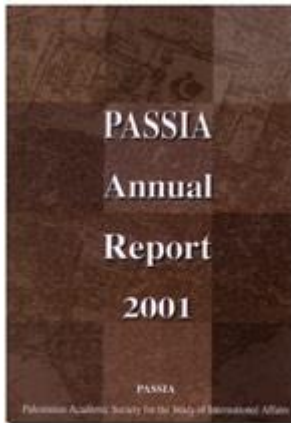


## THE YEAR THAT WAS 2001



The year 2001 was probably the worst for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since the Israeli occupation in June 1967. It will be remembered as one of continual Israeli military attacks and state terrorism against the Palestinian population and the Palestinian Authority (PA), with almost daily killings and injuries of Palestinians, the shelling and destruction of Palestinian homes, land, and infrastructure, an unprecedented level of extra-judicial killings, the invasion and reoccupation of PA-controlled areas, countless arrests and detentions, and the siege of Palestinian towns and villages, creating a devastating economic situation. Throughout the year, over 570 Palestinians fell victim to the Israeli aggressions and more than 6,000 were injured. Israeli forces bulldozed over 8,500 dunums of land, uprooted over 22,000 trees and

demolished 352 Palestinian houses, mostly in Gaza. The violent events of 2001 overshadowed the fact that the year was also one of ongoing, albeit unsuccessful, efforts of local and external players to end the hostilities and return back to the peace talks.

The year began with the deterioration of the situation on the ground as Israel closed Gaza Airport and the border to Jordan, effectively preventing the travel of Palestinians abroad. In the US, Arafat-Clinton began talks in a bid to achieve a peace deal prior to Clinton leaving office, while CIA Director Tenet held talks with PA, Israeli, Egyptian security officials on his cease-fire proposal. Later the month Ariel Sharon outlined his plan for a long-term interim agreement with the PA "offering" a Palestinian state in some 42% of the West Bank. As President Clinton left the White House and George W. Bush took over, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators began marathon talks at Taba aimed at reaching a final status agreement before the 6 Feb. Israeli elections. After a week, the talks concluded with a joint statement, saying that substantial progress on the issues discussed had been made and talks would resume after the elections.

When on 6 Feb., Sharon won a landslide victory over Prime Minister Barak (Palestinians inside Israel boycotted the elections), US Secretary of State Powell was quick to phone Arab leaders in the region urging them to avoid provocative actions and judge Sharon based on his actions as PM, not his past. Two days later, the Bush Administration formally abandoned Clinton's peace proposals as now irrelevant and stated future negotiations should be left to the Israelis and Palestinians. A day after Israeli forces invaded Khan Younis and the Bethlehem district, a Gaza bus driver with Israeli security clearance rammed his bus into a bus stop near Tel Aviv, killing eight people. Israel imposed a complete closure on the Palestinian territories. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch both urged Israel to stop its illegal assassination policy and using indiscriminate force against the Palestinians.

In early March, a car bomb explosion near Afula that left one Israeli dead, induced Israeli forces to shell Gaza and to dig trenches around Jericho. In his farewell address to the

Knesset, Ehud Barak meanwhile said that the new government was not bound by understandings reached at Camp David or at Taba. Later the month, the fact-finding committee into Israeli-Palestinian violence, led by former US Senator George Mitchell, arrived and the Bush Administration ended the CIA's role as broker between Israeli and Palestinian security services. An UNCHR Inquiry Commission presented its report calling for the immediate establishment of an international presence to protect Palestinians against Israeli troops and settlers, and an Arab League summit in Amman approved some \$240 million in emergency aid for the PA. On 30 March violence came to a new peak as Israeli troops fired at protest marches commemorating the 25th anniversary of Land Day all over the country, killing six Palestinians and injuring at least 170.

In early April Foreign Minister Peres held "quiet contacts" with senior PA officials in Stockholm to discuss a Jordanian-Egyptian proposal for implementing a cease-fire and resuming to political negotiations. On the domestic level, security coordination resumed as both sides met with US and CIA officials. In Jerusalem, meanwhile, a recent wave of house demolitions left dozens of Palestinians homeless and Sharon expressed his support of opening the "Temple Mount" to Jews. In the international arena, Sweden, holding the EU presidency, condemned Israel's settlement policy as "a major obstacle to peace" and the UNCHR passed a resolution supporting the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. On 11 April, Israel stepped up its attacks against Palestinians and invaded PA-controlled areas of Khan Younis, killing two Palestinians, injuring 37 and destroying 31 houses, rendering over 500 people homeless. A few days later, Gaza was attacked by sea, land and air, and split into three sections. On 22 April, a Palestinian suicide bomber blew himself up at a bus stop outside Tel Aviv, killing one Israeli and wounding 40 others.

On 4 May the Mitchell Commission presented its report, stating, inter alia, that "A cessation of Palestinian-Israeli violence will be particularly hard to sustain unless the GOI (Government of Israel) freezes all settlement construction activity." The Palestinian leadership said the report was a suitable base for discussions while Sharon refused to accept the recommended settlement freeze. Over the next days, the Israeli army invaded Palestinian-held territory in Beit Jala in retaliation for gunfire on Gilo, and the killing of two teenage settlers near Bethlehem triggered a wave of settler violence against Palestinian civilians. On 14 May, Israeli soldiers killed five Palestinian security forces at their post in Beitunia, near Ramallah, while they were preparing a meal inside their makeshift room, causing an outrage among Palestinians as well as worldwide. The next day, Israeli troops used excessive force against peaceful marches in the territories commemorating the 53rd anniversary of An-Nakba; four Palestinians were killed and over 100 wounded. Further escalation occurred after a suicide bomber blew himself up in Netanya, killing six Israeli and wounding dozens more, and Israel responded by sending F16 fighter jets on air strikes on Nablus and Ramallah, in which 12 Palestinian police officers were killed and over 60 people injured. On 31 May, Palestinians learned with shock and sorrow about the sudden death of PLO Executive Committee member in charge of the Jerusalem file, Faisal Husseini, who suffered a heart attack in Kuwait. Tens of thousands attended his funeral procession the next day from Ramallah to Jerusalem where he was laid to rest on Al-Aqsa compound.

