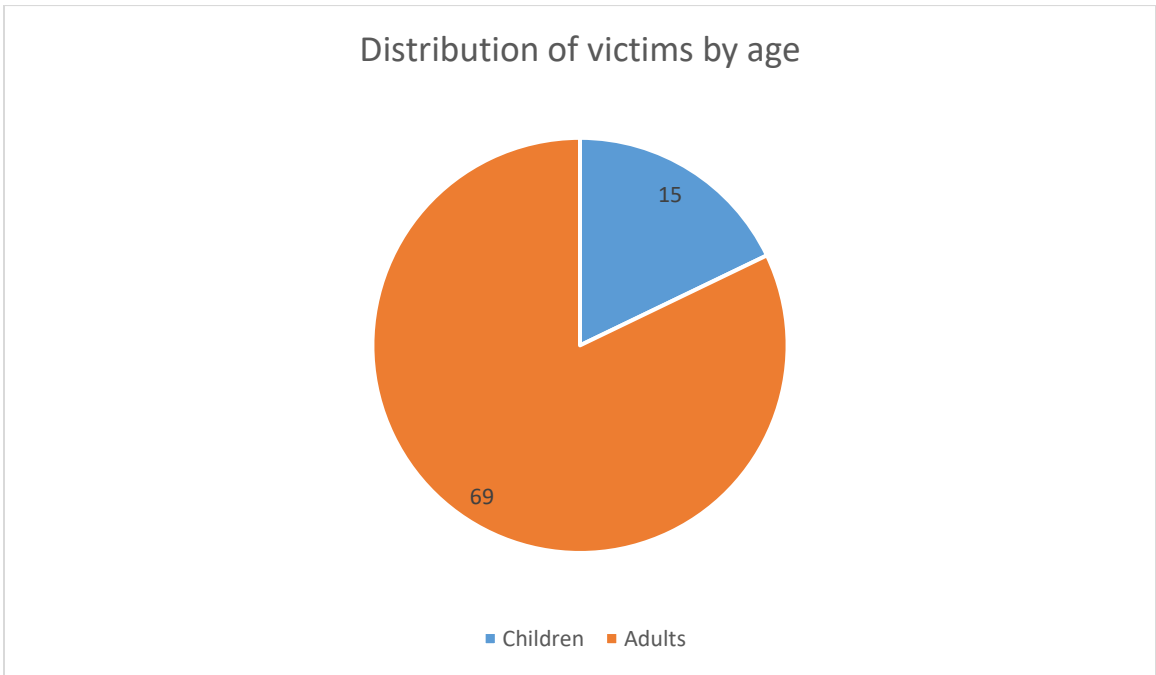


Figure 2

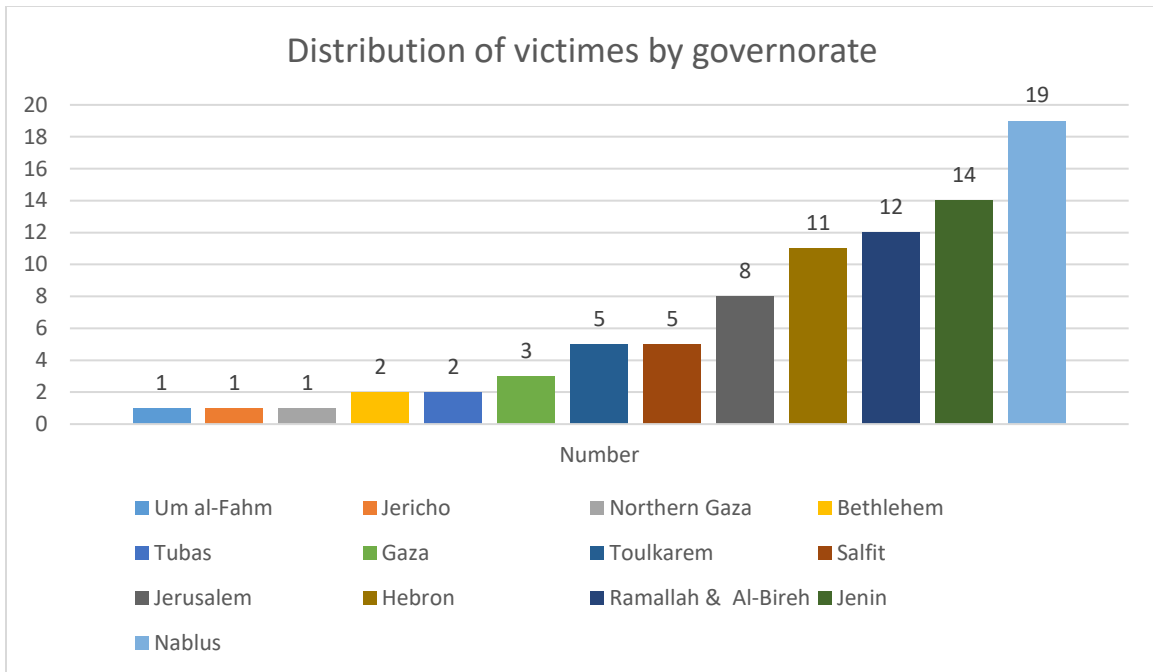


Figure 3

Perpetrators

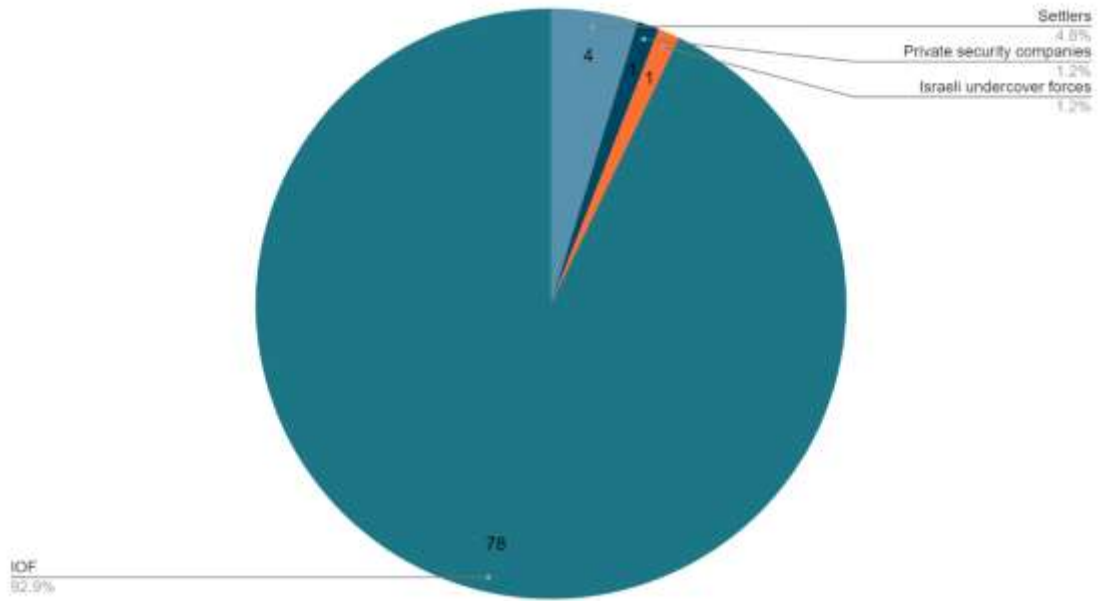


Figure 4

Did IOF soldiers offer any first aid to wounded Palestinians after they had been shot?

