



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Security and Justice Providers post-War in Gaza: Institutional Shifts and Emerging Actors

2024



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2024

Special notes

This report was prepared in the period between January and October 2024. The content of the report represents the field reality for this period. Due to the deteriorating conditions and successive changes on the field in the Gaza Strip, there may be events that occurred after this period which is not included in this report.

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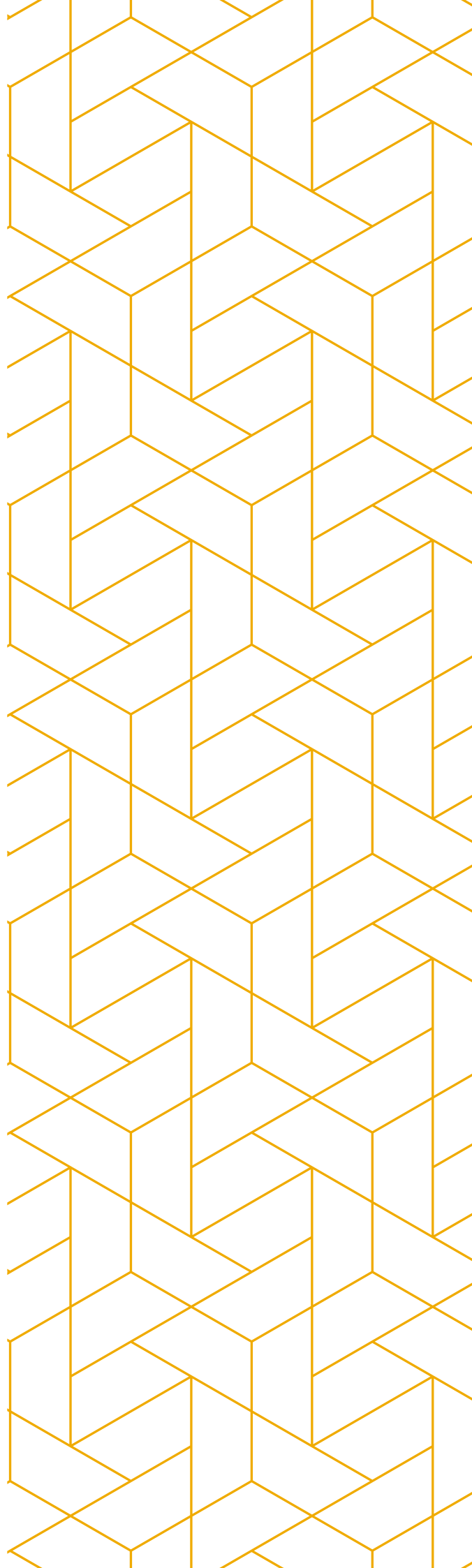
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Executive Summary

Since October 2023, the Gaza war has inflicted major suffering and a complete breakdown of vital services. Widespread displacement, casualties, limited access to food, water, shelter, education, and healthcare have severely impacted the lives of Gaza's residents. These conditions have profoundly reshaped the demand for and the nature of security and justice services, revealing significant changes in both the types of support required and the actors providing these services. This report aims to provide a thorough understanding of the actors currently involved in delivering security and justice services in Gaza. It assesses how the war has reshaped the security and justice sectors, examining the ability of these sectors to respond to the urgent and changing needs of Palestinians. This report is expected to serve as a foundational tool, assisting national, regional, and international stakeholders in designing future arrangements for security and justice for Palestinians. DCAF – the Geneva Center for Security Sector Governance will continue to produce background reports that identify the specific security and justice needs in the occupied Palestinian territory, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the local context.

Objectives of the report

This report provides an objective overview of all actors delivering security and justice services in the Gaza Strip. It identifies shifts in these sectors, focusing on how they have evolved to address the unique security demands imposed by the war and the changing needs of Gaza's population.

Methodology

The report is based on a rigorous, multi-tiered methodology to ensure a balanced analysis of Gaza's security and justice sectors.

1. **Individual Interviews:** Interviews conducted with Palestinian political representatives across the political spectrum to assess any shifts at the policy level since October 2023.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Interviews with representatives from Palestinian governmental bodies and security forces in the West Bank and Gaza to identify shifts in the institutional and legal framework.
3. **Field-Level Insights:** Engagement with providers of security and justice services to document interventions, field activities, and coordination mechanisms among local, regional, and international actors and interaction between these and the population.

4. **Community Feedback:** Surveys distributed and semi-structured interviews conducted with Gaza residents to provide insights into public perceptions of local security and justice providers on the ground, the types of services offered, their understanding of their own changing needs and the effectiveness of communication and coordination efforts.
5. **Desk Research:** A review of social media and official platforms of Palestinian security and justice providers, as well as reports and analysis provided by local and international organizations, as well as news organisations to track developments on the ground.

This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the actors in Gaza's security and justice sectors during the ongoing war and humanitarian crisis, as well as their responsibilities, and efforts to adapt.

Key Findings

The governance of Gaza's security and justice sectors is at a critical juncture that presents the following outlook:

1. **New security and justice tasks:** The war and the resulting mass displacement, the severe humanitarian crisis and the partial breakdown of social order have reshaped Palestinians' security needs. Consequently, security and justice institutions have had to extend their roles, taking on new tasks and functions beyond their traditional mandates.
2. **Institutional degradation and adaptation:** Security and justice sector infrastructure as well as personnel have been systematically targeted. Many institutions have ceased to function. Others, including the Civil Police, the Civil Defense and the Shari'a Judiciary have managed to partially adapt to the adverse conditions in the Gaza Strip with a series of ad-hoc measures.
3. **Emerging actors:** In response to the institutional collapse, new actors started to address the increasing security needs of Palestinians. These actors include temporary institutions created by the de-facto government of the Gaza Strip, including the emergency committees and the popular protection committees, as well as relief organisations and influential families and tribes.

Despite these adaptations, the medium to long-term restoration and sustainability of Gaza's security and justice sectors remains uncertain, requiring sustained large-scale reforms with determined international support that is aligned with the conditions of the context.

Introduction

Since the attacks on October 7, 2023, Israel initiated a large-scale war in the Gaza Strip, leading to a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. The war has resulted in massive loss of life, the displacement of around two million Gazans and the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure. Communities across Gaza are now facing unprecedented security threats, including acute shortages of food and clean water, the lack of basic health and rescue support, as well as rising levels of crime and instability. This situation has highlighted the urgent need for ensuring good governance of security and justice services even if at a minimal level.

However, the conflict has severely undermined all existing security and justice institutions. Numerous security and justice personnel have been killed, and the infrastructure has been systematically targeted. With the remaining providers overwhelmed, a significant gap has emerged in meeting the security needs of the population. This gap is increasingly being filled by a mix of new actors that are stepping in to provide basic services, such as influential tribal leaders and various local, regional, and international relief organizations. Some of these actors provide security and justice functions in the absence of other institutional arrangements.

The evolving security landscape in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) reflects a major shift in how security and justice is provided and addressed. The current situation requires refocusing on an inclusive people-centered approach, as opposed to a state-centered approach that puts the emphasis on the military, intelligence, and law enforcement bodies. Security provisions need to integrate both formal and informal actors and consider broader political, social, economic, and environmental factors. Ensuring good governance, democratic accountability, humanitarian needs, and the protection of human rights are all essential components of the comprehensive approach that is needed.

This report highlights the impact of the Gaza war since the 7 October 2023 and the radical changes in the security and justice sectors. The report underscores the importance of understanding security and justice within a broader people-centered approach supported by DCAF.

Box 1: Traditional vs. inclusive understanding of security and justice

Traditional understanding of security and justice services: State-centred approach run by military, intelligence and law-enforcement institutions.

Inclusive understanding: People and service-centred approach, which involves formal and informal, state and non-state actors. Understanding security and justice within broader considerations, including political, social, economic, environmental and other factors.

Interlinkages between security and development: Security, democracy, good governance, socio-economic development, respect for human rights, protection for marginalised groups are all linked and should not be treated separately.

The relevance of this report

In August 2023, DCAF published [“A Comprehensive Reference Guide to the Palestinian Security and Justice Sectors”](#). The guide provides a detailed account of the legal and institutional frameworks of the security and justice sectors in the occupied Palestinian territory. However, the significant changes since October 2023 have impacted all the sectors, in particular security and justice, and generated needs that have emerged due to severe humanitarian crisis and the intense and continuous violence. This has required to reassess the needs and the current state of the security and justice sectors to fully reflect the situation in the Gaza Strip today.

Addressing the security needs of Palestinians, rebuilding Gaza’s security and justice sectors, and developing effective local and regional security sector governance will require extensive international support. This support needs to be grounded in a comprehensive and informed understanding of the radical transformation undergone by the security and justice sectors in Gaza. This includes a realistic and detailed assessment of the current security challenges, the technical, institutional and personnel capacities that remain within these sectors, as well as the crucial role of emerging actors who have become increasingly involved in responding to emerging security and justice needs. Without such an understanding, support efforts are likely to fail or fall short of their objectives, further jeopardizing not only Gaza’s future governance but also regional stability.

The report is part of DCAF’s long-standing effort to advise and support improvements of security sector governance and reform in the oPt, in collaboration with the local and international community. The present report, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, builds on DCAF’s previous work supported by the European Union and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

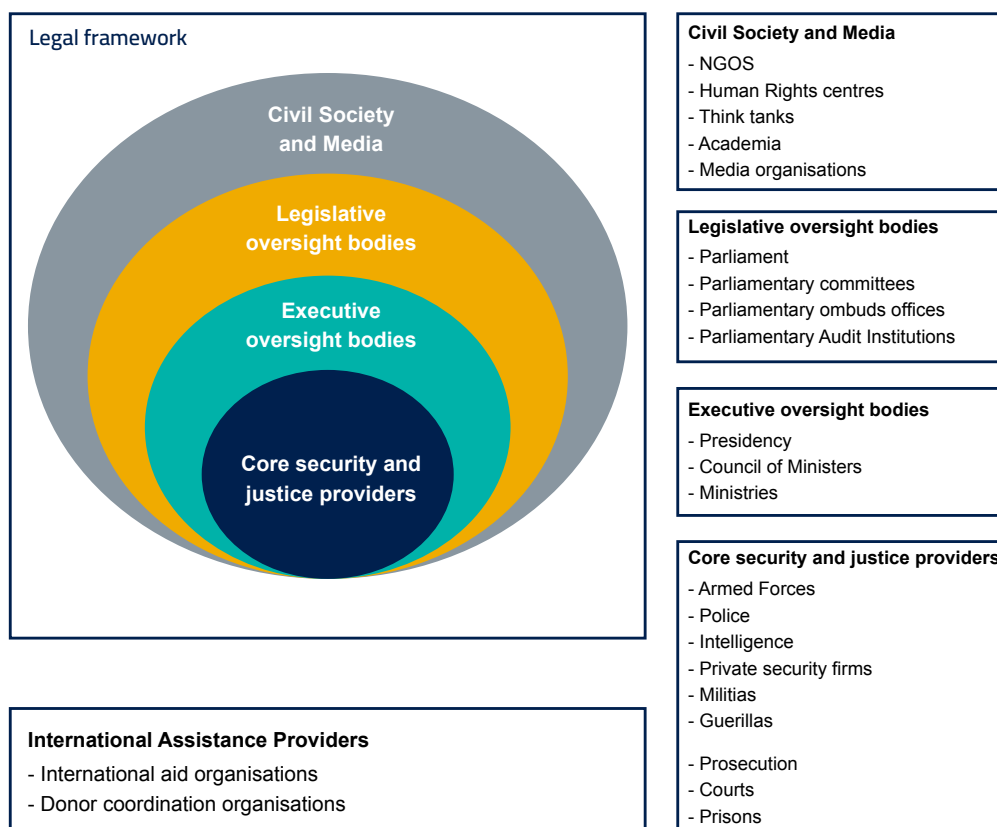
This report provides essential data needed to inform any future interventions by the international community. As such, it is meant as a resource to guide international experts and policymakers.

