



Bethlehem 2017: Facts and Figures

Christmas 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Bethlehem Governorate consists of 10 municipalities, three refugee camps and several village councils. It has a population of over 220,000 people, including over 16,000 living in three refugee camps: Dheisheh, Aida and Beit Jibrin.¹ Among the largest cities and towns of the governorate are Bethlehem City, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Al Doha, Al Khader, Battir and Artas.

Bethlehem City is located 10 kilometers to the south of Occupied East Jerusalem. It is located in the northern side of the Bethlehem Governorate and has a population of 32,000.²

Currently the Palestinian government exercises limited control over only 13% of the Bethlehem Governorate. Israeli colonial-settlement presence in the area has cut off the open roads of Bethlehem towards Jerusalem (north) and the Dead Sea/Jordan Valley (to the east).

BETHLEHEM AND THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

There are two sites in the governorate that have been inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Site:

- The Nativity Church and Star Street ("Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route") in 2002
- Battir, including Wadi' Makhroul ("Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir") in 2014

OTHER IMPORTANT HERITAGE AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES LOCATED IN THE GOVERNORATE ARE:

- The Shepherds Field in Beit Sahour (there are two locations: one for the Roman Catholic Church and one for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate).
- Saint Nicholas Church in Beit Jala (a large parade of scouts takes place every December 19th marking the Saint Nicolas' Day).

1 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016

2 Ibid

- Saint George's Monastery in Al Khader.
- The Cremisan Valley (including Bir Onah, its monasteries and winery).
- Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque / The Rachel Tomb (under full Israeli control).
- The Pools of King Salomon in Artas.
- The Herodion Mountain (under full Israeli control).
- The Pools of King Salomon in Artas.
- The Dead Sea (under full Israeli control).
- Mar Saba Monastery.
- Milk Grotto Church.
- The Convent of Carmelite Sisters.

THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION: STRANGLING BETHLEHEM

- There are 18 illegal Israeli colonial-settlements across the Bethlehem Governorate with a population of over 130,000 settlers.³ This includes three settlements within the illegally Israeli-defined, expanded and annexed "Jerusalem Municipality" which are Gilo, Giv'at Hamatos and Har Homa.⁴ In effect, Israeli settlements surround the Holy City of Bethlehem from its four sides.
- Among the several settlements separating Bethlehem City from the rest of the occupied West Bank⁵ are Gilo (31,600 settlers) and Har Homa (19,000 settlers) to the north; Har Gilo (1,500 settlers), Beitar Illit (52,000 settlers) and Neve Daniel (2,500 settlers) to the West, Efrat (10,000 settlers) to the south as well as Nokdim (1,800 settlers) and Tekoa (3,700 settlers) to the East.⁶
- In 2015, Peace Now revealed Israel's "Civil Administration" plan to establish a new settlement called by the Settlement Watch group as "E2" by expanding the illegal settlement of Efrat with 2,500 settlements units to be illegally built on privately owned Palestinians lands that belong to Nahla village. If this plan is carried out, it would severely affect the continuity of Bethlehem with the south and hence prevent any natural growth.
- Several senior Israeli officials are settlers in the Bethlehem Area including ministers Avigdor Lieberman (Nokdim) and Ze'ev Elkin (Kfar Eldad) as well as the Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, who owns a house in the illegal settlement of Neve Daniel.
- The construction of Israel's illegal Annexation Wall in Beit Jala (Beir Onah/Cremisan Valley) has been completed, with the exception of a 225 meters gap on the upper side of the valley). Access of the landowners to their lands is completely impeded and they have faced access restrictions even during olive harvest season.⁷

3 Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, Population Statistics 2015

4 Negotiations Affairs Department

5 Ibid

6 Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, Population Statistics 2015

