

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

### PRESS RELEASE

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#### **Israel/OPT: Israeli authorities are using facial recognition technology to entrench apartheid**

The Israeli authorities are using an experimental facial recognition system known as Red Wolf to track Palestinians and automate harsh restrictions on their freedom of movement, Amnesty International said today. In a new report, *Automated Apartheid*, the organization documents how Red Wolf is part of an ever-growing surveillance network which is entrenching the Israeli government's control over Palestinians, and which helps to maintain Israel's system of apartheid. Red Wolf is deployed at military checkpoints in the city of Hebron in the occupied West Bank, where it scans Palestinians' faces and adds them to vast surveillance databases without their consent.

Amnesty International also documented how Israel's use of facial recognition technology against Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem has increased, especially in the wake of protests and in the areas around illegal settlements. In both Hebron and occupied East Jerusalem, facial recognition technology supports a dense network of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras to keep Palestinians under near-constant observation. *Automated Apartheid* shows how this surveillance is part of a deliberate attempt by Israeli authorities to create a hostile and coercive environment for Palestinians, with the aim of minimizing their presence in strategic areas.

"The Israeli authorities are using sophisticated surveillance tools to supercharge segregation and automate apartheid against Palestinians. In the H2 area of Hebron, we documented how a new facial recognition system called Red Wolf is reinforcing draconian restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of movement, using illegitimately acquired biometric data to monitor and control Palestinians' movements around the city," said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

"Palestinian residents of occupied East Jerusalem and Hebron told us how omnipresent surveillance cameras have invaded their privacy, repressed activism, eroded social life, and left them feeling constantly exposed. In addition to the constant threat of excessive physical force and arbitrary arrest, Palestinians must now contend with the risk of being tracked by an algorithm, or barred from entering their own neighbourhoods based on information stored in discriminatory surveillance databases. This is the latest illustration of why facial recognition technology, when used for surveillance, is incompatible with human rights."

Amnesty International is calling on Israeli authorities to end the mass and targeted surveillance of Palestinians and lift the arbitrary restrictions they have imposed on Palestinians' freedom of movement across the OPT, as necessary steps towards dismantling apartheid.

Amnesty International is also calling for a global ban on the development, sale and use of facial recognition technology for surveillance purposes. The organization has recently documented human rights risks linked to facial recognition technology in India and the US, as part of its Ban the Scan campaign.

*Automated Apartheid* focuses on Hebron and East Jerusalem, the only cities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories with Israeli settlements inside their bounds. The report is based on evidence gathered during 2022 field research, including interviews with Palestinian residents; analysis of open-source material; and testimony from current and former Israeli military personnel. This testimony was provided by the Israeli organization Breaking the Silence, and was used to corroborate Amnesty International's findings on how Israel's facial recognition systems operate.

## **Red Wolf**

Under a 1997 agreement between Israeli authorities and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Hebron was divided into two sections, known as H1 and H2. H1, which constitutes 80% of the city, is administered by the Palestinian authorities, while Israel maintains full control over H2, which includes the Old City. Some 33,000 Palestinians live in H2, along with around 800 Israeli settlers who reside illegally across at least seven settlement enclaves.

Palestinian residents of H2 are subjected to draconian movement restrictions. They are barred from accessing certain roads, which are open only to Israeli settlers, and a network of military checkpoints and other obstructions severely impedes their daily lives. Israeli settlers in Hebron travel on different roads to Palestinians, and are not required to use checkpoints.

*Automated Apartheid* reveals the existence of a previously unreported Israeli military facial recognition system called Red Wolf, which is deployed at checkpoints in Hebron.

There is strong evidence to suggest that Red Wolf is linked with two other military-run surveillance systems, Wolf Pack and Blue Wolf. Wolf Pack is a vast database containing all available information on Palestinians from the OPT, including where they live, who their family members are, and whether they are wanted for questioning by Israeli authorities. Blue Wolf is an app which Israeli forces can access via smartphones and tablets, and which can instantly pull up the information stored in the Wolf Pack database.

When a Palestinian goes through a checkpoint where Red Wolf is operating, their face is scanned, without their knowledge or consent, and compared with biometric entries in

databases which exclusively contain information about Palestinians. Red Wolf uses this data to determine whether an individual can pass a checkpoint, and automatically biometrically enrolls any new face it scans. If no entry exists for an individual, they will be denied passage. Red Wolf could also deny entry based on other information stored on Palestinian profiles, for example if an individual is wanted for questioning or arrest.

Red Wolf expands its database of Palestinian faces over time. In testimony given to *Breaking the Silence*, an Israeli commander stationed in Hebron said that soldiers are tasked with training and optimizing Red Wolf's facial recognition algorithm so it can start recognizing faces without human intervention.

Amnesty International even documented, through the testimony provided by military personnel, how the surveillance of Palestinians has become gamified. For example, two soldiers stationed in Hebron in 2020 said the Blue Wolf app generates rankings based on the number of Palestinians registered – with Israeli commanders providing prizes for the battalion with the highest score. In this way, Israeli soldiers are incentivized to keep Palestinians under constant observation.

## **Cameras everywhere**

Amnesty International also documented how Israel's AI-powered facial recognition systems are supported by a vast physical infrastructure of surveillance hardware.

