



MA'AN Development Center

Nablus

From Economic Metropolis to Shrinking City

Nablus

January 2008

Nablus

OVERVIEW

Nablus governorate central governorate of the northern West Bank, located 55 kilometres north of Jerusalem.

The governorate, which is the fourth largest in the West Bank, following Hebron, Bethlehem, and Ramallah governorates, extends over a total area of 605km².

The heart of the governorate, Nablus city, is the largest Palestinian city in the West Bank. Its history dates back to ancient times and it is mentioned in the Old Testament as the Canaanite city of Shekhem. Its present name derives from the Roman city of Flavius Neapolis, which was changed into its current Arabic from Nablus in the 8th century.

The Nablus old city has one of the oldest souks (covered markets) in the West Bank. It is one of the most important cities for trade, industry and education in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). The city's population is predominantly Muslim, with Christian and Samaritan minorities.

There are 56 communities in the governorate with an estimated population of 345,847 (PCBS mid-year population projection 2003), the population of Nablus city is about 137, 891, or 39.8% of the total population in the district.

On the outskirts of Nablus city there are three large and densely populated refugee camps 'Ein Beit el Ma (5,178 inhabitants), 'Askar (13,064 inhabitants) and Balata (18,142 inhabitants).



Map (1): Nablus location map

General view of Nablus and its Old City from Al Tor Mountain



Nablus in History

The city of Nablus was founded in 72 CE by the Romans. During the subsequent Ottoman rule, the city was named “Little Damascus” and visitors to the town can still detect some of the strong pan-Arab roots on which this association is based. In the 19th century, the city became a major industrial center for olive oil and cotton processing. The town’s historic old city includes nine historic mosques, 18 Islamic monuments, an Ayyubid mausoleum and a 17th-century church, as well as Ottoman-era palaces and Turkish baths.



Al Naser historic mosque

Nablus has boasted 79% of the vegetable oil processing industry, including soap production, which is centered in the old city. Another important industry has been stone quarrying and processing, with 54 quarries (37% of all quarries) located in the area alongside one-third of Palestinian stone-cutting operations. The city is home to all three

monotheistic religions. A small community of Jewish Samaritans resides on Mount Gerezim, on the edge of Nablus. They are recognized as an official minority and retain one quota seat on the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Information from Costs of Conflict, OCHA & Palestinian Chambers of Commerce

Nablus

Nablus in Crisis

- Forced internal displacement
- Transfer of major markets and industries outside of Nablus
- Unemployment
- Destruction and insecurity caused by Israeli military raids
- Regional inaccessibility of basic services due to encircling Israeli checkpoints
- Isolation of the city from its hinterlands caused by Israeli settlements and their infrastructure



Downtown Nablus on a day of "haddad". The once-bustling streets are quiet

It's Wednesday morning in the Nablus souk and business is slow. One week before the Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha, the market should be humming with activity. But last night, December 10, Israeli undercover forces entered the town and killed a wanted Palestinian. Mosques earlier in the day announced a "haddad" or an unofficial commercial strike. Most shops were open anyway, but the shoppers were few.

"I've been here since the morning, and this is my first sale today," Yahia Ahmad Izzain, 58, said at 11 am, standing behind a pile of burnished apples and oranges. A produce seller for decades in one of Nablus' markets, he has watched the change in the city's fortunes as it has transformed from the center of West Bank industry to a closed, shrinking city.

While the Nablus native used to go to Israel and Jericho himself to pick out produce for his stall, these days he can't get an Israeli permit to cross the checkpoints and is forced to buy from a distributor in town at much higher cost. In any case, "people just don't have money to buy these days," he says.



One of Nablus' vegetable markets on a slow day

CHECKPOINTS AND BYPASS ROADS

Nablus city, home to 137,891 people, and center for an estimated 345,847 people in Nablus governorate, is surrounded by no less than 106 permanent Israeli military checkpoints, seven of them just outside the city.¹

Nablus is distinct from other Palestinian cities because all goods are required to pass through one of two special commercial checkpoints; 'Awarta and Beit Iba through back-to-back process. At 'Awarta crossing south of the city, a truck carries goods to one side and a special vehicle removes the products for a security check before they are transferred to another truck on the crossing's other side. The same process is observed for goods entering from the northwest at Artah crossing (also known as at-Tayba), which is a gate in the Apartheid Wall near Tulkarem. These goods are then only allowed to enter Nablus city through Beit Iba checkpoint.² Delays, closures, and traffic jams mar the free transport of food, clothes, and raw materials that are required for the survival of Nablus markets and factories.

"Imagine how long the process takes, how much special security checking – because for the Israelis any security checkpoint is sacred," says Amjad Nimr of the Nablus Chamber of Commerce. "Sometimes the soldiers behave badly, or the goods are ruined in the wait. Sometimes the goods go through checking two or three times."

Palestinians cross Huwara on foot through a narrow turnstile



Back-to-back transfer of goods at Beit Iba checkpoint

"Overall, it is estimated that Palestinians are restricted from some 41 sections of roads in the West Bank covering an approximate distance of 700 km. For the most part, the restricted roads are major north-south and east-west transport routes which are now reserved for the movement of settlers or internationals. Palestinian drivers and vehicles can apply for special permits to use these roads, but "flying checkpoints" (stop and search activities in temporary locations) are routinely in operation and applied to most Palestinian vehicles (identified by green license plates rather than the yellow plates of Israeli and settlement registered vehicles). Because the delays and other problems associated with the "flying checkpoints" add significant uncertainty, cost and risk to the transportation of goods, they act as a further deterrent to Palestinian economic activity. All non-permitted Palestinian private and commercial traffic are forced onto smaller and less-maintained roads and circuitous routes. Moreover, most new roads constructed in the West Bank over the last several years have restricted use by Palestinians. In general, there are no formal written orders from the Military Commander of the West Bank regarding restrictions on road usage by Palestinians and according to the International Law Department of the IDF, military commanders have the right to restrict road usage for security purposes, and it is sufficient to issue such orders verbally."

- From Movement and Access Restrictions in the West Bank: Uncertainty and Inefficiency in the Palestinian Economy, World Bank, May 2007

¹ *The Humanitarian Impact...*, OCHA, p. 90.

