

OCHA

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humanitarian UPDATE

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www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt ■ ochaopt@un.org

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

OCHA oPt, MAC House, PO Box 38712, East Jerusalem
Tel +972-2-582 9962 | 582 5853 ■ Fax +972-2 582 5841

INSIDE Hebron: Economic Losses, Closures, Land
Confiscation/Destruction ■ More House demolitions in Gaza ■ Statistics

Overview:

In the first two weeks in December, 23 Palestinians were killed and 58 injured. No Israeli deaths were reported. In the Hebron area, the IDF eased its curfew regime and allowed some Palestinian shops to open. However, the economic situation remains critical in light of the continuing closures in and around the city. In Gaza, more than 270 Palestinians were made homeless by IDF house demolitions.

IDF Restrictions in Hebron: Enormous Economic Losses

Since the beginning of September 2003, the number of curfews imposed by the IDF on H-2 (Israeli-controlled) Hebron declined dramatically. This is a noticeable change for local Palestinian traders used to long spells under curfew. However, the absence of curfews has, as yet, had little impact in revitalizing the once bustling commercial centre.

Among the economic losses in the Hebron District since September 2000¹:

¹ Figures taken from Hebron Chamber of Commerce, and the Economic Department of the Office of the Governor of Hebron.

- Over 2,000 Palestinian shops remain closed;
- Gross loss of USD 447 million incurred by the commercial sector;
- Gross loss of USD 43 million incurred by the services sector;
- Gross losses of USD 1.7 billion in the industrial sector, one of the most important for the district and for the whole of the West Bank. Traditional industries of stone and marble, as well as shoes and leather have been the worst hit.

Economic losses and high unemployment are compounded by the internal and external closures prohibiting goods and traders to move freely within the city, the district, the West Bank and Israel. The road network around Hebron City has been restricted for most Palestinian traffic, closing off the city for traders and the movement of goods.

IDF Closures in H-2 and Old City of Hebron: Most Palestinian shops and roads remain closed

Severe movement restrictions have been imposed on approximately 35,000 Palestinians residing in H-2 including on the Old City of Hebron. Most of these restrictions have been imposed to protect approximately 500 Jewish settlers distributed among seven enclaves in the Old City and their access to religious sites. Daily life for Palestinians residents of H-2 is characterized as dangerous at times, with access to schools, health care facilities and markets severely limited.

The closures in H-2 (as of December 2003):

- 8 streets closed to Palestinian traffic by military order,
- 5 of these streets are also closed to Palestinian pedestrians;
- 12 permanent IDF checkpoints monitor and control movement;
- 4 military IDF bases;
- 7 Israeli settlements in H-2;
- Approximately 1,500 IDF soldiers posted in H-2;
- Over 12 control points have been established by the IDF on rooftops of Palestinian houses; and
- Two permanent military observation towers have been built on the hills of Al Juneidi and Abu Sneinah, overlooking the Old City to provide security to settler areas.

The recent offer by the Israeli Ministry of Defense to compensate² a group of Palestinian merchants of the Old City, whose shops were closed by military order, seems to point to the possibility that more commercial activities could re-open soon. The IDF has already allowed shops along Old Shalala street, part of the traditional commercial section of the city of Hebron, to re-open – a hopeful sign for the coming future.

² The financial compensation is to the tune of NIS 1.5 million (approximately USD 238,000) for 75 merchants.

