

# Situation Report

# Jerusalem/ West Bank/Gaza

World Vision

## GEOGRAPHY

The West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, which make up the Palestinian territories, are located in the Middle East. The West Bank is bordered to the west by Israel and to the east by Jordan. The Gaza Strip is an area of land between Egypt and Israel that is bordered to the west by the Mediterranean Sea.

The region contains low coastal plains, central mountain ranges, a rugged upland plateau and desert. The climate is Mediterranean, with mild winters and dry and warm-to-hot summers.

## PEOPLE

The population of the Palestinian territories is estimated to be over 4 million, with roughly two-thirds living in the West Bank and the remaining third in Gaza. More than half of the population is aged less than 18 years.

The people living in Gaza are Palestinian Arabs, as is most of the population of the West Bank.

Some 97% of the population are Muslim (mostly Sunni), with the remaining 3% comprising Orthodox Christians. Arabic is the major language, with English and Hebrew spoken as well.



Balqis, age 12 looks forward to her future "I love to study, I would want to go to university...It would be my dream."



A beekeeping project in West Bethlehem is providing new skills for women wanting to support their families.

## HISTORY

Many peoples have laid claim to the land occupied by Israel and the Palestinian territories. Arabs took control of the region in the 7th century and ruled the area until the 20th century. Immigration of Jewish people, mainly from Europe, increased during the 19th and 20th centuries and they joined the small Jewish community in Palestine.

In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution dividing Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The State of Israel was declared by the region's Jewish inhabitants. As a result, war broke out and a subsequent ceasefire agreement saw Jordan governing the West Bank and Egypt administering the Gaza Strip. In 1967, Israel defeated Egypt, Syria and Jordan during the Six-Day War. Shortly afterwards the United Nations passed a resolution calling for Israel's withdrawal from these newly conquered territories.

The war created a massive refugee problem, with Palestinians fleeing to neighbouring Arab countries and elsewhere around the world, where many remain today.

A Palestinian uprising lasted from 1987 until 1993. With help from the international community, the Israeli and Palestinian leaders signed a peace treaty in 1993, renewing hope for a peaceful resolution. But conflict continued throughout the late 1990s and into the new millennium.

## ECONOMY

High population density, ongoing conflict and strict internal and external security controls have contributed to severe economic problems in the region.

Some 55% of Palestinians in the West Bank and 70% in the Gaza Strip live below the poverty line of US\$2 a day, while 63.3% of Palestinians in the West Bank and 50% in the Gaza Strip are unemployed.

The incomes of many Palestinians have been reduced in recent years because of restrictions imposed on their movement which mean they cannot travel to their workplaces or go to the markets to do business.

The construction of a physical barrier between Israel and the West Bank has led to a further deterioration of economic conditions by reducing access to agricultural land as well as education and health facilities.

## LIVING CONDITIONS

Household poverty in the region has increased 50% over the past decade and many families rely on food aid and remittances from relatives overseas for their survival.

One in three children in the Gaza Strip suffers from malnutrition, and inadequate water supplies and the unequal distribution of water resources are serious problems.

Many Palestinians living in isolated villages lack access to basic services, especially healthcare, as village facilities are often inadequate, if they exist at all.

## Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES	AUSTRALIA
Population in millions	4.0	20.9
Internet users (per 1,000 people)	67	698
Urban population (as % of total)	72.1%	89.1%
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	\$1,160	\$39,066
Population with an improved water source	92%	100%
Adult literacy rate	female – 90.3% male – 97.2%	female – 99.0% male – 99.0%
One year olds fully immunised against measles (%)	99%	94%
Net primary enrolment ratio	80	97
Life expectancy at birth	73.3 years	81.4 years

United Nations Development Programme. 2009, *Human Development Report 2009*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Ongoing conflict has taken a toll on the psychological wellbeing of Palestinian children and their parents. Many children show symptoms such as withdrawal, attention deficit, sleeping difficulties and depression.

## EDUCATION

Efforts by the Palestinian Authority to improve access to education have seen a two-thirds growth in student numbers in basic education since 1994 and a trebling of secondary school enrolments.

Despite this growth, many problems remain, such as poor student/teacher ratios and poorly trained staff.

## WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN THE WEST BANK/JERUSALEM/GAZA

- assists over 4,600 sponsored children, their families and communities with education and other basic needs.
- works with local civil society groups to promote justice, peace and reconciliation.
- supports the psychosocial wellbeing of children in kindergartens and community centres and helps them overcome trauma.
- supports agriculture and economic development projects, helping to improve livelihoods for women and their communities.



Children draw their experiences as part of a psychosocial care program in Gaza

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