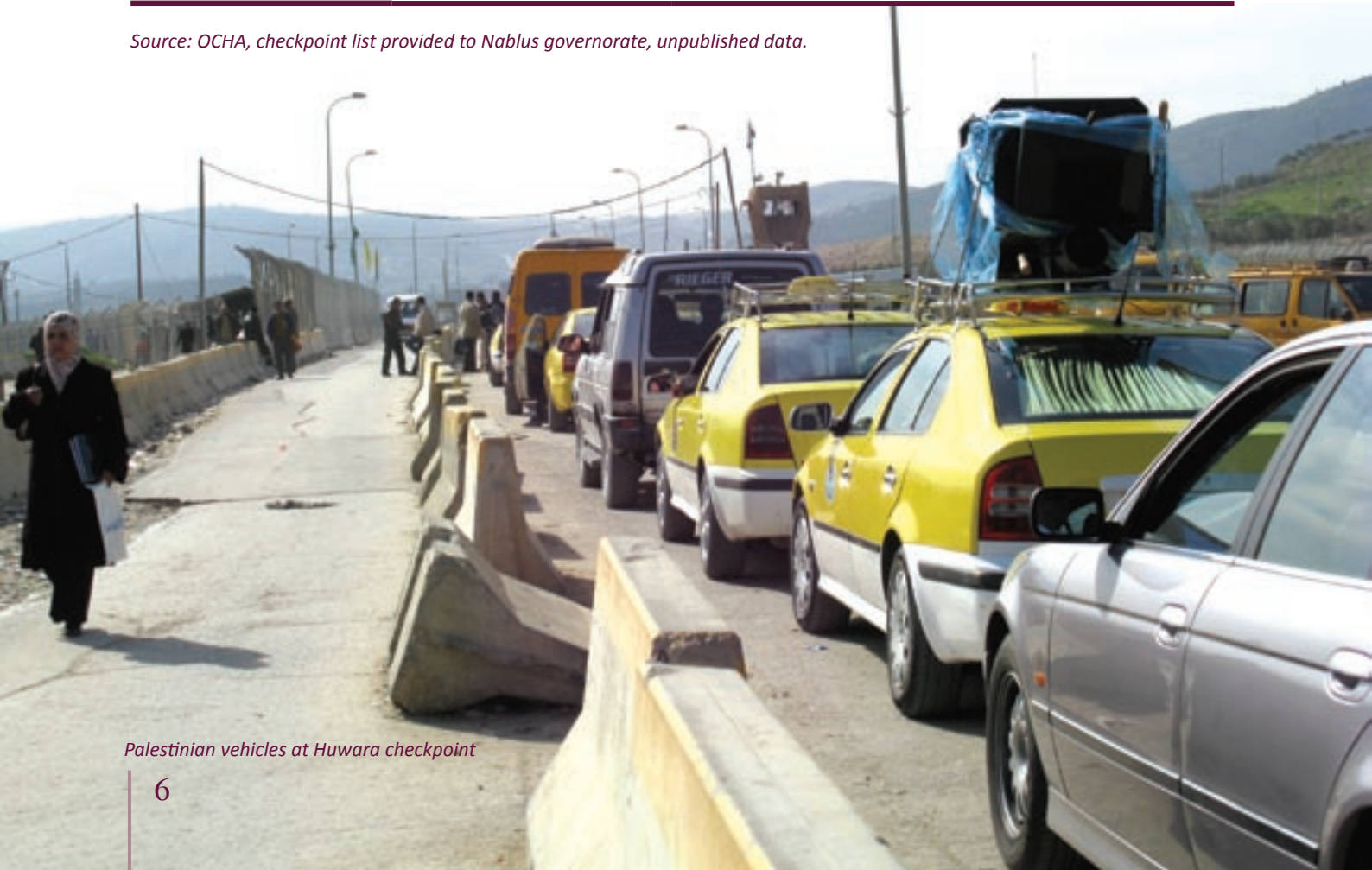
² Interview with Amjad Nimr, Nablus Chamber of Commerce, Public Relations Department, December 11, 2007.

Nablus

Table (1): Checkpoints outside Nablus City

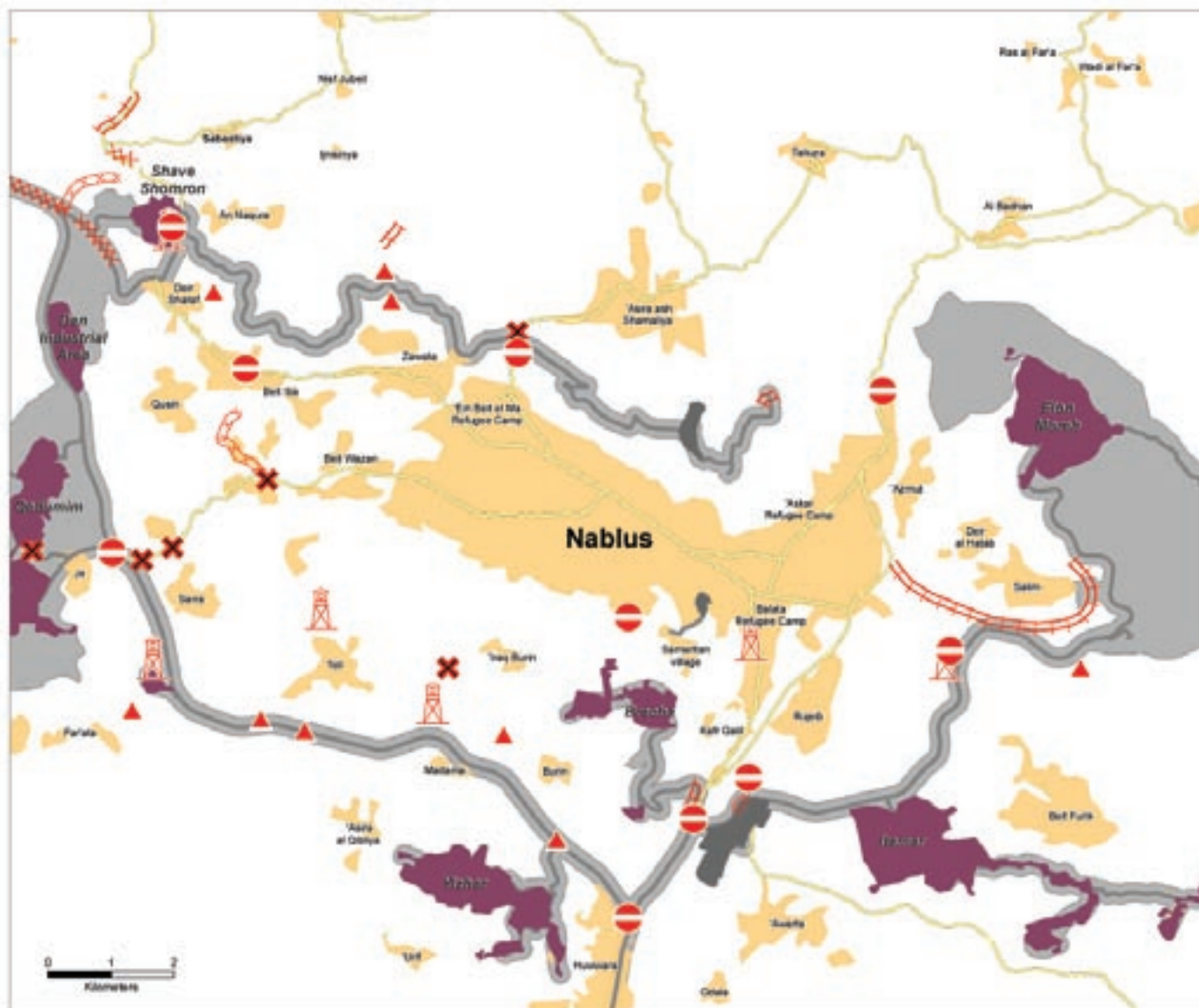
Checkpoint outside Nablus City	Route	Description
Huwara	Southern entrance to Nablus city	Pedestrian crossing with narrow turnstiles, watch towers, detention rooms, electronic and x-ray checks, gates for cars, permits required for entry and exit of cars
'Awarta	Commercial crossing south of Nablus city	Back-to-back transfer of goods from trucks on each side, high-tech security checking
Beit Iba	Northwest of Nablus city	Commercial and pedestrian crossing, trucks and cars require permit, limited hours
Beit Furik	East of Nablus city	Similar to Huwara but only for use by Beit Furik and Beit Dajan residents
Al Bathan	East of Nablus city	Watch towers, gates for car passage, Nablus gate to the Jordan valley
Hamra	East of Nablus city	Similar to Huwara checkpoint
Ma'ale Efrayim	East of Aqraba, leads to northern West Bank and Jordan valley	Car checking lanes, watch towers, passage allowed only for permit holders who are usually workers in Jordan valley
Zaatara	South of Nablus city, after Huwara	Watch towers, car checking lanes, no pedestrians, main gateway to and from northern governorates of Nablus, Tubas, Jenin, Tulkarem and Qalqilia
Tayasir	West of Nablus city to the Jordan valley	Like Ma'ale Efrayim checkpoint
Al-Juneid	West of Nablus city	Watchtowers, gateway to Qalqilia and Tulkarem

Source: OCHA, checkpoint list provided to Nablus governorate, unpublished data.