Land confiscations for Hebron settlements: Wadi al-Ghrouz

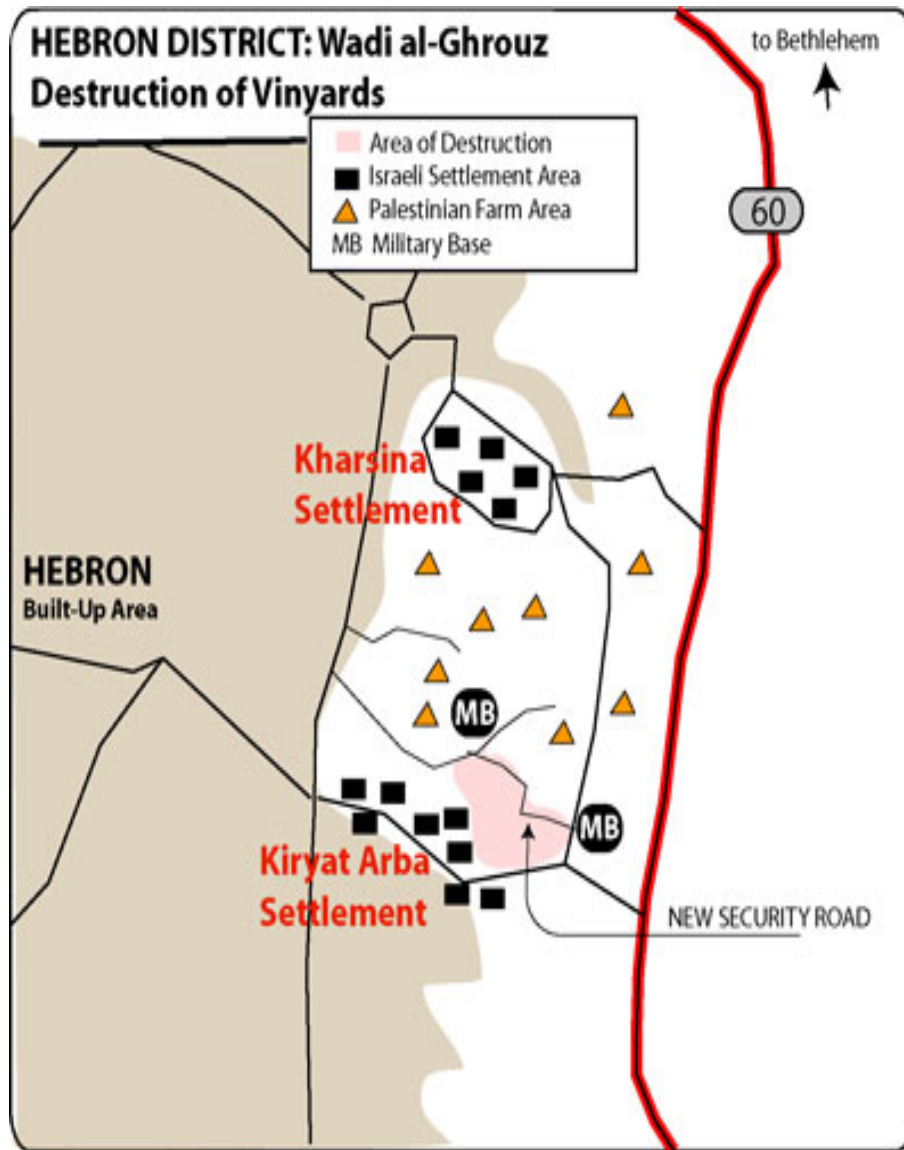
On 11 December, IDF bulldozers uprooted the vineyards at Wadi al-Ghrouz, on the eastern side of the city of Hebron. The vineyards are located between two Israeli Jewish settlements - Kiryat Arba and Kharsina. Over 20 Palestinian farmers had property destroyed.

Land confiscation orders by the IDF are not a new phenomenon in this farmland area,

considered to be a strategic link between the two settlements. Israeli settlers also continue to level land to create dirt roads and build fences alongside them.

This latest action by the IDF is part of a 15.5 acre land confiscation plan to create a security road to connect two military bases located near the settlement of Kiryat Arba. It will be 14 metres wide and surrounded by a fence. An existing road, used exclusively by settlers and Israeli security personnel, already delineates the edge of the Kiryat Arba settlement and runs around the farmers' vineyards. The new security road would run parallel to the existing road at a distance of 200 metres.

This new road will effectively block Palestinian farmers from accessing over 100 acres of prime agricultural land located near the settlement both between the roads and beyond.



The IDF District Civilian Liaison officer told OCHA field officers that the fence around the road was meant to secure the road and would have openings to allow farmers to cross the road to cultivate their land. No planning has yet been conducted on the exact location of the openings and the gates in the fence, nor how frequently they would be open.

OCHA field officers witnessed the land destruction with the farmers and their families who were visibly upset. Most had not received warning that the destruction would take place. Only one out of the twenty farmers appears to have received a military confiscation order: It was written in Hebrew, not dated and made reference to a map which was not attached.

Following the destruction, on 15 December, the landowners with the assistance of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC), lodged an appeal with the Israeli Court of Justice seeking to place a freeze on the construction of the road and fence. A previous petition sent to the officer responsible for infrastructure at the Hebron DCL, appears to have never been received and was not acknowledged by the IDF. The legal process is expected to cost the farmers about 4,000 USD and is being raised with the help of the HRC. Farmers face difficulties raising the funds for legal fees.

Continuing IDF destruction in southern Gaza: 6 killed, 270 homeless

In the early evening of 10 December, Israeli forces moved into the Brasil area of Rafah and on 11 December IDF forces entered the Salameh neighbourhood. These incursions resulted in the death of six Palestinians, 15 homes destroyed and over 100 Palestinians made homeless.

Four days later, the IDF invaded Khan Younis camp, destroying 18 buildings and damaging 4 others. It is estimated that 25 families (more than 170 people) were made homeless by the destruction.

Statistics Box:

01 – 15 December 2003	
Number of Palestinian Deaths	23
Number of Palestinian Injuries	58
Number of Israeli Deaths	0
Number of Israeli Injuries	6
<i>Ambulance incidents</i>	
Delay 1hr to 1.5 hrs	2
Denial of access	0
Verbal/Physical Abuse on medical crew	0
Shooting at ambulance	0

The next issue of the OCHA Humanitarian update will be published on 16 January 2004.