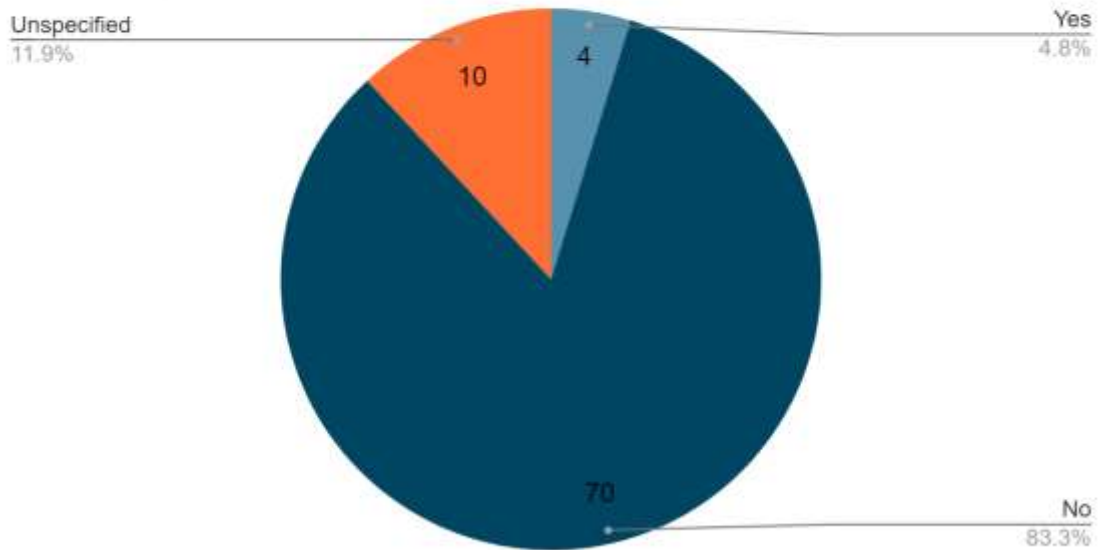


Figure 5

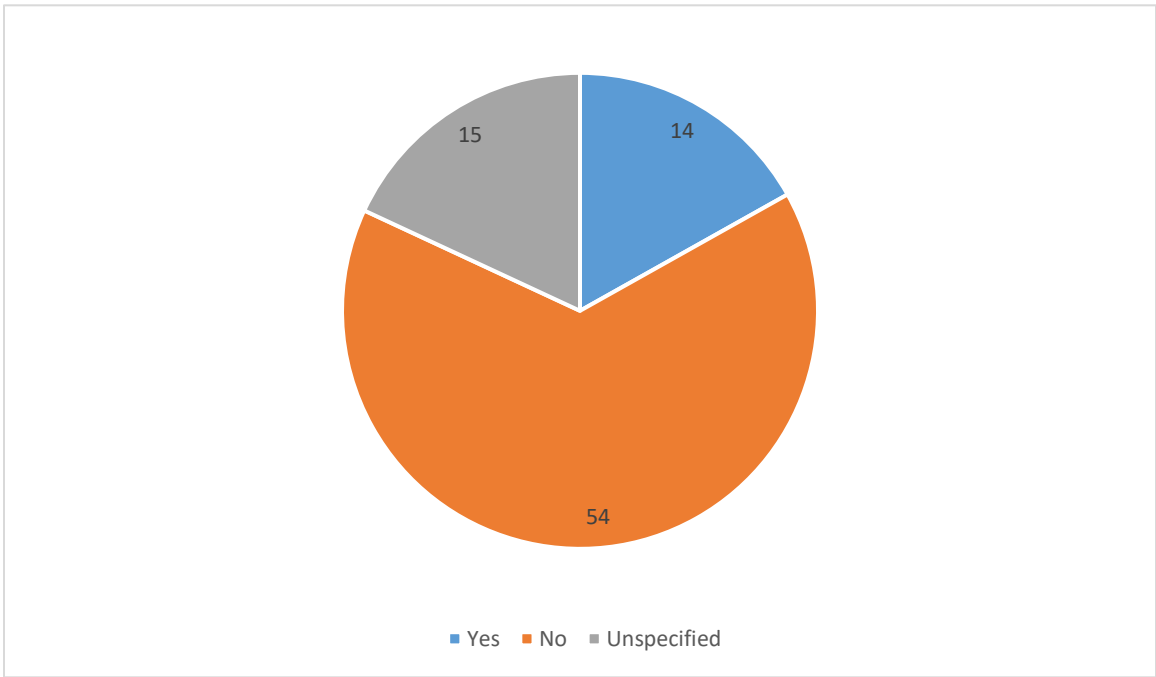


Figure 6 Obstructing ambulance services

Of all killed Palestinians, the Israeli occupying authorities withheld the bodies of 30 killed Palestinians.

Was the body withheld?

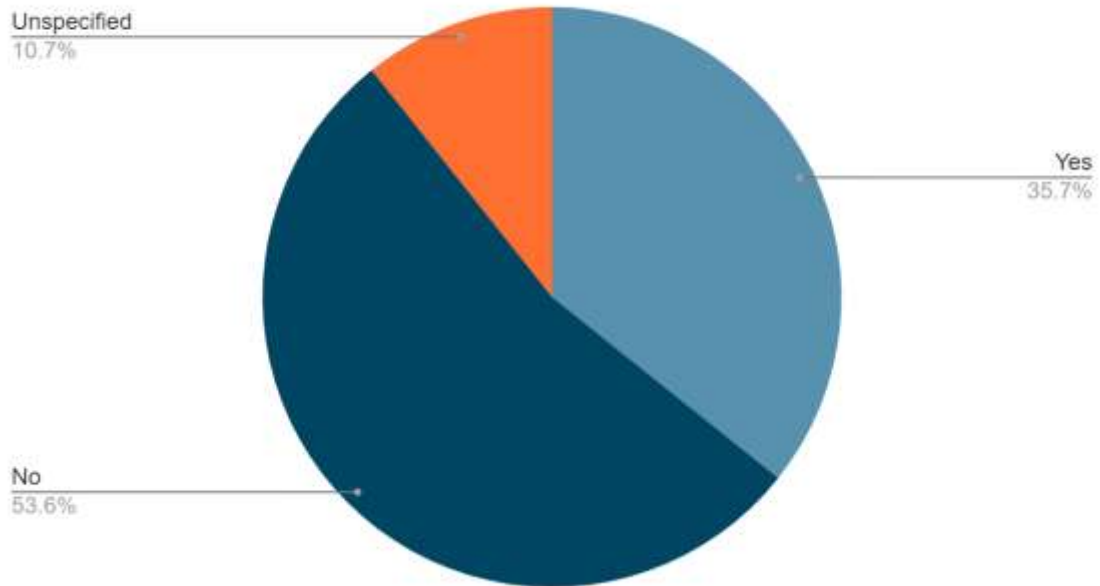


Figure 7

Deaths in peculiar circumstances/indirect killings

Nine Palestinians were killed in peculiar circumstances. Of these, three Palestinian political prisoners died in Israeli prisons. On an annual basis, many Palestinians are killed in intentional and or unintentional settler colonial vehicle ramming attacks along highways and settler colonial bypass roads. In 2021, two Palestinians were killed (one young man and a female) as a result of ramming attacks.