The scope of the report

This report focuses on the impact of the war on the security and justice sectors in the Gaza Strip. Given the interconnected nature of governance, the dramatic changes in Gaza have also affected the security and justice landscape in the West Bank. Therefore, this report also gives an update on legislative changes that currently apply only to the West Bank but could eventually extend to the Gaza Strip in the future.

The report takes a broad view of the security and justice sectors, covering all those institutions that are responsible for providing services to Gazans. This is based on an inclusive understanding of security and justice services as detailed in Box 1 above. This includes an emerging circle of actors that previously did not provide security and justice services. Due to the collapse of much of public life and the disruption of traditional security and justice services, informal security and justice providers have started to address urgent security needs, in complementarity to international, regional and local relief organisations involved in humanitarian aid coordination and protection. This broad view of the security sector is detailed below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Security Sector



This report covers the period from the outbreak of the war in October 2023 until July 31, 2024. Key information was updated up to October 2024. As the war continues to evolve, the findings presented here can only be considered as a preliminary assessment. However, even though developments on the ground may quickly make some data obsolete, the urgent need to understand and respond to these developments cannot be overstated.

Methodology and limitations

The report is primarily based on the collection and analysis of data from multiple sources. Between January and May 2024, DCAF field researchers conducted fieldwork in the Gaza Strip. Based on a set of guiding questions, researchers conducted more than 35 semi-structured interviews with government officials and experts in Gaza. Researchers visited affected areas and observed provisional security and justice mechanisms. Interviews were conducted wherever possible face-to-face. Due to the security situation and prolonged communication challenges, DCAF had to partially rely on online or phone interviews as well as written questionnaires. A second round of data collection was conducted in October 2024 in order to verify findings and address information gaps.

DCAF also held four consultative and dialogue sessions with focus groups in the West Bank, namely, high-level political representatives, representatives of the Palestinian security services operating in the West Bank, representatives of civil society organizations and the media, as well as representatives of the justice sector, including from the Ministry of Justice, the Public Prosecution, the regular judiciary, and the Shari'a judiciary.

Interview data was complemented by an extensive analysis and verification process of reports produced by human rights organizations, think tanks as well as international and local institutions.

The study faced four challenges that limited the amount and quality of data that realistically could be collected.

- **Security conditions:** The security situation posed a significant obstacle. DCAF had to ensure the safety of its field researchers, as well as of all interviewees. The rapidly shifting security situation prevented most on-site inspections of security and justice sector facilities. It also hindered communication with relevant security and justice authorities. Security personnel could not be reached or were hesitant to cooperate amidst the personal danger any exposure might entail.
- **Focus on civilian institutions:** DCAF had no access to those elements of the security sector actively involved in military operations. Therefore, the report remains focused on assessing the state of the civilian agencies, be they formal or informal.

- **Disruption of official websites:** Official websites of security agencies and justice sector institutions continue to be disrupted, preventing access to official communication. Some security agencies and institutions publish limited information on social media.
- **Limited data:** Data collection on the Gaza Strip is severely limited. Authorities of the de-facto government are not able to gather and publish data. Data from international organisations and researchers is scarce and outpaced by developments on the ground. Comprehensive data will only be available once the war ends.

Despite these challenges, we believe that this report provides a reasonably accurate assessment of the current state of the security and justice sectors in the Gaza Strip.

Contents of the report

Section 1: Contextual overview: This section provides a brief overview of the current security and justice sectors in Gaza. The section briefly summarises the current security and justice challenges, the emergence of new actors and the transformation of the structure of the security and justice sectors, using several graphics.

Section 2: Updated legal and institutional frameworks: This section details the legislative changes introduced by the authorities in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Section 3: Current state of the security sector in Gaza: This section provides a detailed examination of the current state of the security sector in Gaza, including the extent of its degradation, the efforts made toward adaptation, and the functions it currently performs. It also sheds the light on who is providing security in the Gaza Strip, and the type of security services that are being provided. The section also highlights in detail the new actors who have emerged to provide critical security services.

Section 4: Current state of the justice sector in Gaza: This section offers a detailed survey of the current state of the justice sector in Gaza. It assesses the extent of its degradation, the adaptations made and the functions it currently fulfils. It identifies the emerging actors who provide justice services, their role and the services they provide.

Section 5: Current state of oversight institutions in Gaza: This section provides a detailed analysis of the current state of oversight institutions in Gaza. It examines the extent of their degradation, the adaptation efforts, and the functions they currently perform.

Section 6: Conclusion: This section summarises the transformation of Gaza's security, justice, and oversight sectors, focusing on the dynamics of destruction, adaptation, and the emergence of new actors.

1. Structural changes in the security and justice sectors in the Gaza Strip

Before the war, the security and justice sectors in the Gaza Strip functioned according to the legislative framework adopted by the de-facto government. Yet, the war impacted the official structures profoundly. This section presents a brief overview of the changes that occurred in the current structure of both the security and justice sector in the Gaza Strip.

1.1 The emergence of new security and justice challenges

The war and resulting humanitarian crisis place unprecedented demands on the delivery of security and justice services in Gaza. Gazans urgently need safety, access to basic services such as clean water, food, and shelter, and access to humanitarian aid. As Israel's military operations intensified, nearly 2 million people — about 90% of Gaza's population — were displaced. Most followed Israeli military orders to relocate to the southern Gaza Strip, yet around 200,000 remain in the north under dire conditions. Approximately 1.8 million are now crowded into a small area near Al-Mawasi, close to Rafah and Khan Younis, an area corresponding to some 10% of the territory of the Strip, creating severe overcrowding and new security challenges, including social unrest, family disputes, and low-level violence.

High levels of food insecurity and limited humanitarian and commercial supplies have caused prices to soar. As desperation increases across Gaza, reports of gang violence and looting have surged, targeting stores, public buildings, and even humanitarian aid. Organised criminal groups potentially connected to some local communities or tribes, have increasingly looted already scarce aid convoys, particularly near the main border crossings at Kerem Shalom and, previously, Rafah.

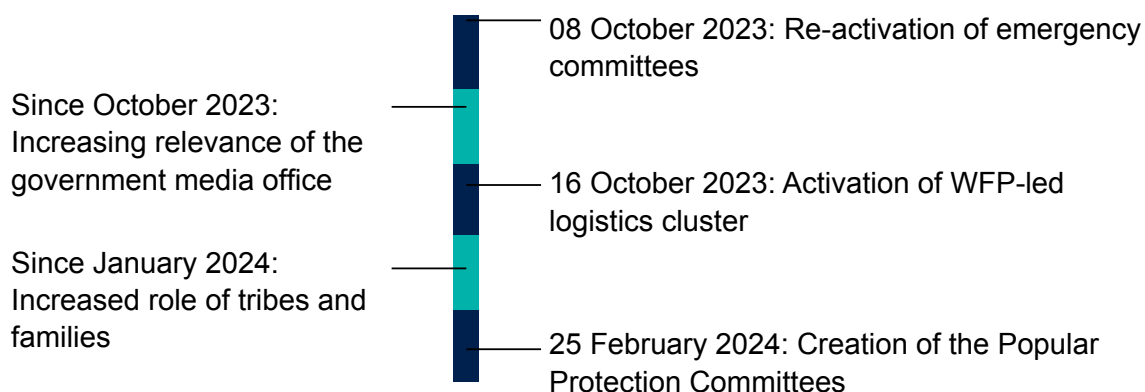
Despite the disruption of ordinary life under the war, the need for justice services persists. Legal disputes arise, newborns require birth certificates, divorces need to be filed and registered, custody issues must be settled, and death certificates issued. There is a need for accountability, and those accused of crimes should be detained, charged and tried. However, the deteriorated security and justice institutions struggle to address the numerous emerging challenges and needs effectively.

1.2 The emergence of new actors

To address these security and justice challenges, the de-facto government adapted and created new structures to partially fill the gap created by the degradation of official institutions. At the same time, new security and justice actors emerged to fill the gap in informal ways. Most notably, five actors emerged as key player in Gaza's security and justice sectors (see also Figure 2 below).

- A. The central and local emergency committees:** During the Covid-19 pandemic, the de-facto government established emergency committees to coordinate the emergency response. On 8 October 2023, exactly one day after the start of the war, the de-facto government re-activated these committees to facilitate government work during the war. This includes a central emergency committee and local emergency committees on governorate level. The central and local emergency committees became key players in coordinating the de-facto authorities' delivery of security and justice services.
- B. The government media office:** Since October 2023, many information channels of the de-facto government were destroyed and broke down. As the government media office retained some of its capacities to communicate with Gazans and media channels, it quickly became the key source of information on security developments.
- C. International, regional and local relief organisations:** As the war caused a massive and ongoing humanitarian emergency, more than 70 international relief organisations started operating inside Gaza. To coordinate the aid delivery among the organisations, with the Israeli authorities and local actors, the UN activated a dedicated logistics cluster. Relief organisations under the WFP-led cluster became critical in responding to the security needs of Palestinians in Gaza, providing essential goods, health services and shelter.
- D. Influential tribes and families:** While tribes and families played a role in Gaza even before the war, their role has significantly expanded, especially since January 2024. As more than 2 million Palestinians were displaced into the South of the Gaza Strip, tribes and families increasingly stepped up the provision of informal justice and security mechanisms.
- E. The Popular Protection Committees:** On 25 February 2024, the Central emergency committee passed a decision to create local community police forces and subsequently specified their tasks, mandate and appearance. The so-called Popular Protection Committees are mostly active in the overcrowded areas in the South of Gaza.

