

# LGBTQ RIGHTS

## IN ISRAEL *and the* MIDDLE EAST

Produced by

**StandWithUs**



# Israel Is a Sanctuary for the LGBTQ Community



*Pride Parade in Jerusalem in 2010*

## **Israel's laws guarantee equal rights for LGBTQ Israelis.**

### **Israel is home to:**

- LGBTQ organizations and community centers
- LGBTQ pride parades
- LGBTQ members of parliament
- LGBTQ soldiers who serve openly in the military and are protected by the law
- TV programs with LGBTQ themes
- The city of Tel Aviv—consistently rated among the most LGBTQ-friendly travel destinations in the world.

LGBTQ Palestinians suffer beatings, imprisonment, and even death at the hands of their families and the Palestinian police. Many escape and find safety in Israel.

# In Israel, LGBTQ Rights Aren't Just a Dream. They're the Law.

## Landmark Decisions

### Affecting the Rights of the LGBTQ Community

- **1963:** Israeli courts ruled that “sodomy” laws should not apply to consenting adults in private.
- **1988:** Israel abolished the decades-old ban on sodomy of any kind.
- **1992:** Legislation barred discrimination against LGBTQ individuals in the workplace.
- **1993:** The Israeli Army adopted a policy of allowing openly LGBTQ soldiers to serve in any capacity.
- **1994:** The Israeli Supreme Court ruled in favor of granting spousal benefits to same-sex couples.
- **1997:** The Israeli Defense Minister announced that same-sex partners would be recognized as family members by the Defense Department.
- **1997:** The Israeli High Court ruled against censoring an educational TV program for teens about homosexuality.
- **2000:** The Knesset lowered the legal age of consent for same-sex relations from 18 to 16.
- **2000:** The Israeli Supreme Court ruled that lesbians can officially become adoptive mothers of their partners’ children.
- **2004:** Israeli courts ruled LGBTQ couples qualify for common-law marriage.
- **2004:** An Israeli court ruled LGBTQ couples qualify for full inheritance rights.
- **2005:** Israeli LGBTQ couples were granted full adoption rights.
- **2006:** Israel recognized same-sex marriage performed abroad.
- **2014:** Israel passed a law protecting students from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

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**Israel has a better track record on LGBTQ rights than most other countries, including the U.S. in some cases.**

# Influential Members of the Israeli LGBTQ Community

**Michal Eden**, elected to the Tel Aviv-Jaffa city council in 1998, was the first openly lesbian elected official in Israel. She has campaigned for LGBTQ causes, including the founding of Israel's first shelter serving homeless and runaway gay and lesbian youth.<sup>1</sup>

**Saar Netanel** became the first "out of the closet" gay man to be elected to a city council in Israel on June 2, 2003.<sup>2</sup>

**Professor Uzi Even** became the first openly gay individual elected to serve in the Israeli Parliament in 2002. A chemistry professor at Tel Aviv University and a nuclear weapons expert, Even led the successful 1993 campaign to end Israel's ban on LGBTQ people in Israel's armed services.<sup>3</sup>

**Itzik Shmuli** was elected to the Israeli Parliament in 2013 as a member of the Labor Party after helping to lead Israel's massive social protest movement in 2011. He was also the head of the National Union of Israeli Students.

**Amir Ohana** became the first openly gay member of Parliament from the conservative Likud Party in 2015. He helped establish an LGBTQ caucus within the party in 2011 and now leads it.

**Nitzan Horowitz** was elected to serve in the Israeli Parliament in 2009. He was a prominent journalist before entering politics. In February 2013 he co-founded an LGBTQ caucus, or interest group, within the parliament to promote LGBTQ rights and equality in Israel.

**Eli Sharon** was a top-ranking soldier in the Israeli army who came out of the closet in an army newspaper during his service.<sup>4</sup>

**Dana International** was born a male named Yaron Cohen to a Yemenite Jewish family in Tel Aviv and came to realize, over time, that her true identity was female. In 1993 Dana underwent sexual reassignment surgery.<sup>5</sup> The singer was a chart-topping star in Europe and the Middle East for several years. In 1998 she won the Eurovision contest with the song "Diva."

**Einav Zilber** is the creator of the lesbian magazine *Pandora*, which, among other endeavors, advocates for the rights of members of the Israeli LGBTQ community.<sup>6</sup>

**Yiscah Smith** is a trans Orthodox woman, author, and activist. She uses her story of transitioning from life as a male who was active in the Chabad movement to advocate for the rights of other transgender people in Israel.<sup>7</sup>

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1) [andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/bioe1/eden1.html](http://andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/bioe1/eden1.html) 2) [www.gaymiddleeast.com/news/article22.htm](http://www.gaymiddleeast.com/news/article22.htm) 3) [andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/bioe1/even1.html](http://andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/bioe1/even1.html) 4) [www.gaypaintings.com/magazine/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=12](http://www.gaypaintings.com/magazine/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=12) 5) [andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/bioi1/inte1.html](http://andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/bioi1/inte1.html) 6) [andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/bioz1/zilb1.html](http://andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/bioz1/zilb1.html) 7) [www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/1.637449](http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/1.637449)

