

STATE OF PALESTINE

Violence in Huwara, West Bank

KEY FIGURES

+390

PALESTINIANS INJURED
AS AT 27 FEBRUARY

+30

HOUSES BURNT
AS AT 27 FEBRUARY

7

PEOPLE KILLED IN
DIFFERENT ATTACKS

FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

Qatar has donated
USD 500,000 to
help Huwara.

The economic cost
of violence is estimated
at USD 5 million.

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

- Since 26 February 2023, there has been an increase in violence against Palestinian citizens in Huwara, a Palestinian town located in Nablus governorate, northern West Bank (TOI 08/03/2023). On 26 February, more than 400 Israeli settlers stormed Huwara and three surrounding villages, vandalising and torching 75 houses and more than 100 cars of Palestinian residents in what has been described as a 'pogrom' by an Israeli commander overseeing the West Bank (The Guardian 07/03/2023; AA 27/02/2023; CBS 06/03/2023; TOI 28/02/2023). The attacks came after a Palestinian killed two Israeli settlers in a nearby settlement earlier in the day, which itself was seen as a form of retaliation for an Israeli military raid in Nablus on 22 February that killed 11 Palestinians (TOI 06/03/2023; AA 27/02/2023; Al Jazeera 22/02/2023; TWP 28/02/2023).
- As at 27 February, more than 300 attacks by Israeli settlers had been recorded in the rampage in Huwara, including shootings and arson, injuring over 390 Palestinians and killing one (Al Jazeera 27/02/2023). Most of the injuries resulted from tear gas fired by the Israeli army (AA 27/02/2023). There are also reports of Palestinians being attacked with metal sticks and rocks. The attackers have also burnt shops, supermarkets, and other property, disrupting the livelihoods of the residents of Huwara (Al Jazeera 27/02/2023). Following the event, Israeli forces have extensively militarised the town (TOI 06/03/2023).
- Since the beginning of 2023, there have been heightened tensions and increased instances of violence, demolitions, and military raids in the West Bank. Some have connected this increase in violence with the new Government, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, who came into power on 29 December 2022 (TWP 28/02/2023; NYT 28/01/2023; CBS 06/03/2023). Between January and 13 March, the Israeli authorities demolished more than 270 structures in the region, affecting more than 10,000 people and displacing more than 400 (OCHA accessed 15/03/2023).
- OCHA categorises the humanitarian situation for one quarter of the households in the West Bank as either 'catastrophic', 'extreme', or 'severe'. As at 25 January, 31% of households in the West Bank reported challenges in meeting basic needs, such as food and healthcare (OCHA 25/01/2023).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

- On 6 March, barely a week after the first attack on Palestinian citizens, a new attack in Huwara killed six people and injured more than 20. Local businesses have also complained of other settlers attacking them at other times. This indicates that, aside from the possibility of further attacks in Huwara, people remain at risk of individual attacks by settlers (TWP 07/03/2023). Posters distributed by Israeli settlers called for the army to respond with war (TOI 06/03/2023; WSWS 06/03/2023).
- Residents of Huwara are likely to experience immediate shelter needs and longer-term impacts of the violence – for example, on their livelihoods and on children's access to education. Heightening tensions are likely to hinder people's access to essential services out of fear of insecurity.

HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

- Times of increased violence further severely constrain the already restricted humanitarian access in the West Bank and expose aid workers to insecurity.
- Huwara is located near a checkpoint on a highway between Ramallah and Nablus that links four nearby Israeli settlements, restricting Palestinian movement for fear of settler attacks and harassment from Israeli forces (Reuters 10/03/2023).
- Israeli soldiers impeded ambulances from accessing the area while the attacks were happening (Arab Center DC 08/03/2023). Some ambulances transporting the wounded were attacked by settlers and soldiers with stones. Fire engines seeking to put out the fires were also assaulted (Al Jazeera 27/02/2023; TWP 27/02/2023).
- Since the beginning of 2023, the Israeli army has raided several refugee camps with the reason of searching for people who have committed crimes. Some of these raids have killed or injured several refugees. These raids endanger the refugee population in Palestine, and the violence restricts their access to humanitarian assistance (France 24 07/03/2023; BBC 07/03/2023).

CRISIS IMPACTS

Protection

The rampage on 26 February and the Israeli military raid on a refugee settlement in Jenin on 6 March injured more than 400 people and killed seven (VOX 28/02/2023; The Guardian 07/03/2023). While these events have affected the most number of people, recurring individual attacks by settlers are also being reported by Palestinian citizens (TWP 07/03/2023).

In 2021, Israeli forces in the West Bank killed 78 Palestinians. This number increased to 151 in 2022. By 21 February 2023 alone, Israeli forces had already killed 44 Palestinians and injured 879 in the West Bank within the year. Settler attacks also increased from 496 in 2021 to 849 in 2022. As at 21 February, there had already been 113 attacks, with 29 of them resulting in casualties (OCHA 21/02/2023). In line with trends during previous years, Palestinian citizens are likely to continue to be at risk of attacks by settlers or Israeli forces, even more likely in the face of heightened tensions.