Figure 2: Timeline of new actors



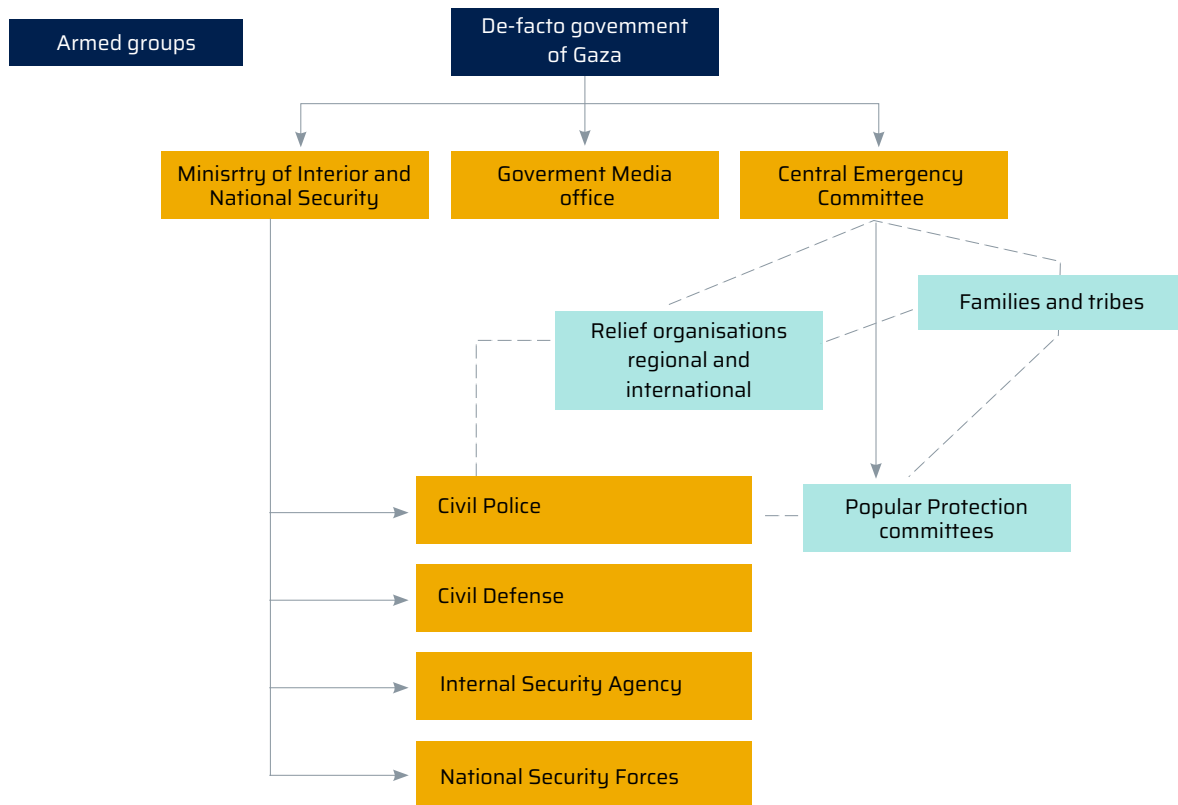
1.3 The current situation of the security sector

Despite the war and the degradation of public institutions as detailed by this report, the de-facto government still exercises some form of control over public institutions. The Ministry of Interior, in charge of all security forces, still finds ways to exert some of its functions, especially through services it provides. Yet, it operates under extreme restrictions and with severely limited capacities. For example, the ministry still issues birth certificates but only provides occasionally ad-hoc direction to security forces.

The work of daily government coordination has been largely delegated to the Central Emergency Committee and the local emergency committees. This is illustrated by their role in the coordination of humanitarian aid delivery, their communication with the families and tribes in the Gaza Strip as well as in creating the Popular Protection Committees and their mandate. However, government work does not flow according to clearly defined procedures and often depends on the initiative of individuals.

This partial vacuum has been filled by new actors as described above and results in changes to security sector as detailed below (Figure 3).

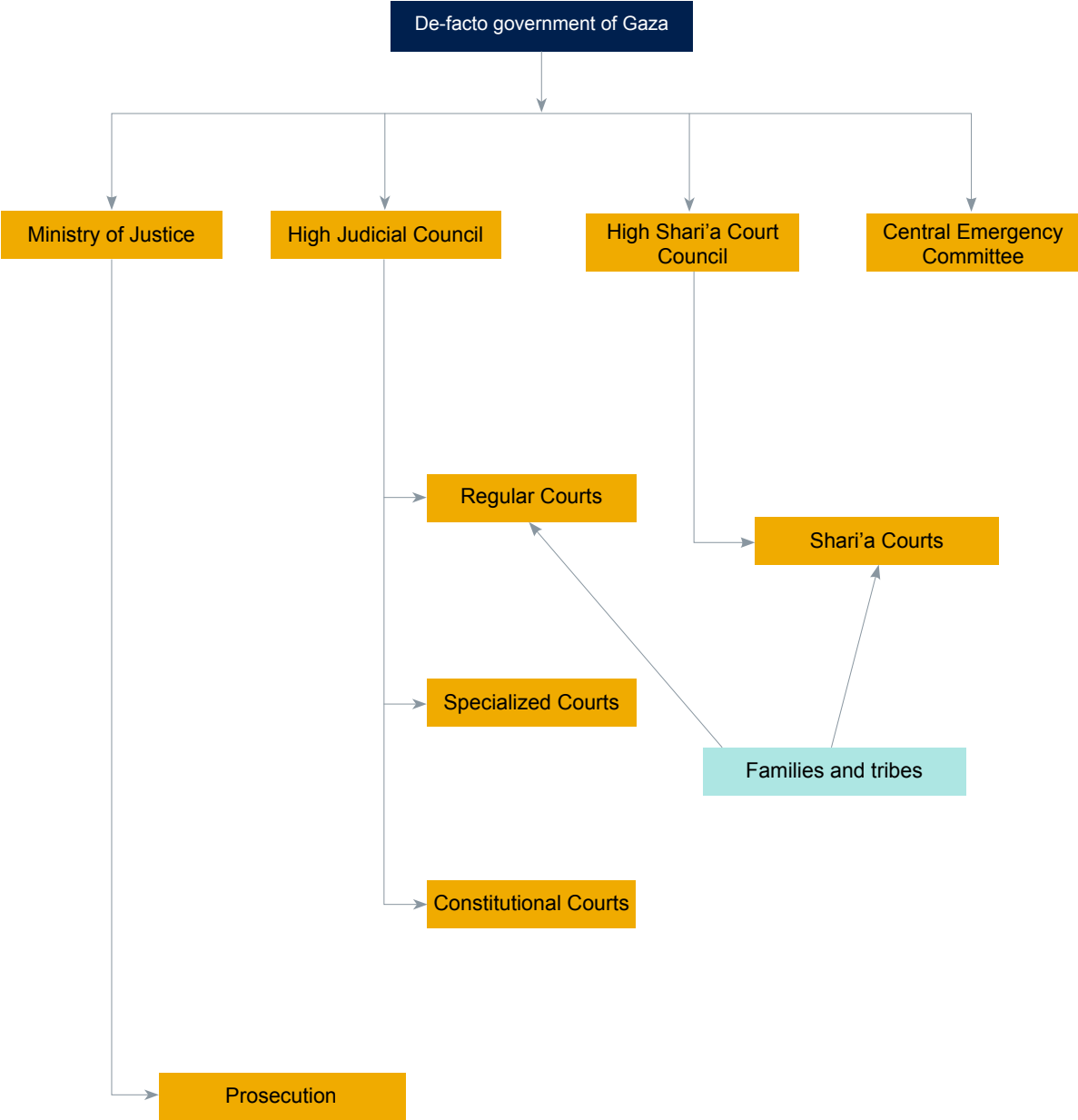
Figure 3: Gaza's current security sector



1.4 The current situation of the justice sector

The justice sector underwent similar transformations. Most official institutions ceased working as employees have scattered, and those attempting to work have no access to facilities nor to the required legal files. Importantly, in early October 2023, the High Judicial Council issued an administrative decision to suspend all operations in the regular courts until further notice. Informal conflict resolution mechanisms via traditional tribal practices have replaced much of the regular judiciary. Hence tribes and families became a critical aspect of the current justice system. The Shari'a court system is still operating, albeit in an ad-hoc, mobile fashion to address critical justice needs, such as issuing marriage and divorce papers. The current situation of the justice sector is shown below (see Figure 3).

Figure 4: Gaza's current justice sector



2. Legislative updates: Government reforms and decisions since October 2023

The security and justice sectors in the West Bank and Gaza continue to be governed by separate legal frameworks. Since the start of the war in October 2023, the de-facto authorities in the Gaza Strip did not issue any new legislation. However, as the security situation deteriorated in the West Bank as well, the newly established 19th Palestinian government adopted a series of laws and decisions aimed at enhancing the stability and performance of security institutions. The government also introduced a comprehensive reform plan to promote transparency, stability, and institutional coherence. Theoretically, the legislative changes apply to both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

2.1 A new government agenda

In March 2024, President Mahmoud Abbas announced the formation of the 19th government via presidential decree Law No. (3) of 2024. President Abbas emphasized that the new government must actively address not only the West Bank but all areas under its mandate including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. He also noted that the government had full authority to carry out wide-ranging institutional reforms to improve the performance, transparency and coherence of institutions. President Abbas stressed the need to maximize efforts for humanitarian relief and reconstruction in the Gaza Strip. As a result, the government re-structured and created several new ministries, including the Ministry of Relief Affairs.

Lastly, the government was tasked with preparing for legislative and presidential elections across all governorates, including in East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. President Abbas announced that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) would remain responsible for the peace process and for Palestinian reconciliation.

2.2 Legal reforms and updates regarding the security sector

Since the swearing in of the 19th government, several new decisions and laws have been taken that affect the security sector, which theoretically apply to both to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Article 43 of the Basic Law of 2003 states that the President can issue decrees with the power of law in cases of necessity that cannot be delayed and when the Legislative Council is not in session'. These decrees must be submitted to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) once it reconvenes, or they cease to have the power of law. The most important changes came as part of Law No. (7) of 2024. For a full list of changes to the legal framework governing the security sector, please consult Annex I.

Law No. (7) of 2024 issued on July 17, 2024 amended the Palestinian Security Forces Service Law No. (8) of 2005, which remains the key legislative text regulating the structure of the entire security sector and defines the mandates, functions and responsibilities vested in the different security forces. Amongst some minor changes, the amendments passed via Law No. (7) of 2024 granted the President, as Commander in Chief, more direct control over the security forces. It further centralized power in the Presidency, granting the president powers that contravene the amended Basic Law of 2003. Specifically, it circumvents the role of the government in directing the security forces which is contrary to Article 69, Paragraph 7 of the Basic Law. As a consequence, security forces cannot be held accountable by the PLC in the future.

2.3 Challenges and possible reform options

The Palestinian government continues to face significant challenges that present major obstacles in any reform effort. Among them is the continuing Israeli occupation, including the severe restrictions on government control in Areas B and C, the Palestinian political divide, ever more pronounced and entrenched since the 2007 split between Gaza and the West Bank, as well as the lack of financial resources, partially due to the Israel withholding of tax revenues. Yet, outstanding reform efforts and flaws in the security cooperation with Israel continue to undermine public trust in state institutions. Most Palestinians in the West Bank are dissatisfied with the performance of government institutions and most of them believe that corruption is widespread.¹

Addressing public trust will require sustained democratic reforms supported by international assistance to make the public and the security sector more responsive to the needs of all Palestinians. It simultaneously requires addressing the government's structural constraints, including a potential revisit and update of underlying frameworks (Oslo agreement, protocols thereof, etc.), that altogether hinder the Palestinian government's capacity to implement reforms in an efficient and meaningful way.

1 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (2024) Public Opinion Poll No. 92. See also Public Opinion Poll No. 91, and No. 90.

3. The security sector in Gaza since since October 2023

Israeli military operations systematically targeted Gaza's security sector institutions, severely damaging infrastructure, killing personnel and reducing their overall capacity. This degradation affected both military institutions and those providing strictly civilian services. The degradation of each institution will be explained further below in the report. Security institutions implemented a series of emergency measures to cope with these challenges, but their weakened state implies they can only meet a fraction of the current security demands. Consequently, new actors have emerged to fill the gaps left by the official institutions. Therefore, security in Gaza is provided by a combination of official bodies operating at reduced capacity and various new actors stepping in to bridge the shortfall.

The following section of the report examines the security sector within this broader context. After detailing the destruction of security sector infrastructure, this section covers the key security providers in order of their current significance: the central emergency committee (3.2), the Civil Police (3.3.), the Civil Defence (3.4), relief organisations (3.5.), tribes and families (3.6), the newly established Popular Protection Committees (3.7), the government media office (3.8), armed groups (3.9), the National Security Forces (3.10), the Internal Security Agency (3.11), and the military justice commission (3.12).