Palestinian vehicles at Huwara checkpoint

Checkpoints and other physical obstacles surrounding Nablus city



Closures	Settlements and related infrastructure	Roads networks
Checkpoint	Settlement and outpost outer limits	Roads primarily for Israeli use
Road Gate	Military bases	Roads forbidden to Israelis by order of IDF
Observation Tower	Actual/projected areas west of the barrier, nature reserves and buffer around roads primarily for Israeli use	Palestinian built-up
Earthmound		
Earth Wall		
Road Barrier		
Trench		

Map (2): From the Humanitarian Impact of Israeli Infrastructure the West Bank - OCHA - December 2007

Nablus

SETTLEMENTS AND OUTPOSTS

The flow of people is similarly restricted. Fourteen Israeli settlements and 26 outposts (settlements established without Israeli government permits) surround the city of Nablus, and the roads connecting them are considered off-limits to Palestinians.³ Special permits are required for vehicles to travel on these roads.

In April 2007, only 10% of Nablus buses (22 out of 220) and 7% of Nablus taxis (150 out of 2,250) had permits to access and use the checkpoints around Nablus city. Only 50 private Palestinian cars were permitted to use the checkpoints.⁴ Alternative roads are blocked by various obstacles placed by the Israeli military.

More Settlements

On January 7, 2008 the Israeli newspaper, *Ha'aretz*, published a report on more than 100 new Israeli outposts to be established in the West Bank. According to *Peace Now*, about 50 outposts, accommodating 3,000 settlers, have been constructed since March 2001.⁵

The *Ha'aretz* map (3) shows the planned outposts in the West Bank. Note Nablus area on the map.

Map (3): New Israeli outposts in the West Bank, 2008

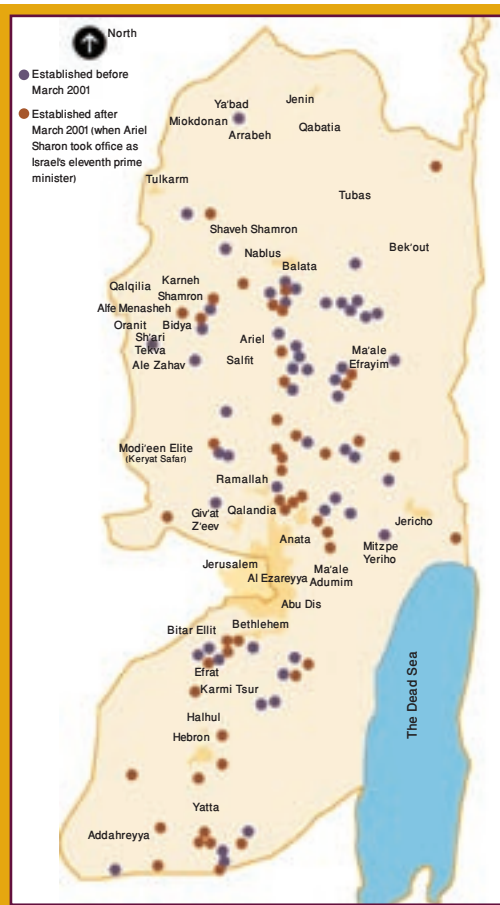


Table (2): List of main settlements in Nablus governorate

Main settlements in Nablus governorate	Year of establishment	Population	Distance from the Green Line (1967 border)
Argaman	1968	166	23.7
Gilgal	1970	162	30.2
Maswa	1970	142	30
Ma'ale Efrayem	1970	1,384	43.7
Gitit	1973	214	37
Mekhora	1973	114	26.4
Pesta'el	1975	214	34.5
Ro'i	1976	128	15
Nativ Hagidud	1976	125	29
Shavei Shomron	1977	606	13.3
Tomer	1978	282	31.2
Elon More	1979	1,314	22 km
Shedmot Mehola	1979	536	3.4
Yafit	1980	104	36
Bracha	1983	1,182	23.2 km
Migdalim	1983	142	32.7
Ma'ale Levona	1983	556	21.8
Yitzhar	1983	673	20.5
Eli	1984	2,420	23.7 km
Itamar	1984	698	28
Revava	1991	827	12.3
Rotem	2001	18	5.9

Source: *Peace Now, Settlement List - 2007*

³ *The Humanitarian Impact...*, OCHA, July 2007, p. 90.

⁴ *The Humanitarian Impact...*, OCHA, p. 90.

⁵ Information: *Ha'aretz* and *Peace Now* – January 7, 2008 and *Al Quds* newspaper – January 8, 2008

ECONOMIC AND HUMAN RESOURCE LOSSES

These difficulties are compounded by the persistent state of insecurity in the town. Since the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising between Sept. 28, 2000 and Nov. 1, 2007, 635 Palestinians have been killed in Nablus governorate (474 killed in the city alone), and 10,371 injured.⁹ Many of those killed were wage-earners.



Closed stores in Al Yassamina neighborhood in the old city

Most of these casualties occurred during the initial invasion of the city in April 2002, which lasted 21 days. Sixty-seven people were killed and more than 160 injured, and a total of 151 days of curfew subsequently imposed with only 65 hours of non-curfew time, during which residents were allowed to attend to food and health needs and bury the dead.¹⁰ Afterwards, the international community assessed the cost of repairing resulting damage to public infrastructure, roads and buildings in the Nablus governorate at \$114 million and restoring Nablus' historic old city at \$42.5 million.¹¹

Damages from January 2008 Israeli Invasion in Nablus City

*Homes and Commercial buildings: \$180,000
Old City: millions of dollars, losses are still being assessed*

Information from Nablus Chamber of Commerce

Nablus City At A Glance

Nablus city residents killed between Sept. 29, 2000 and Nov. 1, 2007: 474

Residents of the city killed in 2002 during Israeli invasion: 184

Nablus hospital reports of injured between Sept. 29, 2000 and Nov. 1, 2007: 10,371

Nablus governorate has more children and women in Israeli jails than any other region (24 of 118 women and 95 of 340 minors as of May 2007), and the longest-held Palestinian prisoner (Sa'id al-Atba', imprisoned for 31 years) is from Nablus.

The city's mayor, Adli Ya'eesh, and deputy mayor, Mahdi Hanbali, are both being held in Israeli administrative detention (detention without trial).

Days of curfew in the city between Jan. 1, 2002 and June 29, 2007: 312

Days of closure of the city between Jan. 1, 2002 and Oct. 7, 2007: 255

Statistics from Nablus governorate fact sheet

⁹ Numbers from Nablus governorate report, 2007. See chart for OCHA breakdown.

¹⁰ *Costs of Conflict*, OCHA, p. 8.