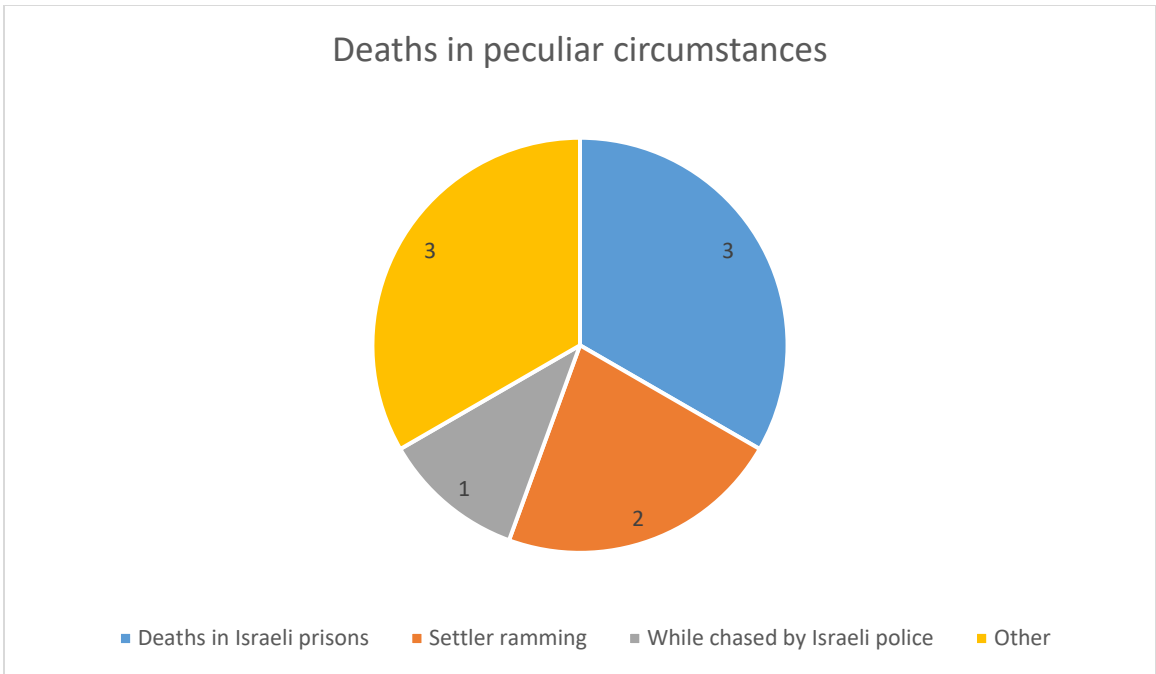


Figure 8

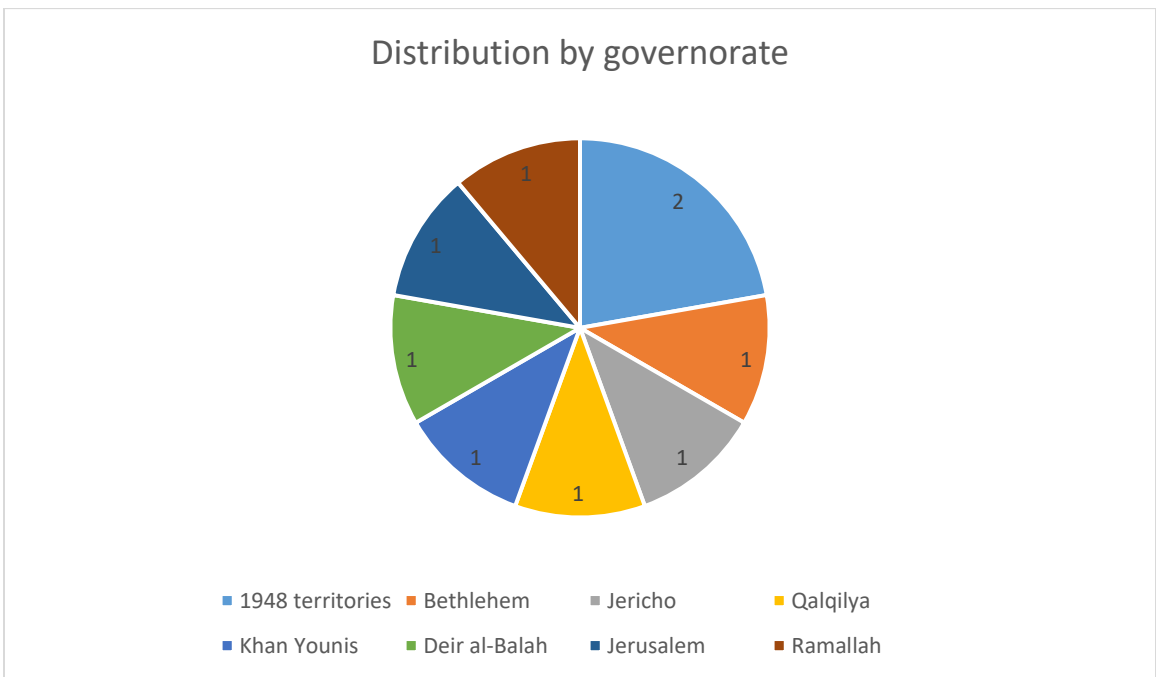


Figure 9

Demolitions

Apart from those destroyed during the Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip, in 2021, the Israeli occupying authorities demolished 606 Palestinian private and public structures. A noticeable increase from 2020 total demolitions which amount to 535 Palestinian private and public structures.



The Jordan Valley, November 2021

Homes⁶

During the reporting period, the IOF demolished 233 homes.



A structure demolished in Al-Lubban al-Sharqiya, August 2021.

⁶ In relation to homes, Al-Haq is informed by two primary criteria: (1) the owner, and (2) status of the home as to whether it is inhabited or not. Accordingly, if three uninhabited housing units belonging to the same owner are demolished, Al-Haq considers all three units as one home, combining their surface areas as one home. For example, in Wadi al-Humos, the Israeli occupying authorities demolished more than 70 housing units, with multiple uninhabited units belonging to the same owners. Hence, the surface areas of these units were combined and entered as 14 homes only. Likewise, Bedouin homes usually include more than one residential tent. Al-Haq counts all tents, which serve as rooms or other facilities such as kitchens or toilets, of the same structure and household as one home. For instance, if a family live in four tents, including two as rooms, one used as kitchen and the other as a toilet, these are all counted as one home.