3.1 Damage to security sector infrastructure

Since October 2023, infrastructure in Gaza has sustained significant damage. Preliminary data gathered by the World Bank until the end of January 2024, estimated already a total damage worth of 18.5 billion, with more than 60% of all residential buildings in Gaza sustaining significant damage. 80% of this damage was estimated to have occurred in the governorates of Gaza, North Gaza, and Khan Younis.² This estimate is outdated. On 24 May, Israel started an intense military operation throughout the southern areas of Gaza, Rafah specifically. Military operations continue across various locations inside the Gaza Strip thus augmenting the magnitude of damage and destruction. As of 3 July, analyses indicated that 59% of all buildings in Gaza (not only residential) had been damaged.³ The war has created more than 42 million tons of rubble which, according to an estimation by the United Nations Environment

2 The World Bank (2024) Gaza Strip Interim Damage Assessment.

3 Van den Hoek, J. (2024) Gaza Damage Assessment. Available at: <https://x.com/JamonVDH/status/1811458108734210437> (accessed 10.09.2024). See also Palumbo et al. (2024) At least half of Gaza's buildings damaged or destroyed, new analysis shows. BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68006607> (accessed 10.09.2024).

Programme (UNEP), will take a decade to clear.⁴ A large quantity of debris is also contaminated, releasing hazardous substances.⁵ This data puts the destruction of much of Gaza's security sector infrastructure in context. DCAF's analysis indicates that at least 190 government buildings have been destroyed.

- **Police stations and facilities:** All 21 Gaza police stations have been bombed or shelled. All police training or storage facilities have been targeted. This resulted also in the destruction of large amounts of equipment.
- **Civil Defence facilities:** At least 13 of the 18 Civil Defence stations across the Gaza Strip have been destroyed or partially damaged. At least two stations have been looted. 131 ambulances have been targeted by Israeli forces.
- **Hospitals:** 33 of Gaza's 36 hospitals have been partially or completely destroyed. By early June 2024, only three hospitals remained operational. These three remaining hospitals operate far beyond their capacity and without sufficient medical supplies.
- **Safe zones and aid convoys:** Israeli airstrikes have repeatedly hit areas where relief organisations were providing services, including zones Israel designated humanitarian or "safe" zones. By end of May 2024, Israeli forces had carried out at least eight air strikes on aid workers' convoys and premises in Gaza since October 2023. This included the attack on an aid convoy by the organisation World Central Kitchen in April 2024, as well as airstrikes on the Kuwaiti Peace Camp, a designated safe zone in May 2024,⁶ and on the al-Mufti school in early October 2024 that was used as an UNRWA shelter.⁷

4 UNITAR (2024) Gaza: Debris Generated by The Current Conflict Is 14 Times More Than the Combined Sum of All Debris Generated by Other Conflicts Since 2008.

<https://unitar.org/about/news-stories/news/gaza-debris-generated-current-conflict-14-times-more-combined-sum-all-debris-generated-other> (accessed 13.09.2024).

5 Salem M. et al. (2024) A year on, Gazans wonder how to clear tonnes of war rubble from Israeli offensive. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/after-year-war-gazans-wonder-how-deal-with-tonnes-rubble-2024-10-06/> (accessed 10.10.2024).

6 Human Rights Watch (2024) Gaza: Israelis Attacking Known Aid Worker Locations. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/14/gaza-israelis-attacking-known-aid-worker-locations> (accessed 01.09.2024).

7 Durbin, A. and Wyre D. (2024) Israeli shelling of Gaza school kills at least 22. BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y8zj8qrn5o> (accessed 15.10.2024).

3.2 The development of emergency committees

Background: At the start of the war, the de-facto government in Gaza activated emergency protocols. These protocols included the establishment of a central emergency committee and local emergency committees at the governorate level. These committees, staffed by de-facto government employees, function as provisional government mechanisms since most ministries, including the Ministry of Interior and National Security, which oversees security institutions, reduced much of their regular operations. The de-facto government established the mechanism of the emergency committees via appropriate legislation in 2019 during the COVID-19 crisis.

The emergency committees act as a provisional executive, coordinating essential government functions. This includes liaising with various institutions that continue to operate during the war, including some ministerial staff and the remaining security forces. However, coordinating efforts across Gaza is challenging due to ongoing military operations and Israeli control of certain areas. For example, Israel established permanent control over the newly created 'Netzarim Corridor', effectively dividing Gaza into northern and southern zones. Additionally, Israel controls the Philadelphi Corridor along the entirety of the Gaza-Egypt border. Furthermore, the targeting of emergency committee members by Israeli forces has further hampered their work.

Adaptation

Over the course of the war, the emergency committees have adapted their operations:

- **Decentralization:** Operations have increasingly shifted to a locally driven and decentralized approach. While local emergency committees maintain loose coordination with the central emergency committee, each governorate manages its government response operations independently.

Current tasks and functions

As emergency response mechanisms, the committees focus on the most critical areas:

- **Government Functions:** The central and local emergency committees at the governorate level strive to coordinate and organize basic government services.
- **Coordination of humanitarian response:** One of the current roles of the emergency committees is to coordinate the humanitarian response with relevant actors, including international organizations. However, based on DCAF's discussions with international stakeholders, these committees seem not effectively

engaged with the international community, and their role might be more apparent in coordinating the aid directly with the local actors.

- **Official communications:** Government decisions are made by the emergency committees and communicated through an official spokesperson.
- **Supervision of security forces:** The emergency committees assist the Ministry of Interior in overseeing and facilitating the operations of security forces, including basic rescue and police services. The central emergency committee has also approved emergency measures such as the creation of the Popular Protection Committees.

3.3 The Civil Police

Background: The Civil Police is the main law enforcement organization of the de-facto government in Gaza and handles ordinary police functions, such as combating crime and upholding public order. Before the war, the Civil Police was staffed by around 8741 police officers working across 21 police stations in the Gaza Strip. Alongside the Civil Defence, the Civil Police is one of the least politicized security institutions in Gaza, focusing solely on civilian duties.

Since October 2023, police work faced severe adverse conditions. Official communication channels of the police remain disrupted. The police force has been operating with minimal personnel. A large proportion of the personnel, namely approximately 80% of police officers are currently not reporting to work. Many have been displaced. Many others have been killed by Israeli forces while performing their duty. Israel publicly describes police officers as legitimate military targets as part of Hamas' government structure, despite the Police being a strictly civilian force. As police work comes with severe security risks, even police officers who could take on police functions are reluctant to do so.

Adaptation

The remaining police force improvised and adapted to perform police functions. Adaptation is notable in four areas:

- **Mobile police stations:** Police forces have started relying on mobile police stations to show presence and allow Palestinian citizens to address the police. These forces are concentrated in so-called safe areas or humanitarian zones in the south of the Gaza Strip and avoid areas of active military operations.
- **Police mobile contact numbers:** Police forces have published several mobile phone numbers to substitute for the out-of-order free police hotline where citizens

can report crimes and request police assistance. This has been an adaptive tactic to minimize the targeting of police officers while performing policing services.

- **Local policing:** Police officers currently operate mostly without uniforms to reduce the danger of being targeted by military operations. When operating without uniforms, they usually wear distinctive markings to identify themselves as police and they carry police badges visibly. It is only in humanitarian safe zones, such as UNRWA shelters, that police wear uniforms.
- **Makeshift detention centres:** The Police set up improvised detention centres to apprehend individuals committing crimes where necessary and possible.
- **Community policing – Popular Protection Committees:** To address the shortage of police officers, the Civil Police in coordination with the central emergency committee encouraged the formation of local Popular Protection Committees, creating some form of community police model as described below. Reports indicate that some police officers returned to work, working for such committees, hoping to reduce the danger of being targeted by Israeli forces.

Current tasks and functions

Police work is restricted and carried out under threat to life. As such, police forces only exercise rudimentary police functions. At the same time, the police forces had to step up, taking on new tasks.

- **Coordinating and protecting humanitarian aid:** One of the key functions of the Palestinian Civil Police is coordinating the entry of humanitarian assistance into specific areas and ensuring its protection, often in collaboration with tribal and family structures, as well as the Popular Protection Committees. This protection has become increasingly vital as aid convoys are frequently looted, with looting becoming more organised and violent. Initially, looting took place sporadically. Now organised criminal gangs forcibly redirect entire convoys to pre-prepared warehouses, unload the goods, and sell them on the black market. The police work to safeguard humanitarian aid from such attacks and help maintain order among desperate crowds during aid distribution.
- **Maintaining order:** Police forces maintain a semblance of order in coordination with the Popular Protection Committees. Especially the overcrowded areas in the South of the Strip are prone to crime and unrest. Humanitarian officials frequently stress the danger of Gaza slipping into a complete state of chaos. In overcrowded areas, Police disperse riots and handle public disturbances by employing batons and, if necessary, firearms. If necessary, police give out warnings to those accused of criminal acts, and apprehended those accused of serious offences, such as murder, detaining and guarding such offenders in makeshift detention facilities. The police are active in traffic management in overcrowded areas following new waves of displacement, for example in Rafah.

- **Conflict resolution:** Police rely on traditional models of conflict resolution that hold certain authority in Palestinian society. For this, they collaborate with important families and community leaders, as well as with traditional mediators to resolve disputes between individuals and families amicably, including some that involved violence. Such conflict resolution approaches are crucial as detention centres and the judiciary are largely nonfunctional and accused offenders can therefore not be legally charged, tried or detained.
- **Price controls:** The police monitors market prices and handle complaints related to price gouging and racketeering, attempting to ensure fair trade practices.

Impact of limited policing

Despite these efforts, the war greatly hinders the police's ability to provide security and safety and enforce the law, and systematically erodes their capacity. According to data collected in the field, Israel continues to target police forces, even when they are coordinating, protecting and distributing humanitarian aid, and in the presence of large crowds. As of date, the police is only selectively capable of maintaining a minimum of public order, and only in some areas of the Gaza Strip. For example, much of the looting of humanitarian aid occurs in narrow corridors near the border crossings, where police presence is limited due to the risk of being targeted by Israel. Additionally, police struggle to safeguard basic rights and freedoms. This often affects those most vulnerable. Individuals, women in particular, often struggle to have their claims resolved, particularly in family law matters such as alimony or custody, where citizens frequently lack the ability to appeal to a state agency. Criminality levels are rising, especially in the Northern area of the Gaza Strip where incidents of looting private and government property are frequently reported.

3.4 The Civil Defence

Background: The Civil Defence in the Gaza Strip is responsible for protecting civilians and their property. It is tasked with protecting civilians, public and private infrastructure, as well as maintaining government functions in cases of natural and man-made disasters. This most notably includes rescue operations and firefighting. Before the war, the personnel strength of the Civil Defence was 736, operating across 18 stations across the Gaza Strip. Even before the war, the resources of the civil defence were very limited. According to international standards, 1 Civil Defence staff should serve per 1'000 population. As the Gaza Strip has a population of 2.1 million, only 1 Civil Defence staff served roughly 2'800 citizens.

Since the beginning of the war, the work of the Civil Defence faces severe difficulties. By early September 2024, more than 90 Civil Defence employees - over than 10% of

its staff - had been killed while performing their duty.⁸ At least 500 health care workers had been killed by the end of June 2024.⁹ The absence of any coordination mechanism with Israeli forces constitutes a significant danger for Civil Defence teams. According to information obtained by DCAF, Israel only coordinates with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) but has no direct coordination mechanism with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) with which the Civil Defence coordinates. The absence of direct coordination increased the danger of Civil Defence staff being targeted while performing their duty and forces the Civil Defence teams to conduct rescue operations including under bombardment and at great risk.