Livelihoods

Aside from killing and injuring people, the attackers also destroyed and looted houses and burnt cars and commercial buildings during the rampages (NAD 01/03/2023; +972 Magazine 27/02/2023). Violence and movement restrictions during times of tension are among the main constraints on the West Bank's economy.

As at 2022, the unemployment rate was at about 44%, and around 30% of the population lived in poverty (WB accessed DD/MM/202Y; Moody's Analytics accessed 14/03/2023). Six out of ten employed people had informal jobs. For these people, the impact of disruptions caused by violence tend to last several weeks, as the tense environment can prevent them from going out on the streets to generate income (WB 06/2019).

Education

The recent attacks also have the potential to disrupt the education of schoolchildren. The fear that their children will be attacked on the way to school, or even that educational facilities will be attacked, can prevent parents from sending their children to school. Some have opted not to do so until they feel there is security in their neighbourhoods (Al Jazeera 27/03/2023; DCI Palestine 27/02/2023).

Access to education for many children living in the West Bank is already precarious, as multiple events of violence and raids by Israeli and Palestinian forces in the refugee camps

have led to the recurring temporary closure of schools and, in some instances, the injury and death of children (UNRWA accessed 14/03/2023; OCHA 14/12/2018). In 2021, education-related incidents in the West Bank and Gaza affected more than 12,000 students (Education Cluster/WeWorld 30/12/2022).

DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

Anti-Palestinian rhetoric

2022 was the sixth consecutive year of the increasing trend in the number of Israeli settler attacks in the West Bank (Euro-Med Monitor 30/01/2023). These are not necessarily lone settler attacks, and Israeli military forces often accompany and protect the attackers (Al Jazeera 27/02/2023). The Israeli Prime Minister welcomed the operations in the Palestinian refugee camps, which he called "the heart of the den of murderers' lair" (TWP 07/03/2023). Israel's finance minister, who also handles civil administration in the occupied West Bank, said after the rampage that "the village of Huwara needs to be wiped out. I think the state of Israel should do it" (TWP 07/03/2023; Al Jazeera 03/03/2023).

2022 has been the deadliest year for Palestinians, with Israeli forces killing 146 people. The Israeli Government's permissiveness of violence and illegal settlements are major drivers of violence against Palestinians (Time 03/03/2023).

Lack of accountability

Despite the magnitude of the recent events, Israeli authorities detained only six suspects, who were soon released without charge (Arab Center DC 08/03/2023; Amnesty 03/03/2023). Israeli security forces also accompanied and protected the settlers as they attacked Huwara during the rampages (Reuters 04/03/2023).

Increased Israeli settlements

The Israeli State has an openly accepted policy promoting settlement in areas populated mainly by Palestinian citizens (Al Jazeera 28/12/2022). In the process of creating such settlements, Palestinian homes are often damaged or demolished to displace Palestinians from the area so that it could become occupied (ACAPS 01/10/2021). The occupation of areas inhabited mainly by Palestinian citizens and under Palestinian authority increases the risk of escalating tensions between Palestine and Israel, which could result in such violent outcomes (FP 02/03/2023).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Demolitions

Although the rampage occurred at the end of February, tensions in the West Bank have been on the rise since the beginning of 2023. The Israeli authorities have demolished more than 200 structures in the region, affecting more than 10,000 people. In 2022, Israeli forces demolished 953 Palestinian structures across the West Bank, the highest number since 2016 (OCHA 21/02/2023). These demolitions often occur in areas under full Israeli control, but nearby Palestinian settlements are also under the threat of annexation. They typically result in forced displacements and increase tensions between Palestinians and Israelis (ACAPS 01/10/2021). Settlers usually promote and carry out the demolitions for the purpose of expanding their illegal settlement areas. These actions force Palestinian landowners to move, usually to places where they also have little access to humanitarian assistance and where they lose their main sources of income (UNRWA 2013; OHCHR 07/05/2021). Should demolitions continue near areas experiencing recent violence, further tensions can be expected to arise and aggravate the current crisis.