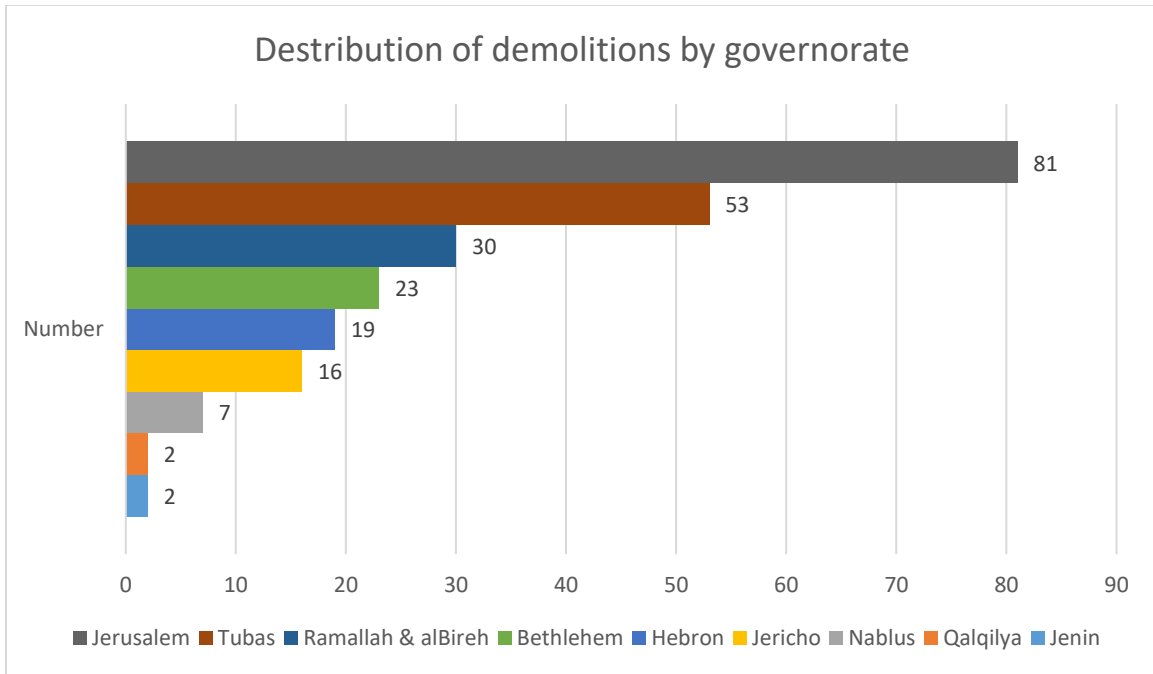


Figure 10

According to designations of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt) by the Oslo Accords, 69 demolished homes were located within the Israeli municipal borders of Jerusalem, 161 in Area C, and three in Area B.