Adaptation

The Civil Defence had to adapt to still perform some rescue operations. Adaptation is notable in four areas:

- **Priority setting:** Civil Defence forces started quickly to set priorities in their work. Due to shifting military operations and the serious threat to life of civil Defence members on duty, the agency had to focus on reachable areas, delaying responses to calls for help from areas with active fighting. Equally, the Civil Defence had to prioritize rescuing injured Gazans, while leaving corpses under the rubble. Estimates put the number of those still under rubble at no less than 10,000 additional victims of the war.
- **Mobile phone numbers:** Similarly to the police, the Civil Defence published various mobile phone numbers to respond to calls for help, as the official hotline stopped functioning.
- **Manual labour:** Due to the shortage of heavy and increasingly even light equipment, its further deterioration due to the strain of countless rescue missions, as well as destruction by Israeli forces, the Civil Defence had to rely on manual labour, attempting to rescue victims under the rubble with their bare hands.
- **Volunteers:** When possible, Civil Defence members attempt to counter their serious lack of manpower by relying on volunteers, often neighbours of those who are under the rubble of bombed and collapsed houses.

8 Based on DCAF's interviews.

9 Medical Aid for Palestinians (2024) 500 healthcare workers killed during Israel's military assault on Gaza. Available at: <https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1598-500-healthcare-workers-killed-during-israelas-military-assault-on-gaza> (accessed 01.09.2024).

Current tasks and functions

By May 14, 2024, the Civil Defence Directorate reported that since October 7, 2023, Civil Defence teams carried out 37,500 rescue missions in Gaza - equivalent to 24 years worth of work before the war.

- **Rescue operations:** Since October 2023, Civil Defence teams have been carrying out first aid, firefighting and rescue operations, pulling citizens from the rubble, evacuating the injured to hospitals, and inspecting bombed buildings. Quickly, the main activity of the Gaza Civil Defence became rescue missions, rescuing people from under the rubble of targeted houses and evacuating the wounded to the few partially functioning hospitals.
- **Removing unexploded ordnances:** Rescue work is further complicated by the large number of unexploded ordnances across Gaza, often hidden beneath the rubble. In just the first three months, Israel dropped at least 45,000 bombs on Gaza of which roughly 10% failed to explode.¹⁰ Due to lacking equipment, Civil Defence members must remove such ordnances manually. As a result, ordnances are only cleared when absolutely needed.

Impact of limited Rescue Services

The severe shortage of manpower and equipment, as well as the restricted access and the dangerous working conditions, has severely impacted the work of the Civil Defence. Despite focusing on rescue missions, Civil Defence forces are oftentimes not able to retrieve victims in time. Rescue operations of individuals trapped below the rubble of multi-storey buildings are often completely impossible without the needed heavy equipment. Both challenges further increase the death toll among Palestinian civilians. Furthermore, the thousands of bodies decomposing across Gaza below the rubble increase the danger of fatal diseases and epidemics in the Gaza Strip, as WHO officials continue to warn.

¹⁰ Daou, Marc (2024) Unexploded bombs, a long-term threat to life in Gaza. France 24. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20240311-unexploded-bombs-long-term-threat-gaza-strip-israel-humanity-inclusion> (accessed 08.06.2024). See also: Amit, Hagai (2024) Israel's Form of Combat in Gaza Is Unusually Wasteful. Haaretz. Available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/magazine/2024-03-07/ty-article-magazine/.premium/its-a-war-of-cruel-rich-people-israels-form-of-combat-in-gaza-is-unusually-wasteful/0000018e-1aa8-d1cc-abfe-dfadbc010000> (accessed 25.06.2024).

3.5 Relief organisations

Background: Humanitarian relief organisations have been active in the oPt for decades, with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) being the most prominent organisation. Established in 1949, UNRWA has provided essential services to Palestinian refugees, both in the West Bank and Gaza. Before the war, a number of humanitarian organisations were already providing critical services to Palestinians in Gaza. In 2022, 80% of the residents of the Gaza Strip relied on, at least limited, assistance provided by international organisations, including access to education. 65% of Gazan residents lived below the poverty line without reliable food security.¹¹

A complex network of more than 70 relief organizations and missions currently operates in the Gaza Strip. Humanitarian organisations have arguably become one of the most important actors addressing pressing security needs such as widespread displacement and crisis levels of food insecurity.

These organisations include:

- **UN organisations such as UNRWA**, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Food Program (WFP)
- **Humanitarian organizations** such as the the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS).
- **Regional organisations** including the Emirati, Jordanian and Egyptian Red Crescents
- **Bilateral aid and medical missions**, mostly from Arab countries. Additionally, the United States made efforts at humanitarian assistance. The US military installed a temporary port in the Gaza Strip at a cost of approximately ۳۲۰ million USD. While the port was somewhat operational for ۳۰ days, it was subsequently dismantled and did little to improve the humanitarian situation.
- **A large number of INGOs** such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Mercy Corps, Oxfam, World Central Kitchen (WCK), Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) and Action Against Hunger.

Relief organisations operating in the Gaza Strip face numerous challenges. The entry of humanitarian aid has been severely restricted by the Israeli authorities. Relief organisations have consistently complained about Israeli obstacles that complicate the entry and distribution of aid, in particular long-waiting times for security checks and

11 UNCTAD (2024) Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (TD/B/71/3). pp.10-11.

very restrictive dual-usage lists that prevent essential humanitarian equipment from entering.¹²

Additionally, reaching all areas of the Gaza Strip remains difficult. Any movement outside of the humanitarian safe zones must be coordinated with the Israeli authorities and must pass Israeli security check points inside Gaza. Road conditions make transportation across the Strip slow, unexploded ordnances make it dangerous, needing mine-reconnaissance teams, and active military operations interfere with scheduled deliveries and makes storage of items challenging. For the past months, the only entry point of humanitarian aid to Gaza was Kerem Shalom (Abu Salem) in the Southeastern border with Egypt. Moreover, Israel stopped granting permission to nearly all aid convoys to travel from the South of Gaza to the North. Only very few organisations are allowed to bring in humanitarian goods via the border crossing points in the north of the Strip (Erez and Gate 96).

Furthermore, humanitarian organisations have repeatedly reported the looting of aid trucks, and at times the looting of entire aid convoys consisting of dozens of trucks. Some evidence points towards organized criminal gangs, possibly linked to local groups that controlled certain smuggling routes into the Gaza Strip before the war. Unlike the private sector, UN and international organisations do not hire security personnel for protection for their convoys. Hence, they rely instead on local Palestinian actors such as civil society organisations and clan elders (mukhtars) to receive and protect convoys.

Lastly, humanitarian staff and convoys have been targeted, resulting in numerous casualties. By the end of April 2024, the United Nations reported that 254 aid workers had been killed, marking an unprecedented level of danger for humanitarian personnel.¹³ The highest profile incident was the killing of seven aid workers of World Central Kitchen on 1 April 2024. Incidents like this occur despite the existence of coordination channels through which the logistics cluster provides detailed information about convoy routes and operational zones to the Israeli military. However, most of the casualties are local Palestinian staff whose killing does not receive the same media attention.

Adaptation

To continue delivering aid under these hostile conditions, humanitarian organizations have adapted in several ways:

12 GISHA (2024) High Court Petition. Available at: <https://gisha.org/en/aid-access-now/>. (accessed 01.10.2024).

13 OCHA (2024) Humanitarian Access Snapshot - Gaza Strip, 1-30 April 2024. Available at: <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-access-snapshot-gaza-strip-1-30-april-2024> (accessed 01.09.2024).

- **Activation of the logistics cluster:** To support the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the UN activated a dedicated Logistics Cluster on 16 October 2023 under the leadership of the World Food Programme (WFP). The Cluster ensures coordination between the many humanitarian organisations, the Israeli coordination and liaison administration (CLA) as well as Palestinian authorities and organisations. Despite the coordination with the CLA, there is reportedly no direct coordination with the Israeli forces on the ground. This introduces another set of difficulties when moving aid as local commanders can override CLA's approval for movement inside the Gaza Strip.
- **Coordination with Civil Police and Popular Protection Committees:** Aid delivery increasingly relies on local forces, including civil police and Popular Protection Committees, for both protection and distribution. Amidst an increasing security breakdown in many areas of Gaza, this protection is essential. Official agreements between humanitarian organizations and these security providers have been established to ensure the safe delivery of aid.
- **Coordination with civil society:** Organizations have limited access to Palestinian citizens and limited capacities to distribute aid across Gaza. As a solution, relief organisations partner with local organisations such as the Ma'an Development Center, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS), Juzoor for Health & Social Development, and the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC). Direct aid distribution is normally facilitated by local organizations which coordinate with Palestinian families, tribes, and the emergency committees who can then directly distribute the aid, reaching the local population.

Current tasks and functions

- **Purchase of goods:** Relief organizations purchase goods for local actors to distribute.
- **Provision of humanitarian aid:** Relief organizations are primarily focused on delivering basic necessities, such as food, clean water, and essential items. This includes the distribution of food parcels, hygiene kits and blankets. Organisations also work to establish temporary shelters.
- **Provision of basic food items:** Relief organizations not only deliver items directly to those in need of food and medicine, but also work with local refugee kitchens and bakeries to provide them with basic ingredients, such as flour or rice. However, due to the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure ready-food items are of particular importance as most Gazans have lost access to cooking and storage facilities.
- **Provision of emergency medical aid:** The provision of emergency medical aid has become a top priority. Relief organizations deliver medical supplies, established

makeshift hospitals and created mobile medical units to reach other areas. International medical teams work alongside local doctors and local organizations to provide critical care.

3.6 Tribes and influential families

Background: Tribal and family structures have long played a central role in Palestinian society, providing informal representation and justice mechanisms. Given the organizational structure in Gaza, influential individuals, such as elderly men, those with economic power, neighbourhood leaders, and family and extended family networks play a crucial role. Three key mechanisms highlight the significance of this system: first, in 2008, the de-facto government established the General Administration for Clan Affairs and Societal Conciliation (GACASC), mirroring the Palestinian Authority's Office for Tribal Affairs and Reconciliation. GACASC acts as an official liaison between recognized clan elders (mukhtars) and the de-facto government. Second, in 2011, the de-facto authorities mandated that all clans establish a family council. These councils represent all sub-groups within a clan and resolve matters through a somewhat democratic process. Third, the de-facto government restructured the informal law system, a socio-political institution within the tribal system, which involved the creation of community-based reconciliation committees. By 2011, these had grown to 41 committees with 700 members. Each committee has a designated focal point at the nearest police station.

These various tribal and family structures have both supported and, at times, conflicted with the official justice system. Given the limited resources of the formal justice system, the de-facto authorities relied on these informal mechanisms to complement official institutions. Several polls indicate that Gazans place greater trust in the tribal system than in the formal court system.¹⁴

As the war, displacement and the humanitarian crisis continue, traditional and informal systems offered by influential families and tribes are filling gaps left by the formal security and justice institutions. Family and tribes build on their long-standing commitment to the social fabric of Palestinian society in Gaza.

Adaptation

- **Increasing informality:** The activities of tribes and families have become less structured. Official communication between families and their designated points of contact with the police and the General Administration for Clan Affairs and Societal Conciliation (GACASC) is no longer possible. In response to this breakdown, tribes

14 Tuastad, D. (2021) ' Hamas and the clans: from Islamisation of tribalism to tribalization of Islamism?', *Third World Thematics*, 6(1-3), pp. 88-104.

have established some ad-hoc tribal committees to discuss and jointly address security and justice issues, including the delivery and protection of humanitarian aid.