¹¹ "Damage to civilian infrastructure and institutions in the West Bank estimated at \$US361 million," Press Release from Local Aid Coordination Committee Co-Chairs, May 15, 2002. The governorate reports that while many repairs have been made, the restoration of historic sites has not been completed due to the added cost and expertise required. Interview with Anan Atiti, Nablus Governorate, November 27, 2007

Nablus

Damages from June 2007 Israeli Invasion in Nablus City

Commercial buildings: EU 308,834
Water infrastructure: EU 118,000
Electricity infrastructure: EU 158,570
Health expenditures: EU 110,170

Information from Nablus Municipality Report

Damages from February 2007 Israeli Invasion in Nablus City

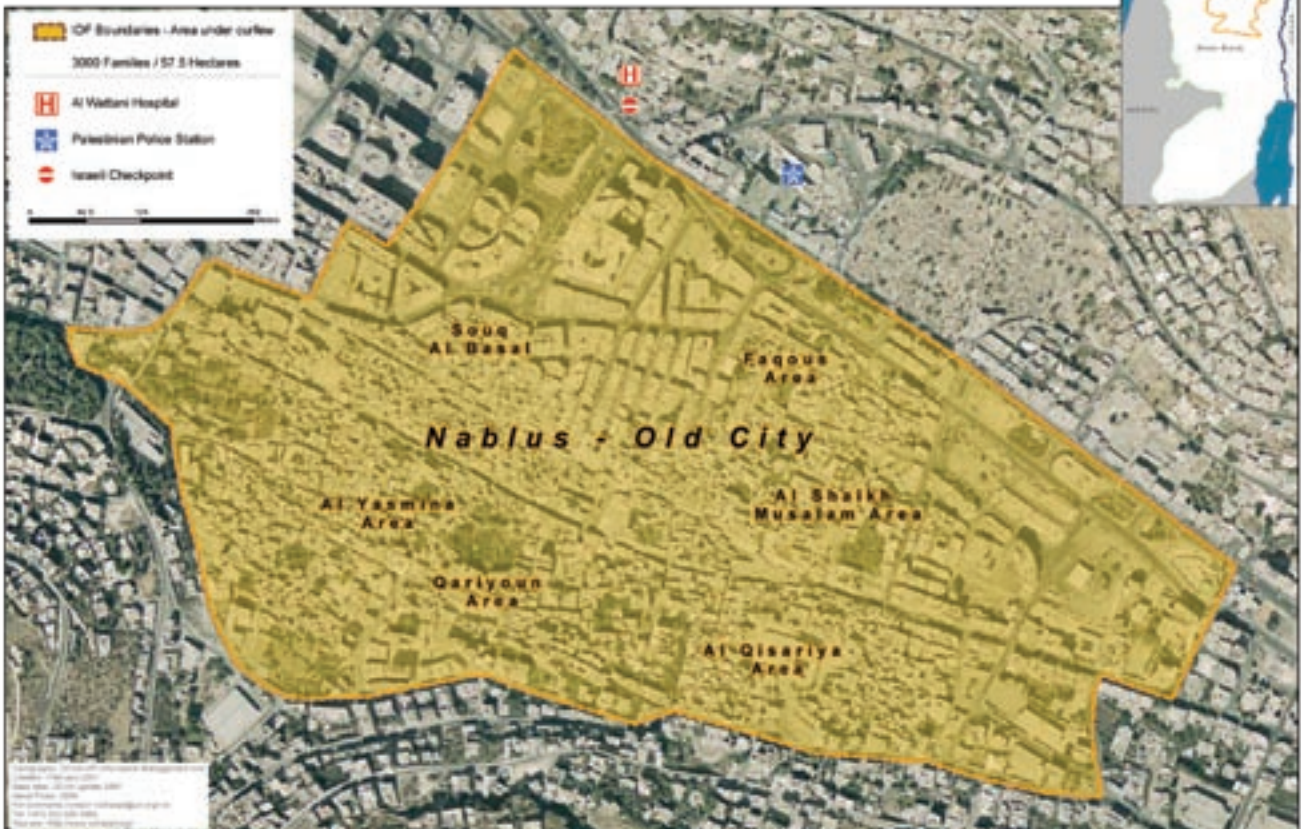
Homes, commercial buildings, and infrastructure: EU 754,647

Information from Nablus Chamber of Commerce

The international community assessed the cost of repairing resulting damage to public infrastructure, roads and buildings in the Nablus governorate at \$114 million and restoring Nablus' historic old city at \$42.5 million.

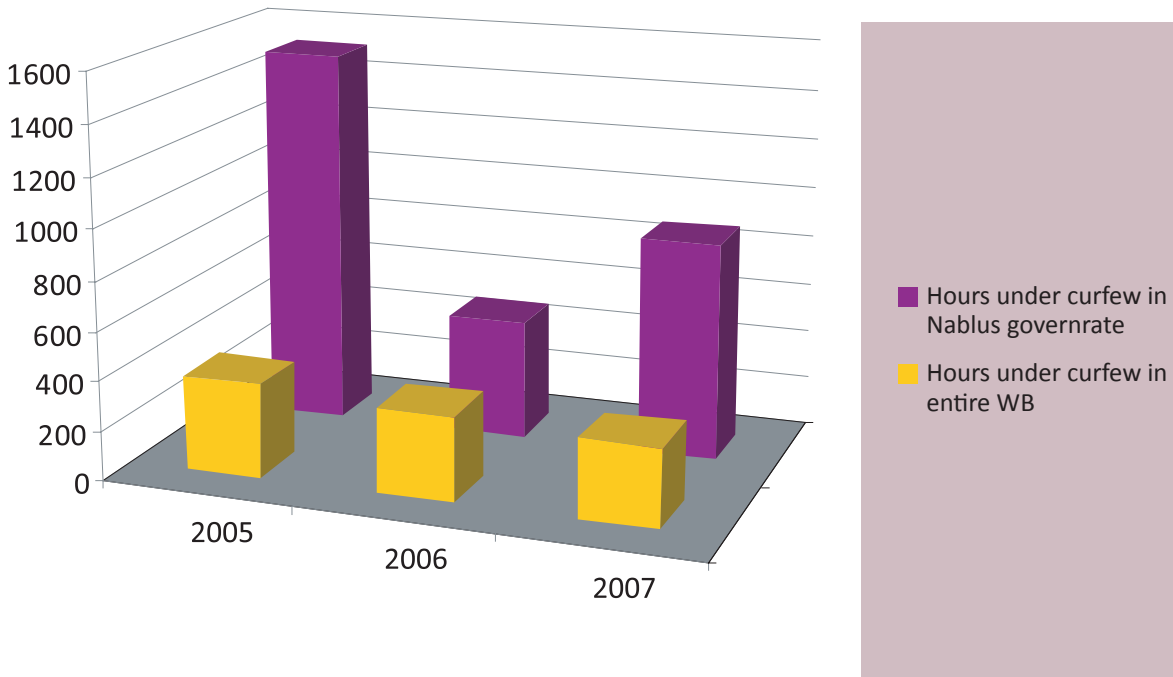
Area of Incursion - Nablus Old City

28 February 2007



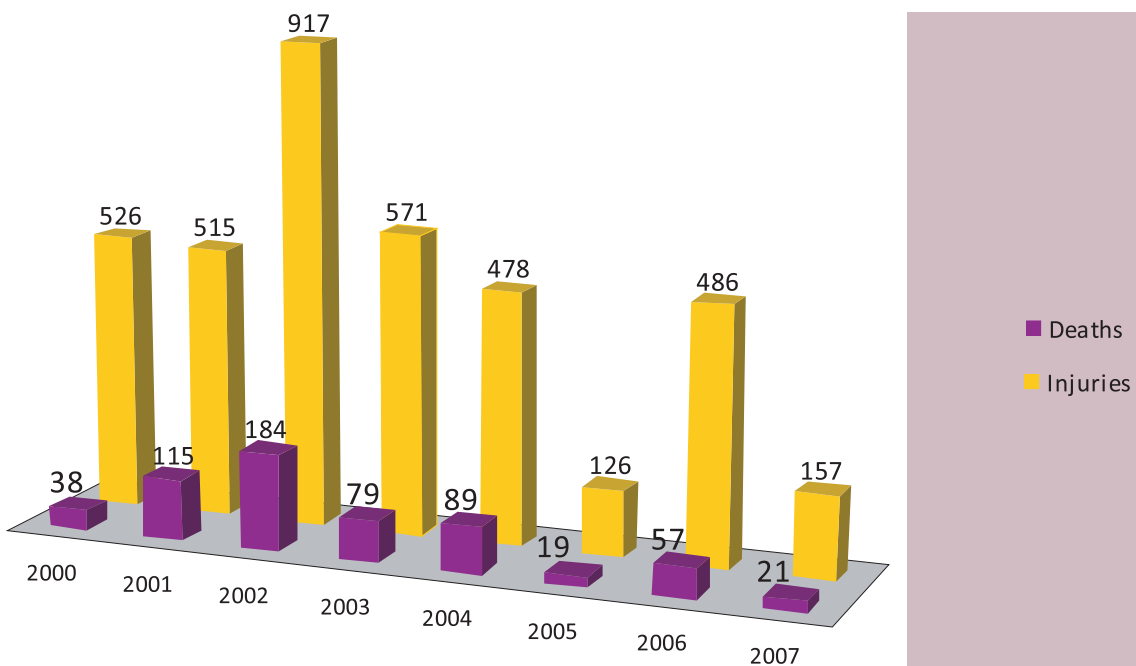
Map (4): Source: OCHA

Chart (1): Hours under curfew in Nablus governorate and other West Bank governorates



