



UNITED NATIONS
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
occupied Palestinian territory

SPECIAL FOCUS
 MAY 2009

**SHRINKING SPACE:
 URBAN CONSTRUCTION AND RURAL FRAGMENTATION
 IN THE BETHLEHEM GOVERNORATE**

This report examines how Israeli measures, such as the Barrier, settlements and closures have impacted Palestinian livelihoods, development and residential expansion in the Bethlehem governorate. Only 13% of Bethlehem land is available for Palestinian use out of 660 sq. kilometers and much of it is fragmented. However, actions like freezing construction of the Barrier inside the West Bank, and opening closed military areas and nature reserves for Palestinian development, could restore parts of the lost space to the governorate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is part of a series by OCHA examining the impact of Israeli measures, such as the Barrier, settlements and closures, on Palestinians in the West Bank. It will focus on the Bethlehem governorate, examining both the contraction of its central-urban core and the fragmentation of its eastern and western parts.

The Bethlehem governorate comprises approximately 660 km. After four decades of Israeli occupation only approximately 13 percent of the Bethlehem governorate's land is available for Palestinian use, much of it fragmented. Furthermore, access to East Jerusalem has been severely reduced. Israeli measures have led to this reduction in Palestinian access and space. These measures include the continued expansion of Israeli settlements and settlement outposts, construction of the Barrier, and the zoning of the majority of the Bethlehem governorate as Area C, where Israel retains security control and jurisdiction over planning and construction. The physical and administrative restrictions allocate most of Bethlehem's remaining land reserves for Israeli military and settler use, effectively reducing the space available to the Palestinian inhabitants of Bethlehem.

As a result, Bethlehem's potential for residential and industrial expansion and development has been reduced as well as its access to natural resources. The traditional mainstays of the Bethlehem governorate economy, such as work in Israel, tourism, agriculture, herding and the private sector have been undermined. Continuation of these Israeli measures compromises the future economic and social development of the Bethlehem governorate.

Major factors behind this reality include the following:

1. Annexation of approximately 10 km² to Jerusalem:

In 1967, the Israeli government annexed approximately 10 km of the northern Bethlehem governorate to Israel, including these lands within the newly expanded Jerusalem municipal boundary. This annexation is not recognized by the international community.

2. Construction of Israeli settlements and related infrastructure:

Israeli settlements were constructed in the section of Bethlehem annexed into Jerusalem (Har Homa, parts of Gilo) and more are planned. Additional settlements were constructed in the remaining parts of the governorate, including the Gush Etzion bloc in the west, Teqoa, Noqedim, Ma'ale Amos in the east, and Mizpe Shalem in the Dead Sea area. Today, there are approximately 86,000 Israelis living in 19 settlements in the Bethlehem governorate and in 16 settlement outposts. The Palestinian population constitutes approximately 175,000 persons.

3. Restrictions on entry into East Jerusalem:

Beginning in the 1990's, new Israeli measures further fragmented the Bethlehem governorate and constrained the movement of its Palestinian inhabitants. Since the 1993 imposition of a general closure on the West Bank, residents of Bethlehem require Israeli-issued permits to enter East Jerusalem and Israel. These permits are valid for limited periods and do not allow the passage of vehicles. The application process has become more restrictive since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000.

4. Construction of the Bethlehem bypass road:

During the 1990's, the Israeli government altered the existing Jerusalem-Bethlehem-Hebron transport axis, Road 60, to facilitate Israeli settler movement. The new construction consists of a major bypass road, two tunnels and a bridge. Part of the constructed Barrier route runs along the new Road 60. The tunnels checkpoint, subsequently constructed on this road, controls entry into Jerusalem from the south-western West Bank.

5. Designation of 66% of the Bethlehem governorate as Area C:

Under the Oslo Accords, the West Bank was demarcated into three administrative zones A, B and C. Approximately 66 percent of the Bethlehem governorate was designated Area C, where Israel retains security control and jurisdiction over planning and construction. Until today, permits for Palestinian construction are rarely granted. Area C includes large tracts of land in the eastern Bethlehem governorate, which have been designated as military areas/fire zones and nature reserves where Palestinian entry and usage is restricted or forbidden. These administrative restrictions effectively limit Bethlehem's residential and industrial expansion to the east and south-east. In addition, the majority of the obstacles to Palestinian movement, roadblocks, earth-mounds, etc., put in place by the IDF since September 2000, are also located in Area C.

6. Construction of the Barrier in 2002:

In summer 2002, following a campaign of suicide bombings by Palestinian militants, the Government of Israel approved construction of a Barrier with the stated purpose of preventing such attacks. The Barrier has compounded the territorial restrictions in the northern and western parts of Bethlehem. The completed section of the Barrier in the north, not only seals the separation of Bethlehem from East Jerusalem, but prevents the urban growth of Bethlehem northwards. The western section of the Barrier, if completed, will further devastate the governorate. Approximately 64 km², including some of the most fertile land in the governorate and nine Palestinian communities with approximately 21,000 residents, will be isolated; the latter will face reduced access to Bethlehem City, the major services centre for health, education, markets and trade.

THE WAY FORWARD

While Israel has the duty to ensure the safety and security of its citizens in response to attacks by Palestinians, the steps it takes must be in accordance with international law and not cause long-term detriment to the local Palestinian population. In practice, Israeli measures have radically reduced the space available to the inhabitants of Bethlehem, compromising the future economic and social development of the governorate.

Steps can be taken to prevent further deterioration. Many of the administrative measures taken by the Israeli authorities are reversible and the Barrier route is not yet finished. Actions including halting construction of the rest of the Barrier in the West Bank, opening up closed military areas and nature reserves for sustainable Palestinian development, along with the international call for a freeze on settlement activity and related actions like 'state land' declarations, would restore parts of the lost space to the governorate and improve the humanitarian and economic situation in Bethlehem. In the long term, these types of immediate steps would contribute to ensuring compliance with international law and UN resolutions and lay the groundwork for a durable political solution in the occupied Palestinian territory.

[Complete document in PDF format](#) (Requires Acrobat Reader)