# LGBTQ Rights by Region



| Region       | LGBTQ Organizations        | Adoption Rights | Legalized Homosexuality                                  | Anti-Discrimination Laws | Honor Killing Outlawed* | Open Military Service | Spousal Benefits for Same-Sex Couples |
|--------------|----------------------------|-----------------|--|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Egypt        | YES                        | NO              | YES<br>(But prosecuted under lewd conduct laws)          | NO                       | NO                      | NO                    | NO                                    |
| Iran         | NO                         | NO              | NO<br>(Gays are put to death)                            | NO                       | NO                      | NO                    | NO                                    |
| Jordan       | NO                         | NO              | YES<br>(But reports of gay men seeking asylum elsewhere) | NO                       | NO                      | NO                    | NO                                    |
| Lebanon      | YES                        | NO              | NO**   | NO                       | N/A                     | NO                    | NO                                    |
| Libya        | NO                         | NO              | NO   | NO                       | N/A                     | NO                    | NO                                    |
| Gaza         | NO                         | NO              | NO   | NO                       | NO                      | NO                    | NO                                    |
| West Bank    | YES<br>(Located in Israel) | NO              | YES<br>(But no protection from hate crimes)              | NO                       | NO                      | NO                    | NO                                    |
| Saudi Arabia | NO                         | NO              | NO<br>(Gay men are put to death)                         | NO                       | NO                      | NO                    | NO                                    |
| Syria        | NO                         | NO              | NO   | NO                       | NO                      | NO                    | NO                                    |
| Israel       | YES                        | YES             | YES  | YES                      | YES                     | YES                   | YES                                   |

\* An "honor killing" occurs when an individual kills a family member who has had sex – or is rumored to have had sex – outside of marriage, either by choice or because he or she was raped. Some countries have no penalties or only light penalties for this kind of killing.

Sources: Amnesty International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Division at [www.ai-LGBTQ.org](http://www.ai-LGBTQ.org) (information updated as of 2004); regarding the PA, *New Republic*, 8/19/02, Yossi Klein Halevi, "Refugee Status," [www.tnr.com](http://www.tnr.com).

Honor Killings: *Star* (Amman) 11/30/99; MEMRI Special Dispatch no. 63 at [www.memri.org](http://www.memri.org); U.S. Department of State, 2004 Human Rights Reports at [www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/c1470.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/c1470.htm).

\*\* In 2014, a Lebanese court ruled that same-sex sexual relations are not "unnatural," paving the way for elimination of laws against homosexuality.

Source: Dan Littauer, "Lebanon: Being Gay Is Not a Crime Nor Against Nature," *Huffington Post*, April 5, 2014.

# In the Middle East Sexual Orientation Is a Matter of Life and Death

**Islamist religious extremism and other cultural factors endanger the lives of LGBTQ people across the Middle East.**

- In many Middle Eastern countries, police arrest and torture gay men.
- In many cases, families have organized vigilantes to beat and kill gay family members.
- Some Palestinians seek to harm gay members of their communities by accusing them of collaborating with Israel, a crime often punishable by death.



*In Iran, homosexuality is a crime punishable by public hanging.*

[www.ukgaynews.org.uk/Archive/07/July/1803.htm](http://www.ukgaynews.org.uk/Archive/07/July/1803.htm)

# Members of the LGBTQ community living in the Middle East are vulnerable to violent attacks.



*Gay Iraqi victims of the police and death squads*

[gayswithoutborders.wordpress.com/2007/09/14/iraqi-the-gays-and-lesbians-should-be-killed-in-the-worst-most-severe-way](http://gayswithoutborders.wordpress.com/2007/09/14/iraqi-the-gays-and-lesbians-should-be-killed-in-the-worst-most-severe-way)

## One Man's Story

Tayseer, a 21-year-old Gazan, was caught in bed with his boyfriend by his older brother. He was beaten by his family, and his father threatened to strangle him if it ever happened again. He fled to the West Bank, where he was arrested and forced to stand in sewage water up to his neck, his head covered by a sack filled with feces. When he was released, Tayseer fled to Israel:

**“The [Palestinian] police will kill me,” he says.  
“Unless my father gets to me first.”**

# Want to Make a Difference?

**Here's what you can do to get involved:**

**Check the facts.** There are a lot of one-sided news reports and articles about the Middle East conflict, so get your news and information from more than one source.

**Contact your government representatives.** Ask your representatives to make aid to the PA and Middle Eastern countries contingent on improving human rights, stopping incitement against LGBTQ people, and making progress toward negotiating peace.

**Build relationships with Israeli, Palestinian, and other Middle Eastern LGBTQ rights organizations.** Invite speakers from Israel to talk about their experiences. Raise awareness about persecution and torture in the Middle East.

**Get involved.** Numerous LGBTQ organizations and other groups work to advance dignity, human rights, coexistence, and peace in the Middle East.



*After a Palestinian artist painted a rainbow flag on the West Bank security barrier, homophobic Palestinian activists erased it in outrage.*

If you're a student or alumnus, register at [www.standwithus.com](http://www.standwithus.com)

To order our booklets: [www.standwithus.com/store](http://www.standwithus.com/store)  
Help us distribute these booklets on campuses everywhere.

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