Source: OCHA

Chart (2): Palestinian casualties from Israeli attacks in Nablus governorate



Source: Palestinian Red Crescent Society (from 2000 - 2004) & OCHA (from 2005 - 2007)

Nablus

On Feb. 24, 2007, Israeli forces invaded the city for four days, causing damage estimated at EU 754,674.¹² More recently, on June 2, 2007, Israeli forces invaded the city and held the old city, a major commercial center, under curfew for 33 hours. An estimated EU 700,000¹³ was incurred in damages even in this short period. Churches and mosques have been among the buildings damaged in these attacks, according to the municipality.



Pictures from 2002 Israeli incursion

¹² Nablus Municipality Report, 2007.

¹³ Nablus Municipality Report, 2007. When asked why damage estimates for more recent incursions are quite high despite their relatively short time periods, officials cite the high cost of restoring historic sites in the Old City where the Israeli army often concentrates, and new Israeli demolitions techniques that detonate from the inside out, thereby causing increased damage.

While the governorate has been able to repair many demolished homes, businesses and other exterior damage, destruction to furniture, personal belongings and personal vehicles were not compensated. One goldsmith had just purchased millions of dollars in machines. His workshop was entirely destroyed, with no opportunity for compensation.¹⁴ The economic costs for the average citizen were immense. But curfews, strikes and demolitions by Israeli military forces continue even today.

“Nablus has become the capital of poverty, rather than the capital of industry,” says Acting Mayor Hafez Shaheen.¹⁵

The Ministry of National Economy has estimated that Nablus city has lost \$1.2 million a day since the start of the Palestinian uprising in 2000.¹⁶



Black curtains wave from a building with its windows shot out, just across from the Nablus municipality, in Jan. 2008.

Table (3): Comparative snapshots before and after the second uprising

BEFORE AND AFTER: A SNAPSHOT		
	Before the intifada	After the intifada
Nablus city’s rate of unemployment (Source: OCHA)	18.2% (1999)	26.3% (2006)
Number of checkpoints in the West Bank (Source: World Bank)	12, most in Jerusalem area	Over 500
Cost of a box of apples (Source: Interview with reseller)	NIS 20-30 (approx. US\$ 5 - 7.5)	NIS 50 (approx. US\$ 12.5)
Daily rental of a truck to transport produce (Source: Interview with reseller)	NIS 400 (approx. US\$ 100)	NIS 3,000 (approx. US\$ 750)
Value of produce sold monthly in Nablus city, as recorded by the ministry ¹⁷ (Source: Ministry of Agriculture)	More than NIS 150,000 (approx. US\$ 37,500)	NIS 2,800 (approx. US\$ 700)
Monthly revenues to the Nablus Ministry of Agriculture from transport and sale of produce (Source: Ministry of Agriculture)	NIS 1-1.5 million (approx. US\$ 250 – 375,000)	NIS 2,000 (approx. US\$ 500)
Palestinian GDP (Source: PCBS)	\$4,511.7 (1999)	\$4,150.6 (2006)

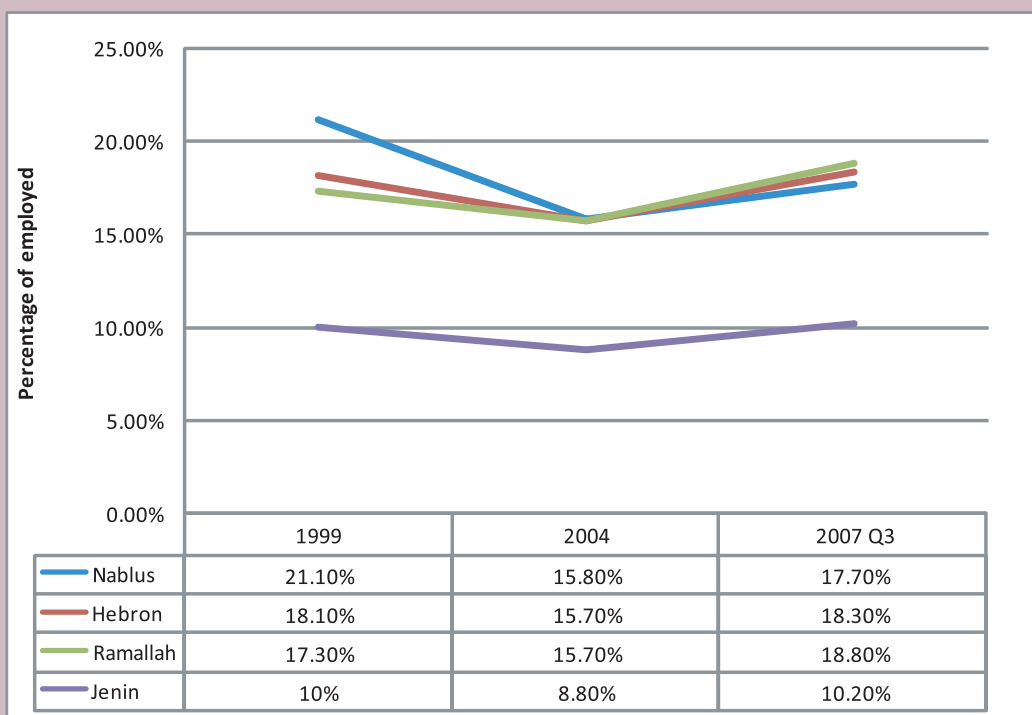
¹⁴Interview with Anan Atiri, Nablus Governorate, November 27, 2007

¹⁵November 27, 2007 interview.

¹⁶Nablus governorate report, 2007.

¹⁷Officials say that post-intifada accounting for sales is flawed as the economy has become fragmented.

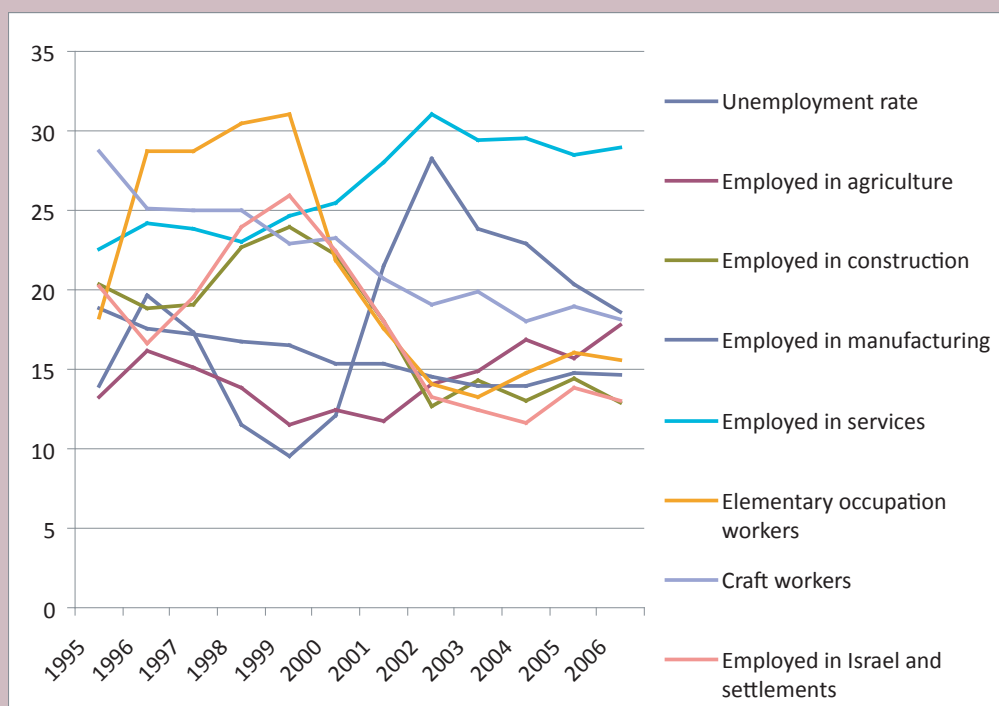
Chart (3): Percentage distribution of employed manufacturing sector in selected governorates