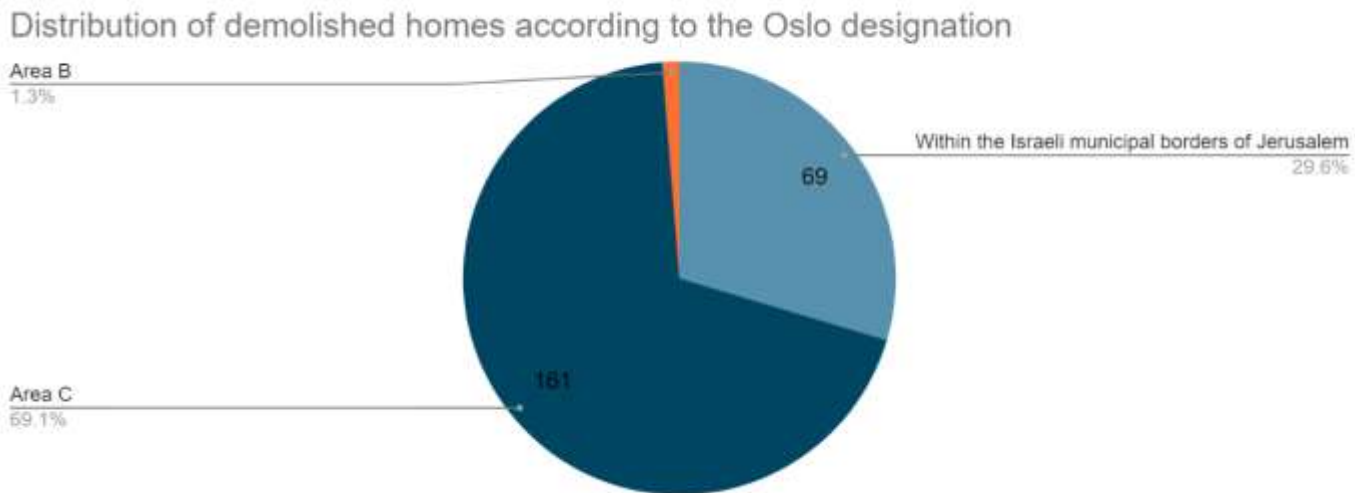


Figure 11

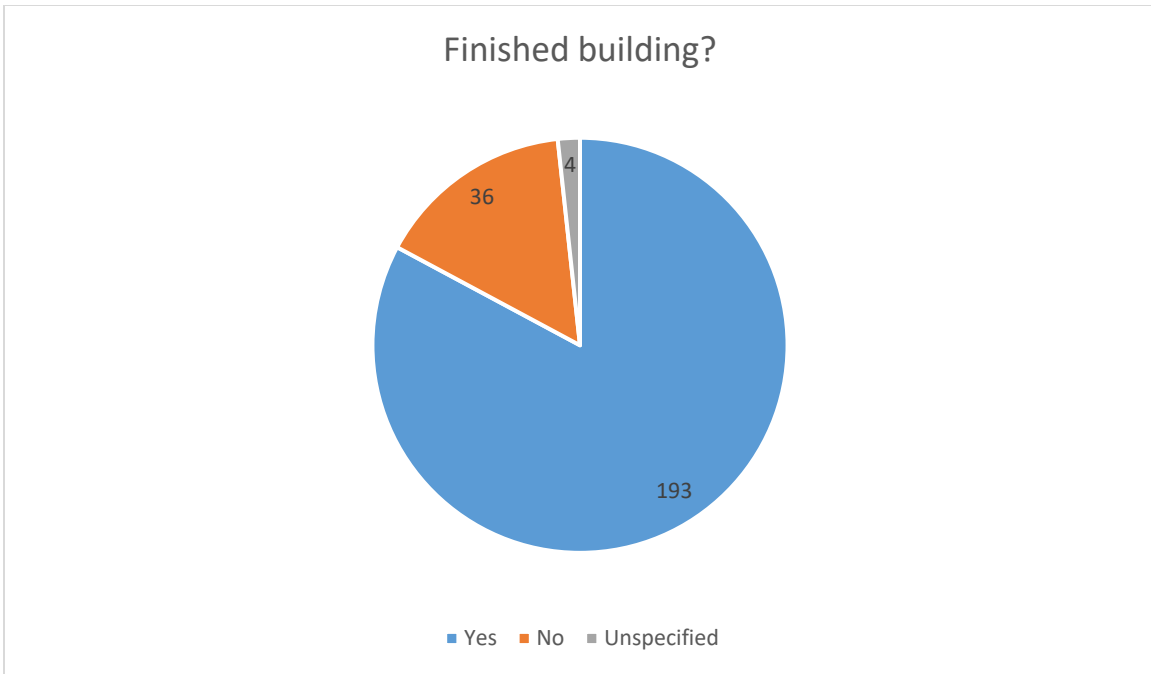


Figure 12

Types of machineries used in the demolitions

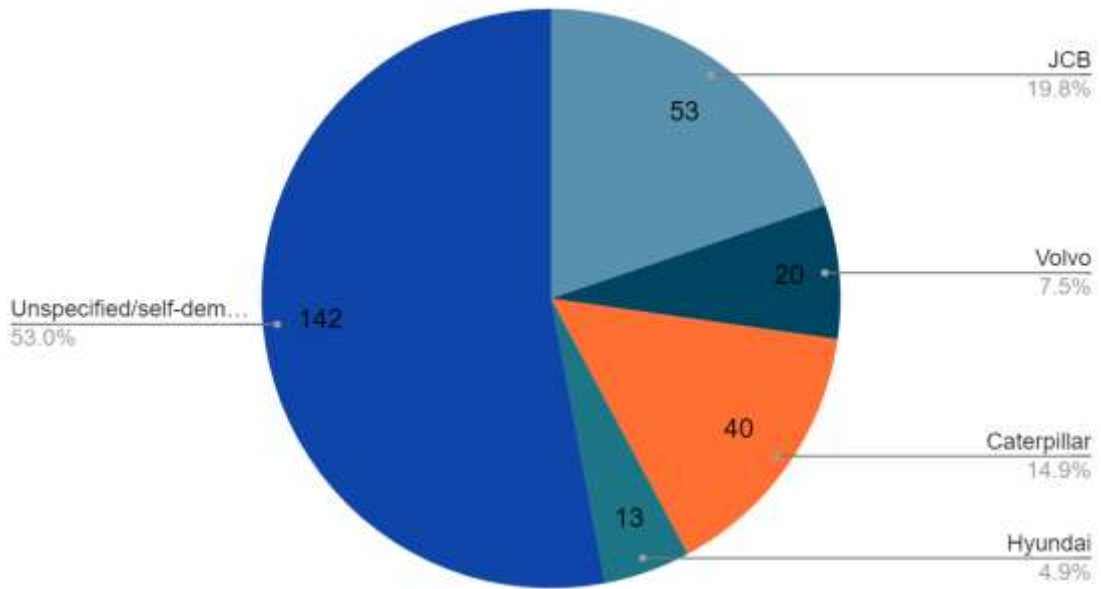


Figure 13

Other private structures⁷

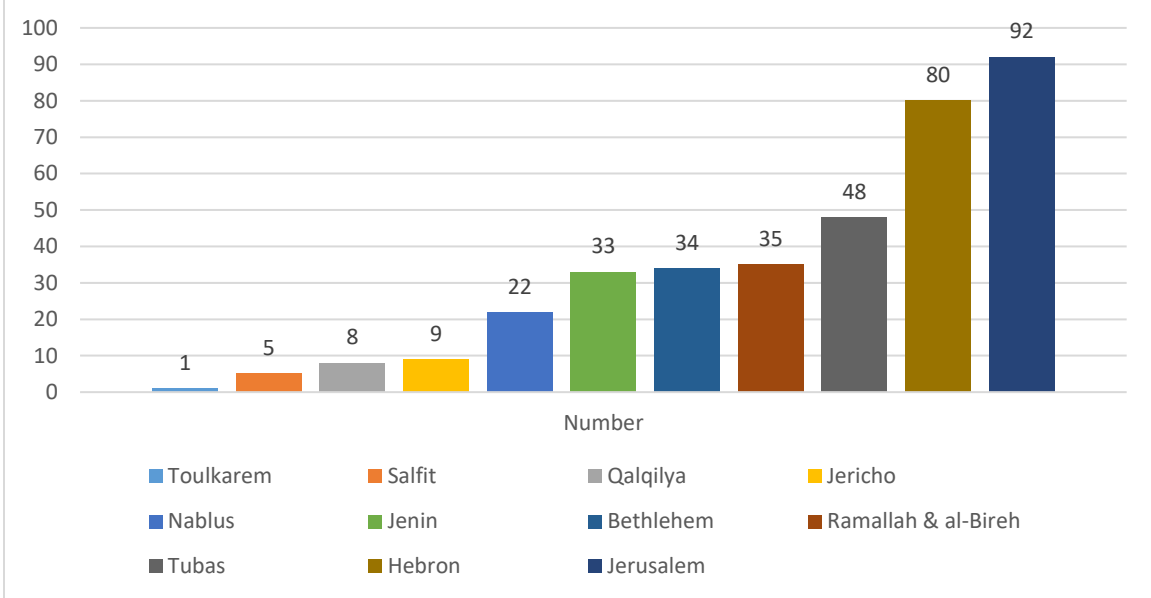
Apart from homes, the Israeli occupying authorities demolished a total of 367 private structures in 2021.



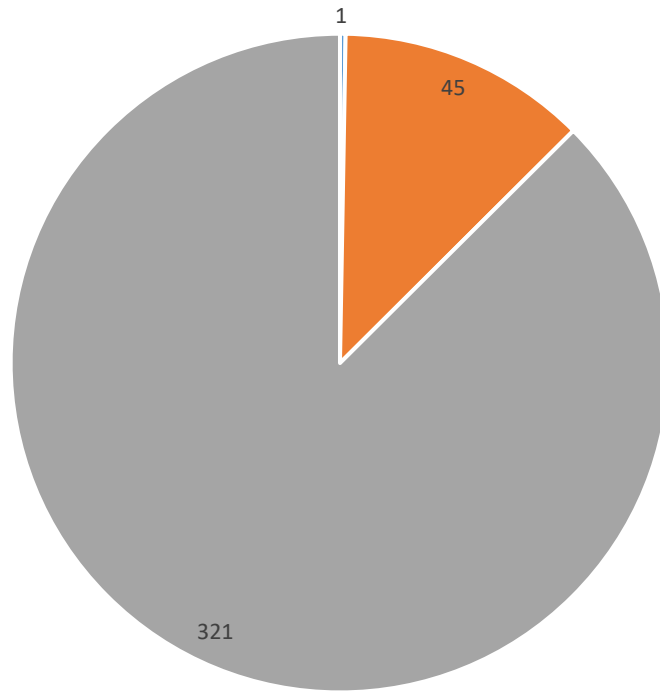
A structure demolished in the Jordan Valley, 2021

⁷ In many cases, a commercial premise belongs to the same owner, but consists of, e.g., more than one barracks. This is counted by Al-Haq as one commercial premise despite the fact that it comprises several barracks, tents, or structures unless the owner or type of commercial premise is different. For example, if an animal farm is made up of three barracks, but are all owned by the same owner, the surface area of this farm is combined and entered into the Al-Haq databank only once. This is also the case of storage facilities, which form an integral part of a home. These are counted as an inseparable part of the home.