That night, a young man from Qalqilya blew himself up outside a disco in Tel Aviv, killing 19, and injuring over 80. Israel gave Arafat 24 hours to avoid military response by ordering a ceasefire, re-arresting all Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants. A week later CIA Director Tenet presented Israeli and PA officials with a US-drafted cease-fire plan, which both sides began to implement after further discussions on 14 June. On 18 June, 28 survivors of the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre in Lebanon brought a case against

Sharon before a Belgian court, which ruled on 30 June that Sharon was indictable for crimes against humanity.

July began with Israel reaffirming its strategy of "active defense" and selecting 26 Palestinians as targets for assassination albeit UN and US protests against such policy. The month saw the largest demolition campaign in East Jerusalem since 1967, with Israeli forces demolishing 17 homes in Shu'fat camp. In other assaults on the city, Israeli authorities banned the 40th day commemoration of Faisal Husseini's death, and clashed with Palestinians trying to defend Al-Aqsa Mosque from Jewish extremist at the end of the month, injuring over 70. On 19 July G8-Foreign Ministers in Genoa called on Israel and the Palestinians to accept outside monitors to help implement a peace plan. At the end of the month, an Israeli helicopter fired three missiles at the Islamic Studies Center in Nablus, killing four Hamas leaders, two journalists and two boys.

After another suicide bombing in Jerusalem killed 17 people on 9 Aug., Israel launched an attack against Palestinian targets by land and air that lasted for several days and caused wide-scale destruction. In Jerusalem, Israeli forces occupied Orient House and sealed off other Palestinian institutions allegedly linked to the PA (which remain closed as we go to press). In a related show of force, a new Israeli police headquarters is established in the Damascus Gate area in mid-Aug. and additional observation cameras are placed throughout the Old City. Later that month, on 20 Aug., the UNSC convened to address the crisis in the OPT, incl. the occupation of the Orient House and other Palestinian institutions, but was blocked from taking action by US threats to veto. On 27 Aug. Israeli forces assassinated PFLP Sec. Gen. Mustafa Zabri (Abu Ali Mustafa) with two missiles fired at his office in Ramallah, triggering more violence. The next day, the Israeli army redeployed around Bethlehem and re-occupied parts of Beit Jala.

September began with Israel being branded a "racist apartheid" state by thousands of NGOs meeting in Durban, South Africa, at the UN conference against racism. But the events of the months were undoubtedly the multiple suicide attacks in the US where planes were crashed into the World Trade Center's Twin Towers in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, and in Pittsburgh. While Palestinians expressed shock at the attacks in the US, the Israeli army ceased the opportunity - the world looked at New York - invaded Palestinian areas and killed nine Palestinians.

On 17 Oct. PFLP activists assassinated far-right Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi at the Hyatt Hotel in East Jerusalem, in retaliation for the assassination of PFLP leader Abu Ali Mustafa in August. Hours later, Israel issued an ultimatum to Arafat to extradite the assassins and to outlaw militant Palestinian groups or face harsh retribution. On 19 Oct. Israeli tanks invaded Bethlehem, killing three, injuring dozens and causing wide-scale destruction. This was still topped by a raid of the village of Beit Rima, northwest of Ramallah, on 24 Oct., allegedly a hide-out for PFLP activists involved in the Ze'evi murder. During the incursion, the village was put under curfew and media and ambulances were banned from entering; ten Palestinians were killed and dozens more injured and arrested. Late Oct. saw also a new wave of house demolition in East Jerusalem neighborhoods.

On 9 Nov. President Bush, addressing the UN General Assembly, used for the first time the term "Palestine", stating, that the US is "working toward the day when two states - Israel and Palestine - live peacefully together within secure and recognized borders as called for by the Security Council resolutions." A similar boost came from Secretary of State Powell who announced in a 19 Nov. speech that Israel must end its occupation

"and accept a viable Palestinian State in which Palestinians can determine their own future on their own land and live in dignity and security." Towards the end of the month, amidst a new wave of violence, the new US envoy Anthony Zinni arrived in the region in yet another attempt to bring about calm and the sides back to the negotiating table.

After two suicide bombers blew themselves up in Jerusalem, killing 10 Israelis and wounding over 150, and a third explodes a bomb on a bus in Haifa, killing 10, on 1 and 3 Dec., Israel attacked Palestinian cities, killing two, injuring over 150 and destroying many PA offices and security locations as well as the three PA helicopters and the runway of Gaza Airport. On 11 Dec. Israeli forces started establishing an iron gate on the Ramallah-Jerusalem road near Qalandia checkpoint, resembling Erez crossing. As violence kept mounting, and the death toll raises, Pres. Arafat calls upon Palestinians to practice complete restraint, even when under attack. After a gloomy Eid Al-Fitr feast in the territories, Israel once more intensified the siege for Christmas and did not allow Arafat to travel to Bethlehem, a move widely condemned by the EU, the Vatican and the UN. The year ended with another six Palestinian martyrs who were ambushed and killed in two separate incidents in the Gaza Strip.