- **Increasing reliance on community leaders:** As semi-official tribal structures are currently not functioning, well-placed individuals of influential families and tribes, including those previously holding the semi-official position of mukhtar, but also otherwise individuals with social and economic capital, have taken the lead in coordinating for their respective communities.

Current tasks and functions

- **Coordination and protection of humanitarian assistance:** Clans and families mobilized armed family members to protect humanitarian goods. These efforts are conducted in coordination with the emergency committees and the civil police. Tribal committees also work closely with humanitarian organisations with whom they have reached informal agreements to safeguard, coordinate, and deliver humanitarian aid. Amidst the collapse of public institutions, such coordination has become increasingly central to the international emergency response.
- **Protection of private sector businesses:** A few well-connected individuals, most likely linked to tribes that Israel may aim to rely on for future governance in Gaza, have been granted permission by Israeli authorities to import and sell goods in the Gaza Strip. These individuals frequently employ family members to protect trucks and shops from looting. There are also reports of negotiations with looting gangs for protection payments and instances where import licenses are resold at high prices to other traders.
- **Reconciliation and arbitration:** In the absence of a functioning formal court system, tribal committees have taken on the responsibility of resolving disputes between individuals, delivering arbitration justice, and attempting to maintain order and discipline within communities.
- **Long-term governance:** The Israeli government has attempted (and may continue to attempt) to recruit influential families and tribes as an alternative to the institutions of the de facto government. However, Palestinian tribes and families have so far firmly rejected these proposals in several public statements following internal consultations. These efforts are reminiscent of the Village Leagues in the late 1970s, when Israel sought to co-opt local Palestinian leaders against established Palestinian institutions and civil society.

3.7 The Popular Protection Committees (PPC)

Background: On 25th February 2024, the central emergency committee announced the formation of new community policing bodies named Popular Protection Committees (PPC) for the southern areas of Gaza. Subsequently, the exact tasks and appearance of the PPCs were specified. All members must wear black and a headband displaying the words “Popular Protection Committees”, constituting an alternative, informal uniform. They are allowed to conceal their faces with a mask and are equipped with batons.

The Popular Protection Committees play a critical role in supporting the remaining security forces in Gaza addressing the new and urgent security needs of the population. Officially tasked with several responsibilities, these committees have become indispensable in maintaining a minimum level of public order in the overcrowded areas in the South of the Gaza Strip. Yet, their work remains ad-hoc and not very well-organised and structured.

Current tasks and functions

- **Price monitoring:** In collaboration with the police, the PPC monitors market prices and addresses complaints related to price gouging and racketeering. Their work ensures fair trade practices and access to goods at relatively affordable prices. Before their intervention, prices for essential goods, such as sugar, had skyrocketed. For example, the price of sugar reached \$20 per kilogram. Nevertheless, access to goods remains difficult for many Gazans and prices continue to fluctuate.
- **Protection of humanitarian aid:** In coordination with the police and tribal structures, the PPC helps protect and distribute humanitarian aid, striving to ensure that it reaches those most in need fairly and efficiently.
- **Maintaining order:** The PPC also assists the police in maintaining order, often stepping in where police presence is lacking. In the overcrowded areas of the southern Gaza Strip, particularly in Rafah, where the population has exploded to over a million due to mass displacement, the committees play a vital role. They patrol the streets and markets, helping to prevent crime and unrest. Their presence provides a minimal assurance of governance and social order.

3.8 The Government Media Office

Background: The Government Media Office is the official body responsible for managing and disseminating information on behalf of the de-facto government in the Gaza Strip. It serves as the main communication channel of the de-facto authorities in shaping perceptions and narratives of events in the Gaza Strip. It plays a similar role as the Government Media Centre of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Since October 2023, the government media office has become increasingly important amidst the breakdown of other channels of communications. As a result, the Government Media Office became the key source on developments in the Gaza Strip, especially regarding security matters. Yet, it also faces significant restrictions due to safety issues, power outages and reliable access to data.

Adaptation

To continue providing information the Government Media Office has adapted in several ways:

- **Social media usage:** When its official website became unreachable, the Government Media Office started to rely more heavily on social media platforms, especially Telegram, Facebook, and Instagram. It also communicates more often directly with media outlets to share information.
- **Improvised Media Conferences:** Press conferences are held ad-hoc in various locations, often using basic setups in the streets.

Current Tasks and Functions

Daily media outreach: The Government Office reaches out to the local and international media daily. This includes issuing press releases, organizing press conferences and arranging interviews.

Information on security developments: The Government Media Office shifted its focus nearly exclusively on providing information on security developments. It continuously provides updates on casualty figures, including those for civilians, journalists, and healthcare workers. It has also intensified its efforts to document infrastructure damage. The office started commenting frequently on evacuation routes labelled as safety corridors by the Israeli authorities, often questioning their safety and advising caution.

Public Relations: The office works to promote the image and political positions of the de-facto government in Gaza. It seeks to counter official Israeli narratives in the media and to highlight the impact of Israeli military actions and Israeli policies regarding the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid.

3.9 Armed groups and militias

Background: Gaza's informal security sector includes a multitude of armed groups affiliated with political factions. These armed groups include most notably the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades - the military wing of Hamas, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades - the military wing of Fatah, as well as the Al-Quds Brigades - the military wing of the Islamic Jihad movement, and the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades - the military wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. These groups take on quasi-military functions.

Current functions

Based on reports, DCAF observes the following activities for armed groups.

- **Influencing negotiations:** Personnel from Hamas is involved in indirect negotiations with Israel via Qatari and Egyptian mediators. While negotiations are led by the Hamas Political Bureau, proposals and potential agreements are clearly subject to influence by the armed wing and would have to be approved by both the Hamas Political Bureau as well as the armed Hamas leadership in Gaza.
- **Military operations:** Armed groups remain heavily engaged in fighting Israeli forces in various locations of the Gaza Strip. Operations are carried out under strict secrecy, away from their usual facilities and training sites that were heavily targeted by Israeli forces.
- **Level of operation:** Armed groups remain functional. Early June estimates by various sources put Hamas' strength at half of its initial strength of 35,000 fighters.¹⁵ Hamas' sources claimed it had lost only 6,000 fighters by end of April 2024. Such numbers are roughly in line with The Institute for the Study of War, a US-based think tank which assessed in early August that of the 19 Hamas battalions originally stationed in North and Central Gaza, only two have been destroyed, 9 are degraded but functional, and 5 remain combative effective.¹⁶ This is in line with

15 Hoffmann B. (2024) How Much of a Threat Does Hamas Still Pose to Israel? Council of Foreign Relations, Expert Brief. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/how-much-threat-does-hamas-still-pose-israel> (accessed 01.09.2024).

16 Qiblawi T. et al. (2024) Netanyahu says 'victory' over Hamas is in sight. The data tells a different story. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2024/08/middleeast/gaza-israel-hamas-battalions-invs-intl/> (accessed 01.09.2024).

other assessments. Overall, militants remain capable of engaging Israeli troops and sporadically launching rockets towards Israel.

- **Weapons and munitions:** Armed groups possess a variety of small arms and light weapons. Especially, the Hamas' Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades are relatively well equipped. Arms include assault rifles, sniper rifles, heavy machine guns, mortars, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft rockets. Armed groups also possess many short- and medium range rockets and increasingly employ commercially available drones.

3.10 The National Security Forces

Background: The National Security Forces can be described as a first basis for a future Palestinian army. Contrary to the West Bank, the National Security Forces are a relatively small force in Gaza.

DCAF can currently not assess the activities of the National Security Forces. Even though DCAF has no evidence, it can be assumed that the National Security Forces have been absorbed into current Hamas military operations.

Current functions

Based on reports, as well as statements from Israeli and Palestinian sources, DCAF observes the following activities for the National Security Forces.

- **Military operations:** DCAF assumes that the National Security Forces remain engaged in fighting Israeli forces in various locations of the Gaza Strip. All training or operational facilities are destroyed and non-operational.
- **Weapons and munitions:** The National Security Forces are less armed than the armed groups operating in the Gaza Strip, especially in comparison to the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Weaponry includes small arms and light weapons.

3.11 The Internal Security Agency

Background: The Internal Security Agency is the internal intelligence organization of the de-facto government and its main purpose is to prevent and investigate crimes against governmental interests. This includes combatting espionage and providing information to the political leadership to support planning and decision-making, protecting officials and foreign delegations, and developing contingency plans for the movement and communications of government figures and leaders in case of emergency.

As the Internal Security Agency's function is closely aligned with military activities, little reliable information exists regarding its current numbers and activities since the start of the war. Like other government institutions, Israel considers all members of the agency to belong to Hamas, and therefore as combatants and legitimate targets. All known facilities of the Internal Security Agency have been destroyed entirely, and many of its leaders across all governorates have been assassinated by Israeli forces. Despite the war, the Internal Security Agency continues to conduct limited activities with limited resources.

Adaptation

The Internal Security Agency staff adapted in different ways to continue operating.

- **Civilian clothes:** Members of the Internal Security Agency stopped using their uniforms, working entirely covertly.
- **Covert facilities:** Members started operating decentralised from secret, ad-hoc facilities.

Current tasks and functions

Task and Functions The war shifted the focus of the Internal Security Agency.

- **Counter-espionage:** The Internal Security Agency shifted much of its focus to identifying collaborators and uncovering political crimes and agents in the Gaza Strip.
- **Protection of delegations:** The Internal Security Agency also plays a vital role, in coordination with the civil police, in securing visiting delegations, including medical teams and foreign aid supervisors, in coordination with police.
- **Coordination of delegations:** The Internal Security Agency continues its mission to protect and coordinate the entry of foreign and international delegations into the Gaza Strip together with the Civil Police. Currently, delegations entering are usually medical delegations and aid convoys. Since the takeover of the Rafah crossing point by Israeli forces, its forces have stepped back even more.

4. The Justice Sector in Gaza since October 2023

Operations of the justice sector have come to an almost complete halt. Even a highly optimistic assessment suggests that the judiciary is functioning at only 4% of its pre-war capacity. In the following section, the report examines in detail the impact of the war on the functioning of the courts, as well as its effects on other institutions that support the judiciary in its role of delivering justice. Most notably, informal tribal mechanisms for resolving disputes have gained prominence.

4.1 Judicial infrastructure

The infrastructure of the justice sector in the Gaza Strip has been severely damaged if not completely destroyed. Most judicial buildings such as courts have been bombed, shelled or raided by Israeli forces, often leading to extensive fires. Subsequently, courthouses have been looted by criminal mobs. The damage is extensive, both regarding the building structures itself, but also in terms of damage to fixtures, equipment, and documentation. This includes widespread damage to judicial archives, including judicial files as well as administrative and technical reports. To date, only a few buildings remain intact. DCAF expects that further damage will occur as the war continues.

Key buildings that have been damaged are:

- **The Palace of Justice:** The Palace of Justice is the main judicial complex in Gaza, housing the High Judicial Council, as well as the Administrative Court, the Court of Appeal, Gaza City First Instance Court, and Gaza's Magistrate Court. The complex also contained the main judicial archive of Gaza, containing hundreds of thousands of files. Israeli forces stormed the Palace of Justice and eventually destroyed it completely through a controlled explosion.
- **The High Shari'a Court and Council:** The High Shari'a Court and Council suffered partial damage due to shelling by Israeli tanks, causing a fire inside the building. Furthermore, the building was looted by gangs after the security guards were killed or dispersed by Israeli military actions. 80% of the court's files are estimated to have been damaged.
- **The Military Justice Commission:** The offices of the Military Justice Commission, including all military courts and the facilities of the military prosecution, suffered total destruction due to shelling and subsequent controlled demolition by Israeli forces. This included the destruction of all archives and case files.
- **Public prosecution:** Most of the Public Prosecution's offices were targeted by Israeli forces, suffering extensive damage. The remaining offices were looted by criminal gangs.
- **The Regular and Shari'a Lawyers' Syndicates:** The offices of the lawyers' syndicates in Gaza City and Khan Yunis were shelled and partially destroyed. It is reported that at least 5,000 lawyers are still working in the Gaza Strip.