Distribution by governorate

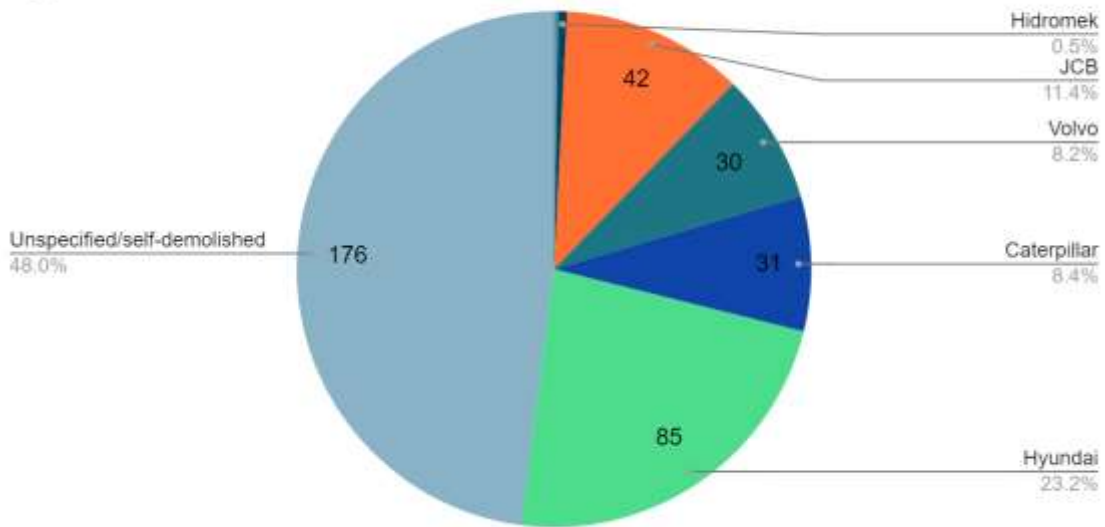


Distribution of demolished houses according to the Oslo designation



■ Area B ■ Within the illegal Jerusalem municipality boundaries ■ Area C

Types of machineries used in the demolitions



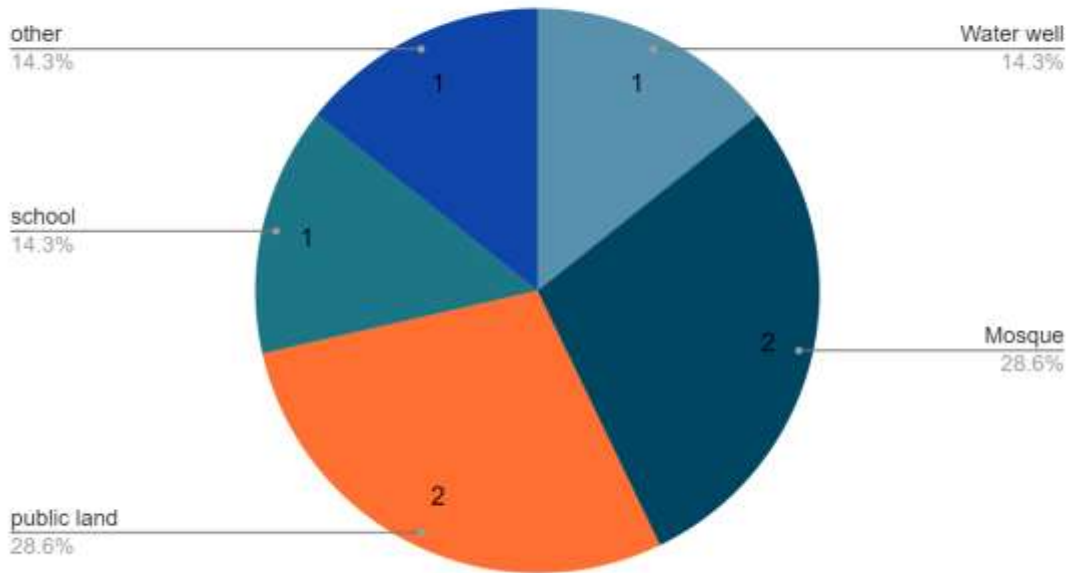
Public properties

Seven public structures were demolished in the West Bank.

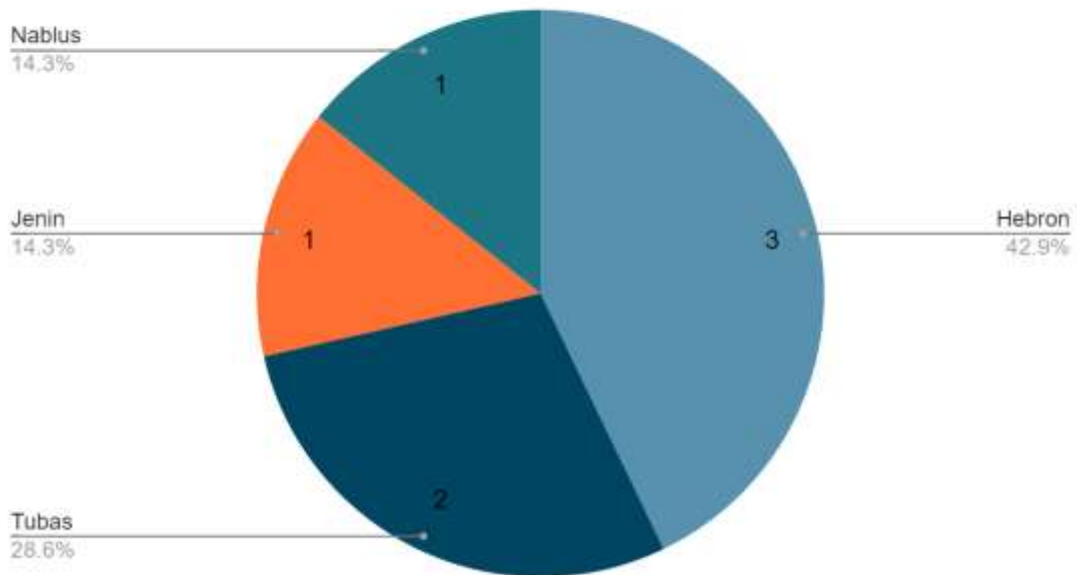


A mosque demolished in Duma, November 2021

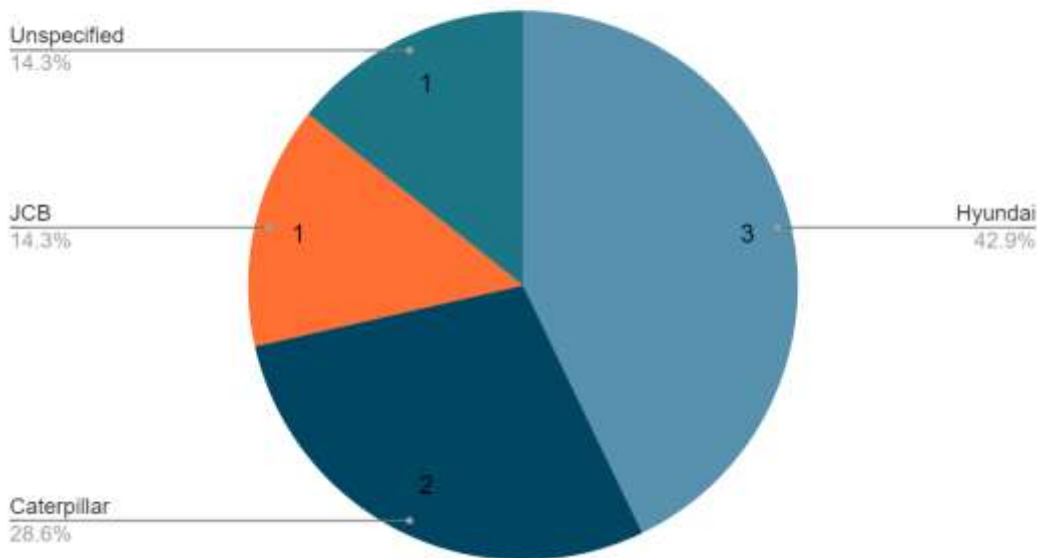
Distribution of public structures by type



Distribution by geographical area



Types of machineries used in the demolitions



Other Israeli violations⁸

The Israeli occupying authorities committed hundreds of other violations throughout 2021. These impinged on many Palestinian rights, including the rights to liberty, freedom of expression, safety, privacy, freedom of movement, education, health, work, physical integrity, a fair trial, self-determination, etc.

The IOF maintained systematic practices, including house raids and searches, flying checkpoints⁹, restriction of movement throughout the oPt, including between the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem. The Israeli occupying authorities continued to expand colonial settlements, confiscate land, and seize water sources. In addition, Israeli colonial settlers assaulted Palestinians and Palestinian homes, cut down trees, damaged agricultural crops, and attacked Palestinian vehicles on main streets. These and other systematic practices take place under the support of the occupying state of Israel.

Of all abuses, in 2021, focus is placed on the relentless Israeli occupation onslaught on the Palestinian people on both sides of the Green Line, during the May uprising as well as on the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Below are highlights of the May uprising and military offensive on the Gaza Strip.