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) labor force data for cited years & Costs of Conflict, OCHA, p. 6

These changes are shaping the Palestinian economy as a whole. The World Bank estimates that internal closures accounted for approximately half of the decline in real GDP (perhaps some 15 percent) observed between 2000 and 2002.¹⁸ As shown below, the number of Palestinians employed in manufacturing has steadily declined since 1995.

Chart (4): Basic changes in labor force indicators in West Bank from 1995 - 2006 (ILO Standards)



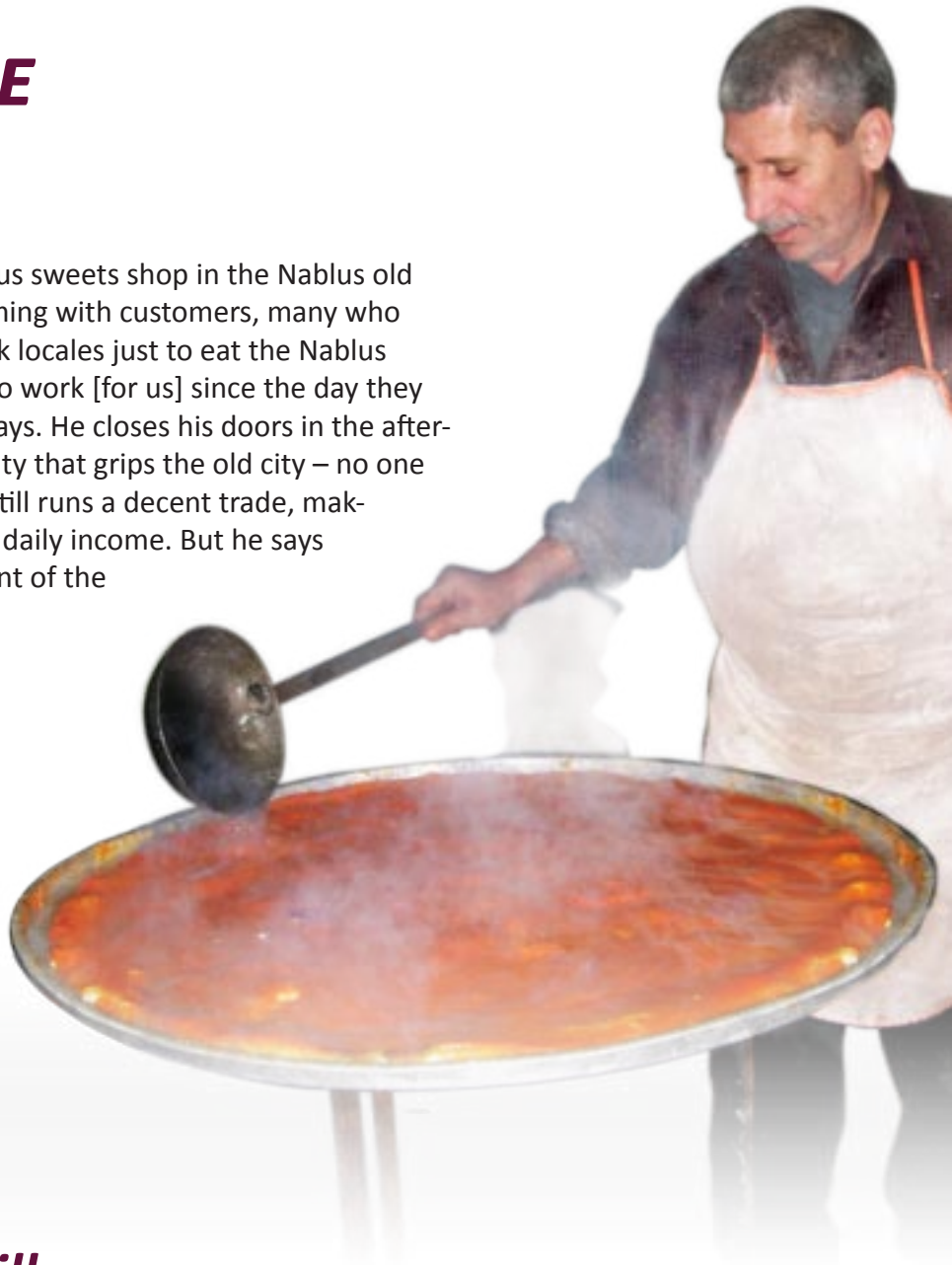
Source: PCBS

¹⁸ An Update on Palestinian Movement, Access and Trade in the West Bank and Gaza, August 2006, World Bank, p. 10

MISSING THE OLD DAYS

Jamal Shantir, 51, owns an infamous sweets shop in the Nablus old city. In the '90s, it was always teeming with customers, many who had traveled from other West Bank locales just to eat the Nablus famous pastry, knafeh. "There is no work [for us] since the day they established the checkpoints," he says. He closes his doors in the afternoon because of the deep insecurity that grips the old city – no one visits its alleys after dark. Shantir still runs a decent trade, making NIS 500-1,000 (\$125 - \$250) in daily income. But he says these sales are perhaps one percent of the income he used to bring in.

Knafeh, best made in Nablus, is made fresh and piping hot



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Shantir still runs a decent trade, making \$125 - \$250 in daily income. But he says these sales are perhaps one percent of the income he used to bring in.

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Nablus

Nablus Security Plan

The Nablus police force has not been able to operate normally in the city since the 2002 invasions. As a result, crime has risen and businesspeople in the city report demands that they pay protection money to the various armed gangs that have thrived. On November 2, 2007 Palestinian security forces were deployed on the streets of Nablus through a political agreement reached with Israel. These armed forces are visible today and citizens report a great sense of relief from their presence. However, Israeli troops continue to enter the city and carry out military raids; the last one was the January 2008 large-scale, full-on invasion that lasted for three days and resulted in massive losses in residential and commercial building.



Palestinian security armed with guns and batons control the city's main circle



Israeli military vehicles invade Al Saqia street in Nablus city where small businesses were destroyed

ECONOMIC DECENTRALIZATION AND THE NABLUS MARKET

Perhaps the most obvious indicator of the decline of Nablus as a commercial center is the transformation that has taken place in its central produce market on the eastern side of the city. In a trend that observers say only became marked some months after the April 2002 Israeli incursions, producers stopped bringing their goods to the Nablus market, preferring instead to sell them in new produce markets established in Beita (south of Nablus), Fara'a (northeast of Nablus) and Qabatiya (north of Nablus). Delays for getting sensitive vegetables and fruits into the city were too risky.