Other buildings with judicial functions, including regular courthouse complexes that were destroyed, damaged or looted, are the North Gaza courthouse complex, the Khan Yunis courthouse complex and the Rafah courthouse complex. Each complex houses the respective First Instance and Magistrate Courts. Shari'a courts that were damaged

or looted are the Gaza City Shari'a Court of Appeal, the Khan Younis Shari'a Court of Appeal, the North Gaza Shari'a Primary Court, the Jabalia Shari'a Primary Court, the Sheikh Radwan Shari'a Court, and the Khan Younis Shari'a Primary Court.

4.2 The regular judiciary

Background: The jurisdiction of regular courts includes all disputes and crimes except for those excluded by special provisions of the law.

since October 2023, the activities of the regular courts have come to a complete halt. At the outset of the war, the High Judicial Council in the Gaza Strip promptly issued an administrative decision to suspend all operations in the regular courts until further notice. This period was officially designated as a suspension, during which all legal time limits were paused. Members of the judiciary, including the High Court, have been unable to reorganize, meet or even communicate effectively with their respective institutions, as communication remains excessively difficult due to prolonged communication and internet outages. In addition, judicial staff has been displaced, and their offices have been bombed or shelled.

This is in stark contrast to previous crises. During previous crises and wars, including the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the Gaza war in 2014, the courts always continued to function partially. Especially judges responsible for detention aspects, such as extending detentions or releasing defendants, continued their work. Due to the scale of this war, most detainees have been released by the security forces to protect them from attacks on prison facilities.

Adaptation

The regular judiciary ceased all normal functions. Considering the requirement of official proceedings for judicial activities to take place, it proved nearly impossible for the regular judiciary to adapt.

Current tasks and functions

All regular judicial work of the regular courts came to a halt. Still, some members and staff of the judiciary participated in emergency activities.

- **Travel ban review committee:** Widespread displacement across the Gaza Strip led to a wave of refugees attempting to cross into Egypt via the Rafah border crossing point. As a response, the central emergency committee recommended the formation of a specialised judicial committee to review existing travel bans. Such bans prohibit certain convicts from leaving Gaza due to crimes committed

or financial debts. Such individuals faced the obstacle of not being able to obtain a review of their status from the competent authorities in the midst of the war. The newly formed committee reviewed existing travel bans and issued new bans for individuals recently charged with committing serious crimes. Members of this committee included regular and Shari'a judges as well as members of the public prosecution.

- **Protection of courthouse complexes and recovery of files:** Some judicial employees are engaged in securing files, hard drives and computers from court premises. This led to the partial recovery of some important files and electronic copies. Yet, secured files remain only a fraction of those that have been destroyed or not accounted for.

Impact of the legal suspensions

The absence of the police was also exploited to provide an opportunity for some parties to the litigation to change the facts of the cases being handled by the courts, which led to the complication of these cases and the misleading of justice.

4.3 The Shari'a judiciary

Background: The Shari'a judiciary in Gaza handles personal status matters of Palestinian Muslims in the Gaza Strip. This includes matters related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Before the war, the Shari'a courts operated across 13 courts. They perform not only critical judicial but also documentation services, such as issuing marriage certificates.

The onset of the war significantly disrupted the functioning of the Shari'a judiciary, causing extensive damage to their infrastructure and paralysing nearly all court functions.

Amidst intense bombardments of the Gaza Strip, many employees of the Shari'a system refrained from offering services, fearing the intentional targeting of crowds that usually gather when official services, such as marriages are performed. Additionally, a significant number of employees either fled the country or moved south, while others were killed. DCAF could not obtain a reliable estimate of the current number of judges still performing some, even very limited, functions.

Critically, files of the Shari'a judiciary are potentially completely lost since Gaza's Shari'a courts primarily rely on paper archiving. Case files, transcripts, judgments, and decisions are stored manually in hardcopies. Electronic archiving is only used for marriage contracts and divorce records and are electronically stored on government

computers with backup copies kept on external storage devices by the Shari'a judiciary. The fate of the data on government computers is currently unknown, as communication with the relevant authorities could not be established. The backup data held by the Shari'a judiciary was destroyed when the relevant buildings were shelled.

Adaptation

In response to the challenges posed by the war, the Shari'a judiciary employees have undertaken several measures to continue providing essential services at a level barely meeting the minimum requirements for the population.

- **Personal visits:** To provide citizens with much-needed judicial services, including the issuance of marriage certificates, judicial staff provided mobile services, visiting and coordinating with refugee shelters.
- **Mobile numbers and temporary locations:** To avoid being targeted by Israeli forces, the judiciary published contact numbers for citizens to request court services via temporary locations.
- **Alternative energy supply:** The judiciary faced significant logistical hurdles, including a severe shortage of printers, ink, paper, and most notably access to electricity. With the power supply disrupted by a blockade on fuel, judicial staff had to rely on solar energy to operate computers and print documents.

Current tasks and functions

Despite the severe disruptions, the Shari'a judiciary has managed to maintain some critical activities, albeit in a limited capacity:

- **Marriage documentation:** Despite the war, the demand for legal documentation of marriages continued. To prevent the spread of unregistered customary marriages that could lead to human rights violations or legal disputes, some Shari'a courts began operating at minimal capacity. Under the supervision of Shari'a judges, judges or court employees began to document marriages, divorces and other legal operations among the displaced population, often relying on visits to refugee shelters or homes.
- **Other documentation services:** Other necessary documentation, such as divorce certificates was provided at temporary and mobile locations after discrete coordination through the published mobile phone numbers.
- **Travel ban committee:** Shari'a judges participated in the newly formed committee that reviews existing travel bans. As noted, the committee is now inactive, as Israel took control over the crossing points with Egypt.

- **Securing court assets:** Court officials made efforts to reach courthouse complexes to secure computers, hard drives and electronic and hardcopy archives that survived the military operations and the subsequent looting. However, due to the extreme security risks and the lack of genuinely safe locations in Gaza thousands of files remain unsecured.

Impact of limited Shari'a work

While the judiciary has managed to continue some functions under extremely adverse conditions, its capacity to provide justice and uphold the rule of law is severely compromised. The Shari'a courts are only able to meet the most essential daily needs of some of the citizens of Gaza, leaving many aspects of family law unresolved and further eroding the social fabric of Gaza.

Due to the halt in regular judicial functions, many legal processes remain incomplete. For instance, the issuance of inheritance certificates is stalled because death certificates are required from the Civil Status Department and are currently not being provided. Only temporary statements of death are available, which are neither final nor legally conclusive.

The judiciary's restricted operations have left many citizens without access to essential legal services. The inability to fully document marriages, divorces, and other critical transactions has led to a legal limbo for many, increasing the risk of disputes and violations of both Shari'a law and human rights.

4.4 Public Prosecution

Background: The Public Prosecution is responsible for criminal investigations and has the exclusive right to initiate criminal action.

Due to the extensive targeting and looting of their offices, the public prosecution ceased functioning. It is unclear how many members of the public prosecution were displaced or killed.

Adaptation

The public prosecution did not reorganise in any meaningful way.

Current tasks and functions

Only some individuals remain in touch with the central emergency committee, offering advice and serving on the travel ban review committee.

- **Travel ban review committee:** The only work recorded by the Public Prosecutor's Office since October 2023 was its participation in the travel ban review committee before the work of the committee became obsolete when Israeli forces closed the Rafah border point.

4.5 Impact of the absence of public prosecution services

The absence of public prosecution directly impacts citizens' rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly concerning detention, release, and imprisonment. Since since October 2023, the public prosecution did not fulfil its assigned role in handling criminal cases, and it did not apply for any arrest or detention warrants. Communication with the police regarding issues of arrests and detention was almost entirely cut off. Facing an increasing number of crimes, police forces aided by the Popular Protection Committees could handle arrests and detention only without due process, effectively underlining the current absence of the Rule of Law and demonstrating a vast lack of accountability that will most likely contribute to further instability in the future.

5. The oversight institutions in Gaza since October 2023

Oversight institutions, such as human rights and media organizations ensure that the security and justice sector work in the interests of the citizens in line with human rights and other international laws and standards. During times of war, organizations hold conflict parties to account. Yet, the war severely limits their capacities, due to destruction of infrastructure, equipment, and killing of the staff present in Gaza.

5.1 Damage to the infrastructure and logistics of civil society institutions

The war has directly or indirectly affected the vast majority of offices of human rights organisations (HROs) as well as media organisations across the Gaza Strip, causing both total and partial damage. DCAF could confirm the destruction of the following offices:

- **The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR):** Israeli forces targeted the headquarters of the Independent Commission for Human Rights. The ICHR is the national human rights body with the function of an Ombudsman. This commission is a national human rights body established in 1993 by a presidential decree taken even before the creation of the PA in. Its legitimacy was later confirmed by the Basic Law.
- **The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR):** The PCHR offices were directly targeted by Israeli strikes at the beginning of the war and burned out completely. PCHR is a Gaza-based human rights organisation, documenting Israeli and Palestinian violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

- **Media offices and organisations:** Israeli attacks have killed up to 168 journalists and offices of various media organisations have been bombed or shelled. In May 2024, Israeli planes levelled the Al-Jalaa media tower, housing the offices of Al-Jazeera, The Associated Press, and Al-Sayed media. Israel struck offices of Agence France-Presse, as well as the Al-Ghefari tower housing Alhurra TV.

5.2 Human rights organisations during the war

Background: Palestinian civil society includes dozens of human rights organisations. They play a crucial role in documenting violations by both Israeli authorities and Palestinian authorities in the West Bank and Gaza.

HROs have generally been operating under a state of emergency since October 2023. Not only have their offices and equipment been largely destroyed, but the staff has also been killed while attempting to gather data about potential war crimes and humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip.

Adaptation

CSOs have attempted to perform their tasks while minimising risk to their staff by adapting their work.

- **Adjusting the geographical focus:** HROs have limited the geographical scope of their work primarily to areas without active military operations. Some organisations limited their work entirely to those areas classified as humanitarian zones by the UN, working from provisional offices established in tents or other temporary housing facilities.
- **Mobile operations:** Some organizations operate flexibly through mobile support units, offering aid and documenting violations of international humanitarian law.
- **Flexible communication channels:** HROs stopped using official channels of communication, partially due to potential surveillance and partially due to prolonged communication outtakes. Instead, the staff relies on private, flexible means of communication such as instant message services.

Current tasks and functions

All HROs in Gaza have shifted their work to focus to address the consequences of the war.

- **Documentation of war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law:** Most HROs still carry out minimal work. They primarily document Israeli violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law

in coordination with international organisations. They monitor international court decisions related to this war, particularly the case brought by South Africa against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

5.3 The work of media institutions during the war

Background: The Palestinian media landscape is diverse but operates under significant constraints due to political pressures, both from Israeli authorities and within the oPt. While traditional media remains influential, there is a noticeable shift towards digital platforms. Journalists and media outlets face ongoing threats and challenges, but they continue to play a critical role in informing both local and international audiences about the situation in oPt.