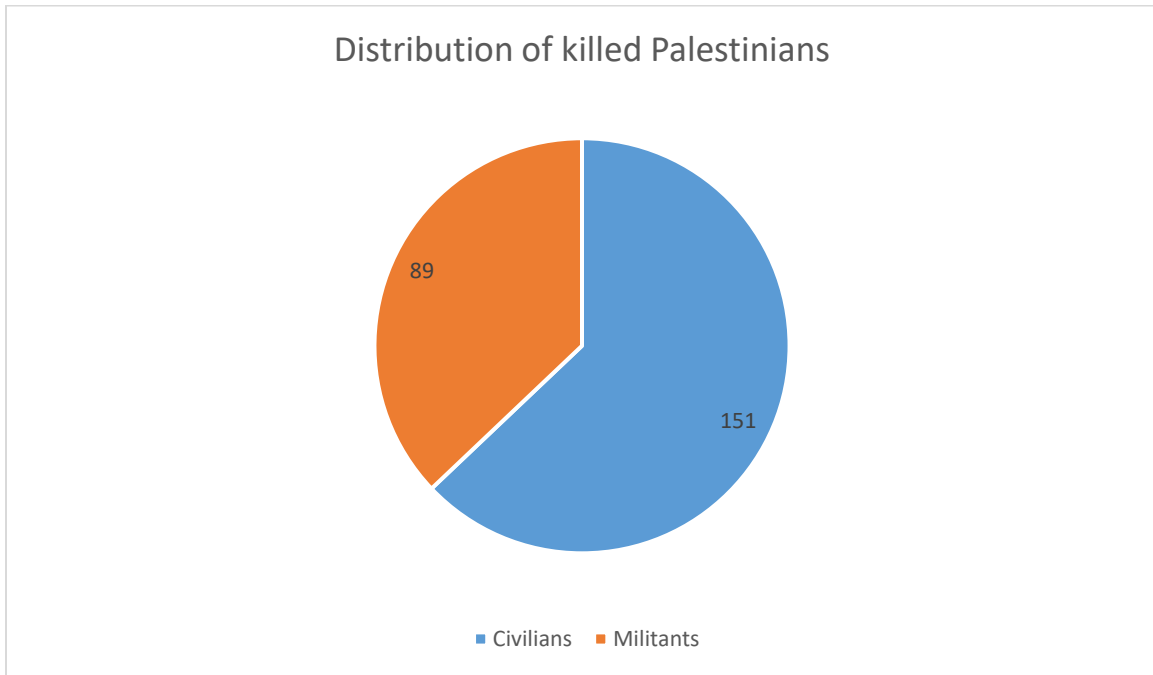
⁸ Al-Haq does not provide a full documentation of these violations. Hundreds of abuses are documented as a representative sample, giving an indicator of the nature of these abuses.

⁹ As appose to permanent check-points.

Focus of the year

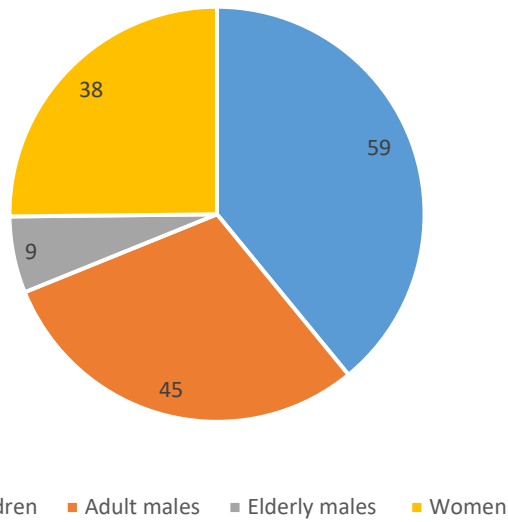
Military Offensive on the Gaza Strip¹⁰

The Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip was launched in the evening of Monday, 10 May and came to an end eleven days later, at dawn on 21 May 2021. In more than 1,615 air raids and artillery shelling operations, the IOF bombed more than 1,000 Palestinian sites, mostly civilian buildings and public structures. The military attack on Gaza resulted in the killing of 240 Palestinians, including 60 children and 38 women. A total of 630 children and 397 women were reported to have been injured.

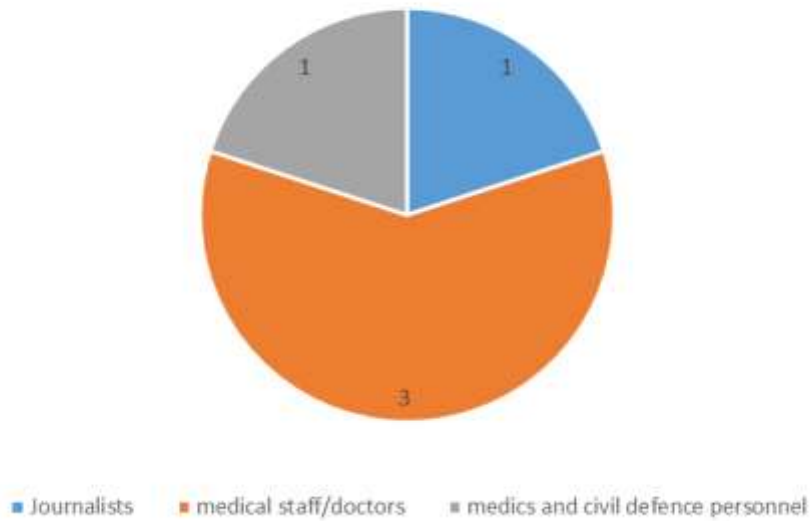


¹⁰ Detailed report on the Military offensive:
<https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/19476.html>