Economic crisis

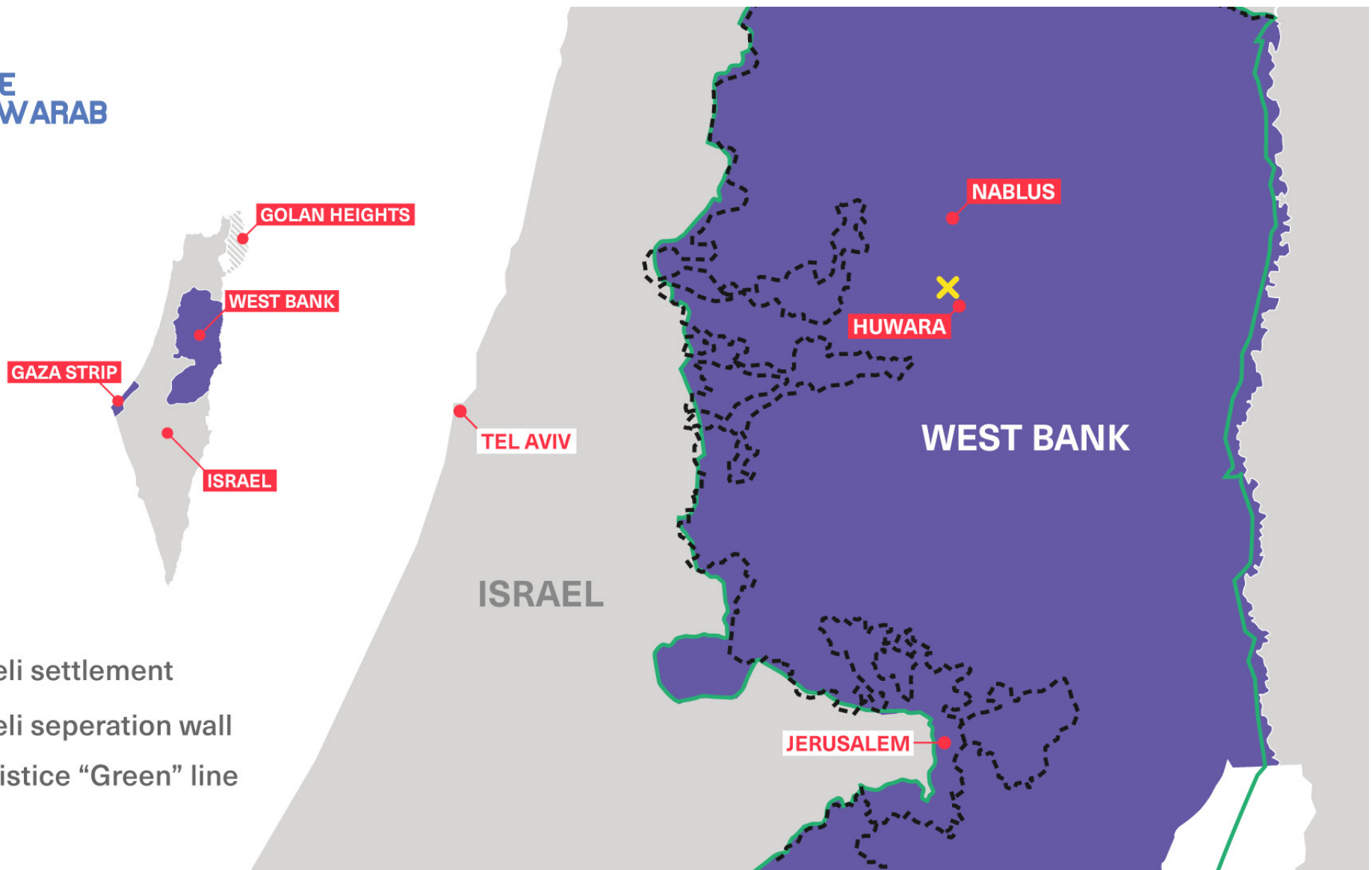
The impact of COVID-19 is still affecting the Palestinian economy. In 2021, the country's gross domestic product was at 5.1% below pre-pandemic levels, and the unemployment rate stayed high, at 26% nationwide and 44% in the West Bank. In 2021, food insecurity had increased in the West Bank by 23% (VOA 14/09/2022). As the Palestinian economy is weak and there is insufficient investment to produce jobs, many Palestinians are forced to work in Israel (Palquest accessed 14/03/2023). At times of widespread violence such as these recent events, populations may be at risk of losing access to their main livelihoods as they become reluctant to access jobs in Israel, and Israeli employers may also be reluctant to hire Palestinians (UNCTAD 14/09/2022).

FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

In the West Bank, there is a multiplicity of humanitarian responders that includes UN agencies (UNRWA, OCHA, UNCF, UNPS, UNPF, WFP, and WHO), INGOs (the Norwegian Refugee Council, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Save the Children), and local NGOs (the Palestinian Medical Relief Society, Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees, and the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center). These organisations face severe physical and bureaucratic challenges, including limited funding, in responding to affected people. The protection cluster was one of the least funded in 2022, with only 28% of the 2022 requirements covered (Protection Cluster accessed 14/03/2023).

The economic damage resulting from the attacks is estimated at more than USD 5 million (Wafa 01/03/2023). Qatar has donated USD 500,000 to support the rehabilitation of Huwara (Doha News 13/03/2023). Although the attacks have produced solidarity from various international delegations, we have found no further information on the deployment of humanitarian assistance or donations for reconstruction (UK Gov't 04/03/2023).

LOCATION OF HUWARA



Source: The New Arab (01/03/2023)