The effects of this have been manifold. The municipality owns the market, and is now deprived the revenues of its vendors, who have moved elsewhere. Revenues collected from renting the market's booths have declined from NIS 5.19 million (\$1.3 million) in 2000 to NIS 509,290 (\$127,323) in 2006.¹⁹ The city reports having been forced to shut down several of the market's industrial refrigerators in order to save money. It has tried to meet with producers to work out how to reactivate the market, but with no success; many stalls remain closed and empty, in part because the vendors are unable to pay outstanding debts to the municipality. The number of people working in the market has declined by 75%, reports the municipality.

¹⁹ "Review of the Humanitarian Situation in the occupied Palestinian territory for 2004", OCHA, April 2005 & Nablus governorate report, 2007.

²⁰ Interview with Majdi Aqwdi, Nablus Ministry of Agriculture, November 27, 2007.

THE NEIGHBORING VILLAGES ALSO SUFFER

These producers and buyers once brought money into the city of Nablus, shopping for their families and conducting business in the city. The Ministry of Agriculture estimates a 90% decline in the number of growers purchasing goods in the city.²⁰ A study by UNSCO in 2005 showed how areas outlying Nablus were being reshaped economically by the closure of the city.

Table (4): Change in number of shops in neighboring villages by 2005

Community outlying Nablus City	Change in the number of shops by 2005
Huwara	-57
Deir Sharaf	-17
Furush Beit Dajan	-1
Zeita Jama'in	-1
Duma	3
Qusra	41
Jaba'	62
'Asira Ashamaliya	119
Beita	193

Source: OCHA, "Costs of Conflict", p. 10

Buyers and homemakers all used to come to Nablus city to get the best cheeses, pickles and olive oil. Now this downtown store is empty of shoppers



Nablus

On the micro-level, the ripple effect of this transformation is striking. One cheese reseller was formerly a relatively wealthy man, vacationing abroad and providing well for his large family. But when village cheese producers stopped bringing their products to the city because it was more profitable to sell the cheese themselves, he lost big. (Between 2000 and 2002, the annual value of dairy product imports to Nablus city fell from \$462,200 to \$38,620.²¹ The Ministry of Agriculture says that the combination of disease that spreads because veterinarians can't get past Israeli checkpoints in time, and spoilage of cheese, milk and yoghurt at the checkpoints has brought about a 40% decline in the entire sector in the oPt.²²) Forced to choose between feeding his family or paying his debts, this reseller stopped paying his electricity bills. Now he owes the municipality over NIS 4,000 (approximately \$1,000). The municipality is currently owed NIS 230,000 (\$57,500) and is itself in debt NIS 200,000 (\$50,000).²³

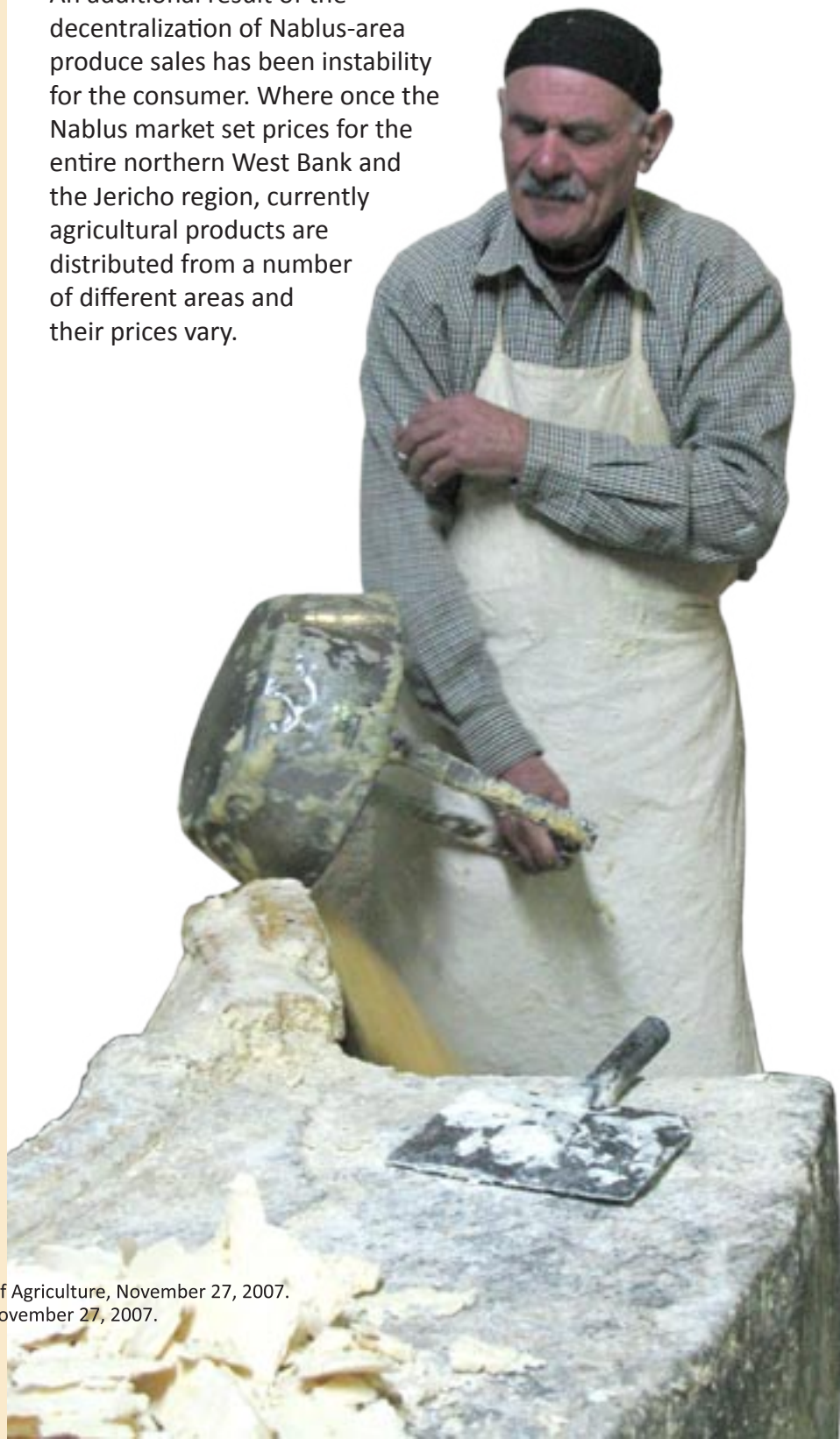
Between 2000 and 2002, the annual value of dairy product imports to Nablus city fell from \$462,200 to \$38,620

Table (5): Number of Israeli permits issued to Nablus merchants

	2002	2003	2004	2007
Number of registered merchants	5,154	5,350	5,678	Approx. 7,000
Number of issued permits	647	870	1,957	1,300

Source: Nablus Chamber of Commerce & Costs of Conflict, OCHA, p. 16

An additional result of the decentralization of Nablus-area produce sales has been instability for the consumer. Where once the Nablus market set prices for the entire northern West Bank and the Jericho region, currently agricultural products are distributed from a number of different areas and their prices vary.



²¹ "Costs of Conflict", OCHA.

²² Interview with Majdi Aqwdi, Nablus Ministry of Agriculture, November 27, 2007.

²³ Interview with acting mayor Hafez Shaheen, November 27, 2007.

FORCED INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

While no definite numbers are available, anecdotal evidence suggests that these strains are taking their toll in the form of forced internal displacement out of Nablus city. Because jobs are no longer as available inside the town, workers are leaving to find jobs in other towns, particularly Ramallah, which was once a 40-minute drive south. Companies are either closing their doors or opening branches in Ramallah. These changes have been so dramatic as to reverse the Nablus governorate's standing as the main manufacturing center in the West Bank, with Ramallah governorate taking its place.