Distribution of killed civilians

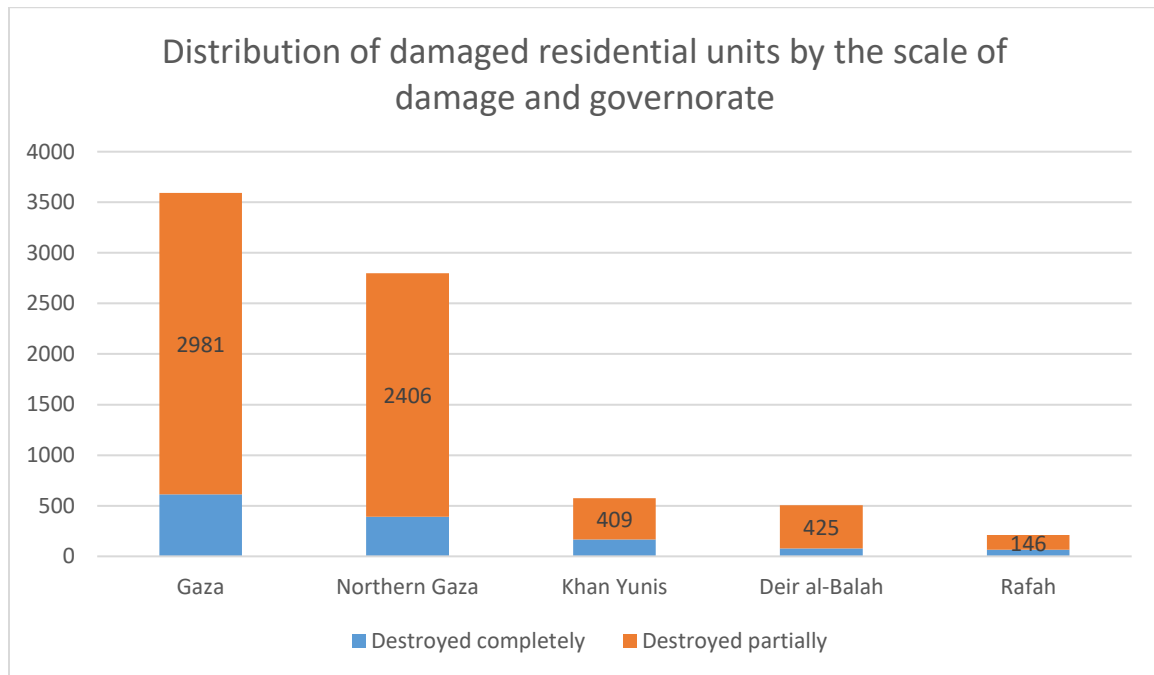


Distribution of killed Palestinians by category

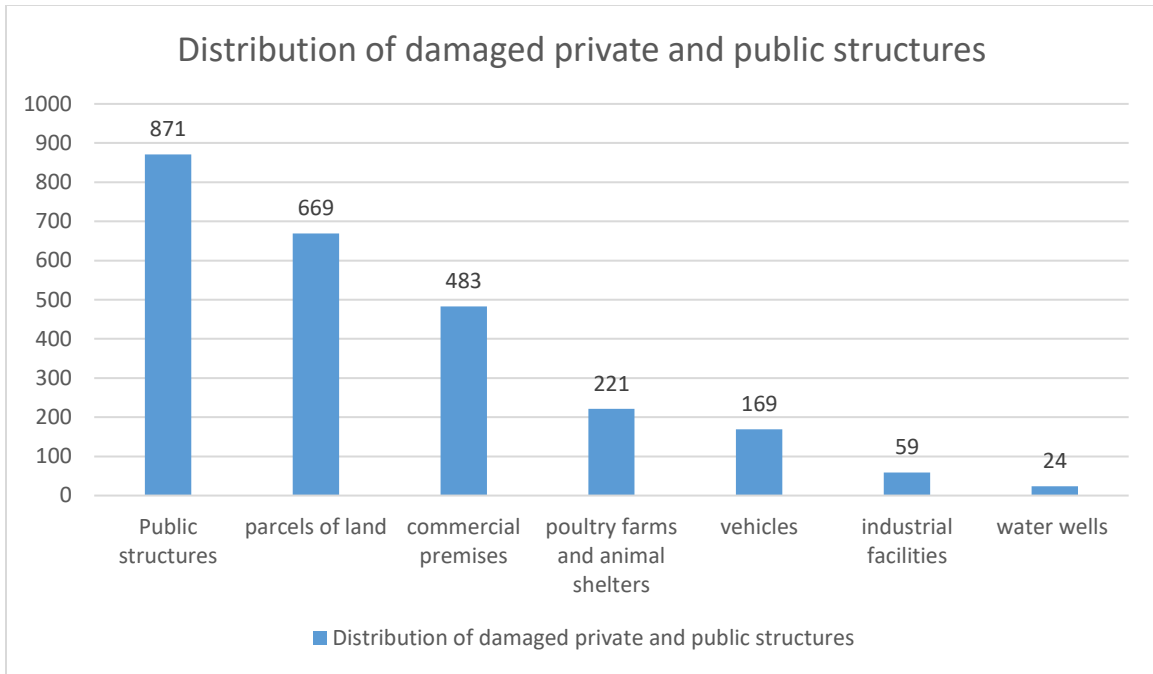


Mainly by air, but also including missile strikes by navy battleships and ground-launched artillery, heavy Israeli bombardment targeted residential areas, homes, towers, agricultural

land, schools, and health centres. All these are civilian objects and protected under International Law. Although it affected all Gaza Strip governorates, Israeli bombardment was concentrated on Northern Gaza in intensity and quantity. The Israeli military offensive resulted in the [displacement](#) of more than 38,020 residents, whose homes were damaged. The number of displaced persons does not include those with undamaged homes.



Widespread destruction of infrastructure and civilian structures across the Gaza Strip unveiled the use of a new type of warheads by Israel. The [Al-Jazeera Media Network](#) revealed that GBU-31 Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) explosives were used during the Israeli military offensive. Developed to penetrate heavily fortified military sites, these bombs were used in entirely civilian surroundings, causing enormous destruction. Another version of these missiles, namely GBU-39, was used, causing damage to 669 pieces of land, 221 poultry farms and animal shelters, 24 water wells, 169 vehicles, 59 industrial facilities, 483 commercial premises, and 871 other public establishments.



Violations by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas authority in the Gaza Strip¹¹

In 2021, Al-Haq documented hundreds of violations committed by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas authority in the Gaza Strip. Perhaps the most striking event in 2021 was the killing of political activist Nizar Banat, while he was being arrested by Palestinian security agencies in the city of Hebron on 24 June 2021. Demanding justice for Banat, demonstrations were held in protest against the crime. For three months, dozens of protests were organised, mainly in the city of Ramallah. Meantime, Al-Haq documented 13 protests, of which security agencies dispersed 10.

Between 24 June and 23 August, protests continued on an intermittent basis. These were suppressed by security agencies, which fired tear gas canisters, beat participants with batons and fists, and confiscated and stole mobile telephones. Security personnel also resorted to defamation, publicised personal photos, incited violence in official statements and on social media platforms, applied family and tribal pressure, and carried out campaigns of arbitrary detention. Ununiformed security personnel dragged protestors on the streets and harassed female journalists and activists.

¹¹ Al-Haq does not provide a full documentation of these violations. Hundreds of abuses are documented as a representative sample, giving an indicator of the nature of these abuses.

Abolished elections, killing of Banat, and subsequent protests were a turning point in the situation of human rights, which greatly deteriorated towards the end of 2021. The table below shows the distribution of violations documented by Al-Haq:

Violation	Number of violations
Arbitrary detention	71
Violation of the right to a fair trial	40
Violation of the right to humane prison conditions	50
Violation of the right to freedom of expression	17
Ill-treatment and torture	40
Beating and physical violence	54
Confiscation of devices, funds, and equipment	15

Official perpetrators of human rights abuses were as follows:

Perpetrators	Number of violations
Palestinian Police, West Bank	76
Palestinian Police, Gaza Strip	110
Preventive Security	86
Internal Security	14
General Intelligence	79

Conclusion

The year of 2021 was not a good year from the perspective of human rights. Political events and developments throughout the oPt provided fertile ground for human rights violations by the Israeli occupying authorities, PA, and Hamas authority in the Gaza Strip. Reported figures indicate a poor human rights situation and increasing impingements on rights and freedoms. This is compounded by an economic downturn and deepening political and social tensions.

The Israeli occupying authorities launched a military offensive on the Gaza Strip, resulting in a large number of victims and substantial material losses. Meanwhile, with full support from official Israeli authorities, Israeli settler colonial organisations escalated attempts to seize control and displace residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. The Israeli authorities made every effort to quench the Al-Quds uprising on both sides of the Green Line. Labelling a number of Palestinian human rights groups as “terrorist organisations” and infiltrating into mobile phones of human rights activists only heralded a new wave of colonial policies. These do not only target the Palestinian land and civilians, but also institutions that provide protection and humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population.

Felt at the beginning of 2021, the sense of optimism for political change and respect for human rights faded away. The agreement to hold legislative, presidential and National Council elections turned into a clampdown on freedoms and restriction of fundamental human rights after the elections were cancelled and Banat was killed. As protests mounted, the PA conducted violent mass arrests and used disproportionate force to disperse demonstrations. Repression was carried out by both uniformed and ununiformed security personnel. Against this backdrop, human rights organisations need to caution against the declining situation of human rights and freedoms in 2021 in contrast with 2020.