7 The Society of Saint Yves

CONNECTION WITH JERUSALEM

- Both East Jerusalem and Bethlehem are an integral part of the Occupied State of Palestine
- Every year on Christmas Eve, thousands of Palestinian Christians as well as Christians from all over the World join the Christmas route procession which starts from Jaffa Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem and end up in Bethlehem Manger's Square.
- Bethlehem and Jerusalem have been twin cities for centuries. The Israeli occupation through its policy of colonization, including its illegal Annexation Wall, has separated and fragmented both cities for first the time in 2000 years of Christianity. This includes the pilgrimage routes that now have to cross through an Israeli checkpoint.
- For Palestinian ID holders, entry to Jerusalem is restricted. They can only do so after obtaining an Israeli military permit. In the vast majority of cases, this permit is restricted to certain hours and does not allow the holder to drive a car.
- Israel's discriminatory citizenship laws have prevented thousands of Palestinian Jerusalemites from obtaining family reunification for their spouses and children from the rest of the Occupied State of Palestine. This has particularly affected Palestinian Christians that had intermarried between Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah for centuries.

CONNECTION WITH HEBRON

- When the Annexation wall is completed, the existing connection between Bethlehem city and Hebron will be disconnected. The current Road No. 60 will be for an exclusive use of the Israelis while Palestinians will no longer be able to use it to access Hebron.⁸

ECONOMY

- Bethlehem has one of the largest unemployment rates in the Occupied West Bank. By 2016 it reached 21.3%.⁹
- Exports of goods abroad has increased by 8% in comparison with the previous year mainly in marble and stone, pharmaceutical and handcraft products. Moreover, Bethlehem manufactures food and beverages, plastic, furniture and textiles.¹⁰

CULTURE

- Bethlehem has ten museums and more than 150 cultural centers and NGO's.¹¹
 - Al-Bad Museum (Ministry of Tourism).
 - History of Bethlehem (Near Jacir Palace).
 - International Nativity Museum (Salesian Convent).
 - Baytuna Al-Talhami Museum (Women' Union).

8 Negotiations Affairs Department

9 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016

10 Samir Hazboun, Chairman of the Administrative Board of Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce and Industry

11 Bethlehem Municipality

- Peace Center Museum (Peace Center Building).
- Bansky Museum (Bansky Hotel).
- Solomon Pools Archaeological Museum (Artas).
- Gallery Bab Id-Deir Art Museum (nearby Nativity Church).
- Dar Al-Nadweh Art Museum.
- Palestinian Heritage Museum.

HEALTH

- The Bethlehem Governorate has 2 governmental hospitals (Beit Jala Hospital and Dr. Kamal Hospital for Mental disorders), in addition to 6 private hospitals (Holy Family Hospital, Caritas for Children, Al-Dibs Maternity Hospital, Shepherds Hospital, Arab Society for Rehabilitation and Yamamah - Dr. Ahmad Nu'man - Hospital).¹²
- In addition to the above, there are also several charities and medical institutions and private health clinic as well as many laboratories, radiology centers, public health clinics, and pharmacies.

EDUCATION

- In Bethlehem Governorate, there are 134 governmental schools, 8 UNRWA Schools and 28 private schools (many of them belonging to various Christian churches, including the Terra Sancta School inaugurated in 1518). The drop rate among the primary schools is 0.8%, whereas the drop rate among High Schools is 1.4%.¹³ In addition to Bethlehem University, there are also Palestine Ahliya University, Al Quds Open University and the recently inaugurated Dar Al Kalima.

WATER

- Bethlehem Governorate has 10 wells used for domestic consumption. There are also 4 wells controlled by the Israeli occupation Company "Mekorot" in Herodion mountain area from which Palestinians are obliged to buy their water. At an increasing rate; between 2009 and 2015 the Palestinian Water Authority has to buy an additional 3 million cubic meters per year. Moreover, both southern governorates Bethlehem and Hebron suffer from water shortage for domestic consumption of the value of 26 million cubic meters per year. ¹⁴
- It is worth noting that the per capita consumption for a Palestinian from Bethlehem is 73.6 liters per day,¹⁵ in comparison to an average Israeli settler that uses more than 350 liters per day. The minimum water consumption per-capita according to the World Health Organization (WHO) should be 100 liters per person per day.

12 Bethlehem Governorate

13 Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education

14 Palestinian Water Authority

15 Ibid