On November 26, 2007, the UN General Assembly empowered UNRWA to assist Palestinians who have been internally displaced. This measure comes alongside heightened concern from international agencies that groups of Palestinians are being newly displaced through Israel's settlement policy and the construction of the Apartheid Wall.

Officials in both the Nablus municipality and the governorate express concern that their city is being emptied of people as a result of Israel's closure of the city and the resulting loss of markets, policies that are linked to Israel's settlement scheme for the Nablus area, the creation of infrastructure for the use of Jews and not Arabs, and Israel's collective punishment of Nablus residents.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

1. Every human being shall have the right to be protected against being arbitrarily displaced from his or her home or place of habitual residence.
2. The prohibition of arbitrary displacement includes displacement:
 - (a) When it is based on policies of apartheid, "ethnic cleansing" or similar practices aimed at/or resulting in altering the ethnic, religious or racial composition of the affected population;
 - (b) In situations of armed conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand;
 - (c) In cases of large-scale development projects, which are not justified by compelling and overriding public interests;
 - (d) In cases of disasters, unless the safety and health of those affected requires their evacuation; and
 - (e) When it is used as a collective punishment.
3. Displacement shall last no longer than required by the circumstances.

From the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights



Nablus

“I am a mother of three, and all three are pushing me to leave this place,” says Anan Atiri, director general in the Nablus governorate. Her 18-year-old son is already in Jordan, and her 16-year-old “can’t go play, can’t participate in activities, can’t travel the checkpoints, but sees the world on the internet. They don’t want luxury, they just want any place that is more safe.”

UN OCHA’s data on house demolitions is an important, albeit insufficient, indicator of forced displacement as a phenomenon. Over the past two years (since May 2005), OCHA has recorded the demolition of 15 structures in Nablus city and three of its refugee camps. Thirteen of these structures were residential and their demolition resulted in the displacement of 225 people (including 38 children).²⁴

An informal survey carried out in the summer of 2007 by Save the Children UK found that Palestinians are moving away from their homes in response to home demolitions, settlement or infrastructure construction that blocks Palestinian building and movement, and direct evictions by Israeli forces, or to escape violence carried out by Israeli settlers. These triggers are almost prevalent in areas of Israeli settlement. The Nablus area was identified as one of three areas in the West Bank (alongside southern Hebron and the Jordan Valley) where internal displacement is underway. Many Nablus residents are moving further south, the study showed, often to other urban areas.



“Over the past two years (since May 2005), OCHA has recorded the demolition of 15 structures in Nablus city and three of its refugee camps. Thirteen of these structures were residential and their demolition resulted in the displacement of 225 people (including 38 children).”

²⁴ Communication with OCHA staff, December 2007.

STORIES OF DISPLACED PEOPLE

One 34-year-old engineer from a Nablus family has recently decided to move his wife and young son to Ramallah. He has been employed in a Ramallah-based company since 1998, first living in the town and then commuting daily since his wedding four years ago to a young woman from Nablus. Sometimes he has been forced to sleep on a cot in his office when checkpoints are closed or there is a curfew in effect. The engineer reports spending 2-2.5 hours traveling from Nablus to Ramallah daily, and another 1-1.25 hours returning in the afternoon. The reason for his recent decision to move, however, is financial. He can no longer afford the NIS 800 (\$200) he must spend on transportation every month on his management-level salary of NIS 3,500 (\$875). When he moves, he will sell the apartment he now owns in Nablus in order to afford housing in Ramallah. He is also looking for work for his wife in Ramallah to help pay for the higher cost of living. He doesn't think it would be possible to find employment in Nablus.

Nablus

“The opportunities in Ramallah were more than those in Nablus, even before the intifada,” says another 34-year-old engineer from Nablus. “Once the Palestinian Authority came back to the Palestinian territories, all of the ministries were established in Ramallah and companies built there in order to be close to them. Investment in Ramallah was much greater than that in Nablus.”

He found work in Ramallah in his field and commuted back and forth. But with the start of the intifada in September 2000, “life became very hard.” He rented a flat in Ramallah with other friends from Nablus and started returning home every two weeks, and then every several months, because one trip one way could take as long as eight hours. Several years ago, he was given the investment opportunity of buying an apartment in Ramallah (he wasn’t thinking of living in it). Later, when he became engaged to a Ramallah native, they decided to furnish the apartment and start a life in the town where he works.

He says he can name 12-15 companies that have closed their offices in Nablus, or downsized and opened new branches in Ramallah. “Investors have started to move from Nablus to other places, not only Ramallah but the villages around Nablus,” he says. “The city’s economy doesn’t only depend on its residents, but on the villagers. Why buy a kilo of potatoes in

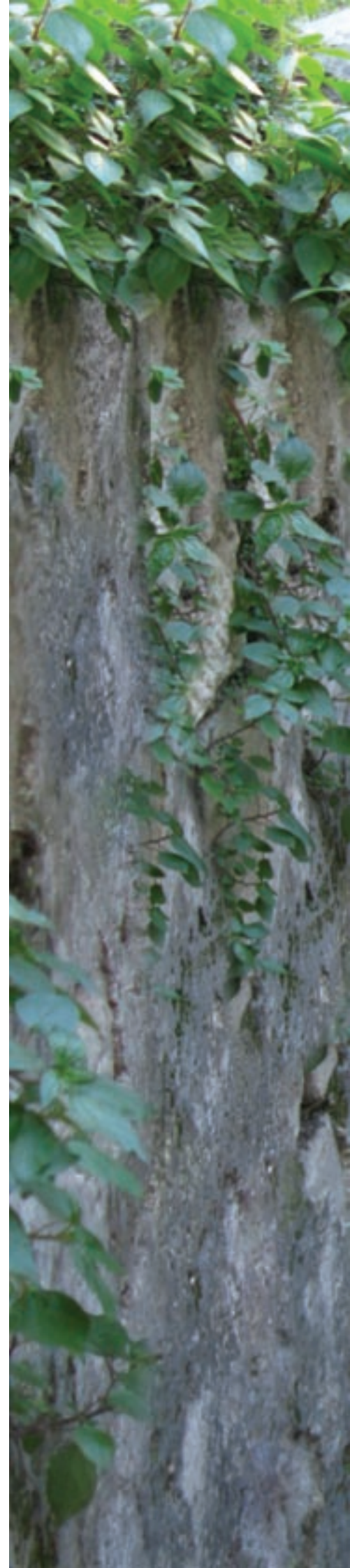
the city and then carry it back to the village?”

While many smaller Nablus businesses have moved their investments outside of the city, some of the city’s most important commercial enterprises have also quietly moved their resources to Ramallah.

“Nablus is not the city that we once knew, where people came from Ramallah, Jerusalem and even from inside Israel to visit.”

– Native Nablus businessman who has moved his center of life to Ramallah

The city of Nablus recently established several job creation programs to try to stem the tide of people leaving the city. If the problem remains unaddressed, however, experience shows that the long-term consequences of internal displacement are: food insecurity, reduced agricultural production, increased dependence upon aid imports, heightened poverty, inadequate living conditions, loss of industry and local economies, a shift to small-scale subsistence, and an increase in threatened populations and urbanization. From a political perspective, the decline and emptying of Nablus city means the strengthening and legitimization of Israel’s illegal settlement of the northern occupied West Bank and further cantonization of Palestinian land.



A photograph of a stone archway in a city. The arch is made of large, weathered stone blocks. Through the arch, a street is visible. A metal gate with a decorative pattern is closed across the street. Several people are walking on the street. In the foreground, a wooden cart filled with oranges and lemons is visible. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting daytime.

From a political perspective, the decline and emptying of Nablus city means the strengthening and legitimization of Israel's illegal settlement of the northern occupied West Bank and further cantonization of Palestinian land.

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Picture credit: MA’AN, Nablus Governorate, and Ala’ Badarneh