Journalists in Gaza face adverse conditions. According to the independent organisation 'Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 137 journalists and media workers have been killed until 2024. During interviews with DCAF, many journalists stated that they had been directly contacted and warned against covering events and forced to leave northern Gaza and relocate to areas that are allegedly safe. Despite precautions, such as wearing vests marked with press identifiers and staying in designated safe zones attacks on journalists continue.¹⁷

Adaptation

Journalists and media workers have adapted to the challenging and dangerous environment in several ways:

- **Social media reporting:** Journalists increasingly rely on social media platforms to document and report on the situation, often sharing personal stories and firsthand accounts of the events unfolding around them.
- **Coverage of new topics:** Many journalists have shifted away from their usual area of work to cover the war, displacement, and humanitarian crises. Producers, who typically work behind the scenes, have taken on roles as photographers, field journalists, and documentarians to capture consequences of the conflict.

Current tasks and functions

Journalists have expanded their coverage to include critical issues that have emerged during the conflict, often under great personal risk:

17 Majadli H. (2024) Over 110 Journalists Have Been Killed in Gaza. Haaretz. Available at <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-08-07/ty-article-opinion/.premium/over-110-journalists-have-been-killed-in-gaza-their-israeli-colleagues-keep-silent/00000191-2c36-daed-a3ff-af3f92620000> (accessed 01.09.2024).

- **Humanitarian coverage:** Media coverage now includes reporting on war crimes, the repeated displacement of civilians, and the challenges faced by medical teams and rescue organisations operating under constant threat. Journalists document the daily struggles of displaced individuals, highlighting the lack of safe places and the scarcity of basic necessities like food and medicine.
- **Collaborations with charitable organizations:** Some journalists have transitioned to work with charitable organisations, documenting their activities and conducting interviews with displaced people.

5.4 Impact of limited work of civil society organisations

The work of civil society organisations, including HROs and media is critical to exercise oversight over any security forces. As per international law, all parties to the conflict must be held accountable for any violations of international law and the humanitarian war they might commit. However, the intentional destruction of much of the infrastructure that human rights and media organisations relied on, as well as the killing of members of civil society organisations, including the media, severely limits their ability to do so. The conduct of Palestinian forces remains uncovered and potential violations committed by Palestinian factions remain undocumented.

Conclusion - Gaza's transforming security and justice sectors between destruction and adaptation

The governance of Gaza's security and justice sectors is now at a critical crossroads. While some public institutions remain somewhat functional, their capacity to maintain order and provide essential services is increasingly fragile. Nonetheless, the sector's ability to adapt to these unprecedented challenges shall not be underestimated or overlooked. Despite immense adversity, some security and justice institutions continue to maintain a minimum level of capacities to respond to the new security needs of Gazans amidst displacement, military operations, and the staggering loss of life. At the same time, new informal institutions have stepped up or been created to fill the gaps left by official bodies struggling to maintain relevance or operate within the Strip.

The presence of some governmental structures and the semblance of continuity should not obscure the fact that daily insecurity has become the norm for Palestinians. The risk of further erosion is large and almost a certainty. Challenges that will continue in the post-war period include widespread displacement, deteriorating public infrastructure, a public health crisis, and rising criminality. The very foundations of state institutions in Gaza are at risk, with statements by UN officials regularly expressing fears that the Gaza Strip could become a failed state. However, the resilience of Palestinian society and the emergence of informal structures have so far staved off these dire predictions.

The current radical transformation and weakening of institutions in the Gaza Strip, however, also present an opportunity for broader security sector governance and reform. While progress in the political negotiations between Hamas and Fatah to jointly administer the Gaza Strip in the future has yet to resolve the deep-seated issues that divide them, it offers a potential pathway to overcoming the split and creating the needed national consensus on security sector governance in Gaza and the oPt as a whole.

This report highlighted three fundamental trends and observations regarding the current state of the security and justice sectors in the Gaza Strip.

New tasks and functions of security and justice providers

The war in the Gaza Strip has profoundly reshaped its security and justice sectors. The war has generated a radically different set of security and justice needs as Gazans face bombardments, military operations, mass displacement, and an ongoing humanitarian crisis. The deterioration of the situation led to an increase in social unrest, gang violence as well as widespread looting and disorder. Such challenges and the post-effects of war will continue even after a ceasefire would take effect.

Reacting to these unprecedented needs, security and justice providers have had to radically shift their operations, offering emergency services that far exceed their traditional mandates and capacities. These shifts are compounded by the adverse conditions under which they must now operate as Israeli forces have targeted security and justice personnel, making any operations, even those urgently needed, extremely dangerous and difficult. The widespread destruction of infrastructure, lack of equipment, and the constant threat of unexploded ordnance have made any work life-threatening.

Examples of new functions performed under these adverse conditions include:

- **Coordination, protection, and distribution of humanitarian aid:** Police forces coordinate with the WFP-led humanitarian logistics cluster to protect and distribute humanitarian aid across the Gaza Strip. Despite being targeted, police forces protect humanitarian aid from mobs and armed gangs while delivering it across Gaza, often crossing multiple lines of Israeli control.
- **War-related rescue operations:** The Civil Defence, equipped with only basic tools and sometimes relying on their bare hands, continues to rescue people from under collapsed buildings across Gaza, despite the presence of unexploded ordnance. The scale and danger of this work are unprecedented.

Degradation and adaptation

The capacity of many traditional security providers has been severely degraded due to systematic targeting by Israeli forces. Several institutions have ceased operations entirely, such as the regular court system, which has stopped working due to the destruction of nearly all courts, looting of equipment, lack of access to files, and an official cessation of activities.

Other institutions have been severely compromised. Israeli forces have destroyed at least 17 police stations and killed numerous police officers, even when they were engaged in protected activities such as humanitarian aid delivery. The war has also severely impacted the operation of the Civil Defence. Despite the urgent need for rescue and firefighting operations, the Civil Defence operates only on a basic level due to a lack of personnel, equipment, and vehicles. Similarly, the Shari'a judiciary has suffered from the destruction of buildings, archives, and equipment.

Yet, security and justice institutions have shown remarkable resilience and have partially adapted to the war's effects. They continue to respond to the emerging security needs of Gazans, often through the personal initiatives of their employees. Examples of this resilience include:

- **Coordination via emergency committees:** Gaza's de-facto government activated emergency measures at the start of the war, establishing central and local emergency committees to coordinate vital government work, including the provision of security and justice services.
- **Mobile stations and phone numbers:** As official institutions are destroyed, security and justice providers have established temporary makeshift or mobile offices to address security and justice needs. The police have set up mobile stations for citizens to report crimes, and the Shari'a judiciary has established mobile units to certify marriages, divorces, and other critical personal status matters in refugee shelters or homes. Security and justice providers have also published mobile numbers to address the communication outage of official channels.

Despite this remarkable resilience and adaptation, sustained intervention and prolonged efforts will be required to rebuild Gaza's security and justice institutions.

Emerging security and justice providers

In the vacuum left by the diminished capacity of official institutions, new security and justice actors have emerged to fill the gap, often with the encouragement of official security and justice providers, as they recognized the need for additional support. The most notable new actors include:

- **Central Emergency Committee:** The de-facto government continues to exercise state functions through the central emergency committee, which was activated immediately at the start of the war. The committee and various local committees at the governorate level play a crucial role in coordinating the remnants of security and justice providers, liaising with international agencies, and communicating with both Gazans and the international community.
- **The government media office:** As many information channels of the de-facto authorities were destroyed and broke down, the government media office became the key source of information on security developments.
- **Relief organisations:** Relief organisations have emerged as a crucial actor in the Gaza Strip. These organisations include more than 70 regional and international organisations that attempt to address urgent security needs of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip via the delivery of humanitarian aid, in close coordination with local authorities and organisations.
- **Tribal and family networks:** Tribes and families have increasingly taken on functions in providing security and justice in Gaza, particularly by helping coordinate, protect, and deliver humanitarian aid in conjunction with international organizations such as UNRWA. Informal justice mechanisms have also become a way to resolve disputes amid the dysfunction of the regular court system.

- **Popular Protection Committees:** Formed by the central emergency committee as an emerging community policing model, these committees are particularly active in the crowded areas of Gaza's South, assisting or substituting for the Civil Police.

These groups have become critical in delivering security and justice services, particularly in areas where formal state institutions are weak or entirely absent. Their involvement reflects a pragmatic response to the immediate needs of the population but also raises questions about the long-term implications for governance and state authority. It remains to be seen what role these new actors will play in any future arrangements for the security and justice sectors in Gaza, and how they might be demobilized or integrated into a future security sector architecture.

Annex I: Legislative developments for the security and justice sector in the oPt since October 2023

Decision	Source
Approval of the Recommendations of the Permanent Ministerial Reform Committee in its 11th Meeting on 05/08/2024.	Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 20 on 13/08/2024.
Retirement of some members of the security forces based on their request	Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 19 on 06/08/2024.
Referral of employees to early retirement based on their request.	Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 19 on 06/08/2024
Extension of the work of the committee studying the “Declaration of the Southern Governorates as a Disaster Zone	Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 19 on 06/08/2024.
Formation of a committee to study the “Declaration of the Southern Governorates as a Disaster Zone.”	Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 17 on 23/07/2024
Referral of several employees to early retirement based on their request.	Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 16 on 16/07/2024
Instructing heads of government departments to intensify field visits to various governorates to observe and respond to the needs of the people, in light of the difficult political, economic, and social circumstances	Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 16 on 16/07/2024
Instructing state institutions to intensify efforts to meet emergency relief needs in Gaza, within the available capabilities, and to enhance coordination with relief organizations operating in the sector	Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 16 on 16/07/2024

Decision	Source
<p>Instructing heads of relevant government departments to monitor their departments' work in providing relief efforts to citizens in Gaza, using the internet and communication systems prepared by the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy</p>	<p>Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 12 on 25/06/2024</p>
<p>Approval of the general framework for the emergency response plan for the Southern Governorates</p>	<p>Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 11 on 12/06/2024</p>
<p>Retirement of several members of the security forces based on their request</p>	<p>Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 10 on 04/06/2024</p>
<p>Referral of several employees to early retirement based on their request.</p>	<p>Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 9 on 30/05/2024.</p>
<p>Retirement of some members of the security forces based on their request.</p>	<p>Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 7 on 12/05/2024.</p>
<p>Instructing the Permanent Ministerial Social Committee to prepare procedures for the "medical evacuation of injured children from Gaza to outside Palestine," as proposed by the Ministry of Social Development</p>	<p>Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 7 on 12/05/2024</p>
<p>Approval of the financial and administrative reform package to streamline spending in government departments</p>	<p>Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 4 on 23/04/2024</p>

Decision	Source
<p>Approval of the recommendations of the Permanent Ministerial Reform Committee in its 2nd and 3rd meetings, which include: studying the status of government departments, reviewing governing legislations, preparing reform plans, promoting governance and transparency principles, strengthening the justice sector and the rule of law, improving the quality of government services such as education and health, rationalizing expenditures, and enhancing the principle of transparency and equal opportunities in all government appointments.</p>	<p>Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 4 on 23/04/2024</p>
<p>Formation of the Permanent Ministerial Reform Committee.</p>	<p>Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 1 on 02/04/2024.</p>
<p>Instructing heads of government departments, each according to their specialization, to hold regular meetings with civil society organizations to discuss common issues with them, to serve government programs, goals, and the public interest, and to create effective and sustainable communication mechanisms with them</p>	<p>Decisions of the Cabinet Session No. 1 on 02/04/2024</p>



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