Hebron has been described by the Israeli military as a "smart city". The reality is streets full of surveillance cameras, which are mounted on the sides of buildings, lampposts, surveillance towers and rooftops, compounding the already drastic segregation that exists in Hebron. For Palestinians, omnipresent surveillance has exacerbated the sense that some areas of H2 are off-limits for them - even areas which are just metres away from their homes.

The Tel Rumeida neighbourhood is close to the heavily-equipped Checkpoint 56, which is mounted with at least 24 audio-visual surveillance devices and other sensors. Eyad, a resident of Tel Rumeida, described how the installation of Checkpoint 56 on the once-thriving Shuhada Street, combined with a heavy military presence and nearly 30 years of movement restrictions and forced closures of Palestinian businesses, has "killed all forms of social life".

Eyad also described how Israeli soldiers seem to rely on the facial recognition system, which Amnesty International identified as Red Wolf, to bar residents from returning to their homes:

“They [Israeli soldiers] can tell you that your name is not in the database, as simple as that, and then you’re not allowed to pass through [to] your house.”

### **Old City, New Tech**

In occupied East Jerusalem, Israel operates a network of thousands of CCTV cameras across the Old City, known as Mabat 2000. Since 2017, Israeli authorities have been upgrading this system to enhance its facial recognition capabilities and give themselves unprecedented powers of surveillance.

Amnesty International mapped CCTV cameras across an area of 10 square-kilometres in occupied East Jerusalem, including the Old City and Sheikh Jarrah, and found the presence of one to two CCTV cameras every five metres.

Israeli authorities have targeted sites of cultural and political significance with new surveillance tools, such as the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City, which has long been a place for Palestinians to meet and hold protests.

The impact of these numerous cameras is acutely felt by Palestinians, as one resident, Neda, explained:

“I’m being watched the whole time... it gives me a really bad feeling everywhere in the street. Every time I see a camera, I feel anxious. Like you are always being treated as if you are a target.”

This mass surveillance violates the rights to privacy, equality and non-discrimination. It also has a chilling effect on the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly by deterring Palestinians from protesting and exacerbating a climate of fear and repression.

As one Palestinian journalist told Amnesty International:

“Those who demonstrate know that, even if they don’t get detained on the spot, their faces will be captured by the cameras and they can be arrested later.”

In the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods, the number of CCTV cameras increased significantly in the wake of 2021 protests against the forced eviction of Palestinian families to make way for settlers.

Amnesty International also documented how the continued expansion of surveillance in occupied East Jerusalem, an illegally annexed city, digitally cements Israel’s domain of control, and helps advance the unlawful security objectives of illegal settlers. Not only does surveillance deter protests against settlement expansion, but Israeli authorities and settlers have also installed additional surveillance infrastructure around areas near illegal settlements.

### **Suppliers of surveillance**

Amnesty International cannot say with certainty which companies are providing Israeli authorities with facial recognition software. However, researchers identified the vendors of several cameras they found in occupied East Jerusalem. They documented high-resolution CCTV cameras made by the Chinese company Hikvision installed in residential areas and mounted to military infrastructure; some of these models, according to Hikvision’s own marketing, can plug into external facial recognition software. Amnesty

International also identified cameras made by a Dutch company called TKH Security, in public spaces and attached to police infrastructure.

Amnesty International wrote to both companies expressing concerns about the risk of their products being used with the Mabat 2000 system to conduct facial recognition targeted at Palestinians and connected to human rights abuses. Amnesty International also requested information about the companies' due diligence processes. Both companies were unable to describe how they had fulfilled, or were currently fulfilling, their human rights responsibilities for these high-risk sales.

According to TKH Security's website, in 2017 an Israeli company called Mal-Tech Technological Solutions (Mal-Tech) became its official distributor for the Israeli market. In its response to Amnesty International, TKH Security said it "has not done any business with Mal-Tech in the past few years", and said it does not currently have a direct business relationship with Israeli security forces. TKH Security did not respond to Amnesty International's further requests for clarification. Hikvision did not respond to any of Amnesty International's questions.

"Hikvision and TKH Security must commit to ensuring that their technologies are not being used to maintain or further entrench Israel's system of apartheid against Palestinians," said Agnès Callamard

"They must stop supplying any technologies which are used by Israeli authorities to maintain illegal settlements – which are war crimes under international law - and ensure they only sell to human rights-compliant customers."

## **Background**

In 2022, Amnesty International released a [report](#) documenting how Israel enforces an institutionalized system of oppression and domination against Palestinians which amounts to apartheid under international law. This system is imposed against Palestinians wherever Israel has control over their rights and is maintained by violations which constitute apartheid as a crime against humanity, as defined in the Rome Statute and Apartheid Convention.

Under international human rights law, state interference with the right to privacy must be a demonstrably necessary and proportionate means of addressing a legitimate aim. Israel's use of surveillance against Palestinians fails to meet these criteria; it also helps to restrict freedom of movement in the context of prolonged occupation, illegal settlement and annexation; entrenches the segregation and fragmentation of the Palestinian people; and ultimately helps to maintain Israel's apartheid system.