



Wadi Fukin Under Threat




MA'AN Development Center

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These hills once belonged to the village of Wadi Fukin. In 1948, however, most of the property was lost to the Israeli occupation; the red roofs in the distance are Tsur Hadassah, which lies just past the green line southwest of Wadi Fukin's fields. The Apartheid Wall is planned to run along the green line here, cutting through the hillside. But Israeli authorities already restrict construction of homes or greenhouses in these village fields in the valley.



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It would have been very easy for the village of Wadi Fukin to have been erased. Caught in firefights along the armistice line between Israel and Jordan<sup>1</sup>, the village was twice demolished and in 1954, its residents forced out to Dheisheh refugee camp in nearby Bethlehem. Thirteen years later, Israel had occupied the area and began investing in settlement projects that swallowed up residents' agricultural lands.



**Wadi Fukin was destroyed twice, only to be rebuilt in 1972**

Today, Wadi Fukin has grown from a population of several hundred to more than 1,238<sup>2</sup> people, surrounded on three sides by towering Jewish-only settlements built in part on the village's confiscated land. The series of walls, towers, barbed wire and patrol roads that Israel is erecting around Palestinian communities in the West Bank – the Apartheid Wall – is slated to run along the fourth side of the village, placing Wadi Fukin in an isolated enclave.

<sup>1</sup> 1949 Armistice lines was established between Israel and its neighbors (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria) after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The Green Line separates Israel not only from these countries but from territories Israel would later capture in the 1967 Six-Day War, including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula (the latter has since been returned to Egypt).

<sup>2</sup> Source: the Palestinian central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), projected mid-year statist



### *Wadi Fukin in Crisis*

- Separation from other Palestinian communities, labor markets, hospitals by Apartheid Wall & settlements
- Confiscation of agricultural lands
- Threat to 11 natural springs due to settlement encroachment
- Growing unemployment due to closure and loss of agricultural land



*The new road Israel is constructing under Route 60 has run straight through cultivated lands*



The main road, Route 60, that runs south in the West Bank is off-limits to Palestinians without special permits, for the exclusive use of Israeli settlers. A new road is being constructed under Route 60 that will connect residents to Bethlehem alone.

Isolation brings with it unemployment and stunted horizons. “Every student wants to be someone,” says resident Atef al-Manasreh. “My son is in university; he studies economics. But where are the companies that will hire him? In the end, we are in a large prison.”



*Bitar Illit settlement and a satellite settlement of a few caravans, Hadar Bitar, lie right by the sole Palestinian road to the village.*



Until 1948, Wadi Fukin boasted 12,000 dunams of agricultural land. The Israeli occupation in 1948 confiscated most of these resources; today the village has 2,600 dunams, of which it is allowed to build on only 250 dunams – the current perimeter of houses in the village. More land has been confiscated for the construction of the Apartheid Wall and many fear that the rest of the land will soon be absorbed into the settlements that surround them.

“Today there are over 460,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Moreover, Israel has appropriated agricultural land and water resources in the West Bank for its own use. This aspect of Israel’s exploitation of the West Bank appears to be a form of colonialism of the kind declared to be a denial of fundamental human rights and contrary to the Charter of the United Nations...”

*—Professor John Dugard, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied Since 1967*



The village's 11 natural springs and rich farmland are threatened by the massive expansion of Betar Illit. Settler water use and detonations from the ongoing construction are lowering the water table, drying up the village's water resources. Sewage from Betar Illit flows into the village and council leaders fear that in a year or two, it will irreversibly pollute the village springs. Settlers recently opened from the settlement down into Wadi Fukin's lands, and they regularly use it to bathe in the village's irrigation pools.

## Constructing Inequality between Arabs and Jews

From the valley of Wadi Fukin, one looks up to the ridges, where the occupation has constructed massive development projects. The largest housing development is the Jewish settlement of Betar Illit, the fastest-growing Jewish settlement in the West Bank since its establishment.

### Betar Illit settlement growth: population and land area covered since 1987

	1987	2004/5	Absolute Increase
<b>Area covered (in ha)</b>	0.4	507.8	+507.4
<b>Settler population</b>	161	24,895	+24,734

Source: OCHA Israeli presence in the West Bank geo-database.

On the other side of the village one sees the developments of Tsur Hadassah and Hadar Betar settlements, built on the village's lands occupied in the 1948 war.

Israeli investment in Betar Illit and other settlements has included the creation of highways and infrastructure, shopping districts and other public services on the expense of Palestinian land. Plots of agricultural land that the occupation has not succeeded in confiscating remain inside the settlement boundaries and Palestinians are still struggling to maintain access there.

Wadi Fukin resident al-Manasreh remembers 2002 when his father invested in planting 60 dunams of his land inside the gates of Betar Illit with olive trees, only to have them uprooted by the settlers. In a rare step and after the elderly man had died, an Israeli court order supported the villagers' right to access and work the land. The land was replanted, but with fewer trees due to fears that the investment would again be lost. Now this same property is threatened by the path of the Apartheid Wall, which is slated for construction nearby.



### Quick Facts on Betar Illit Settlement



Established: 1980  
 Population: 35,000  
 Industries: White collar sector in Jerusalem, commercial district & public sector  
 Services: 2 banks, 1 post office, 2 clinics, 43 schools, public transportation, gardens and playgrounds  
 Unemployment: Estimated less than 10%

*From the official Betar Illit website*

### Quick Facts on Wadi Fukin

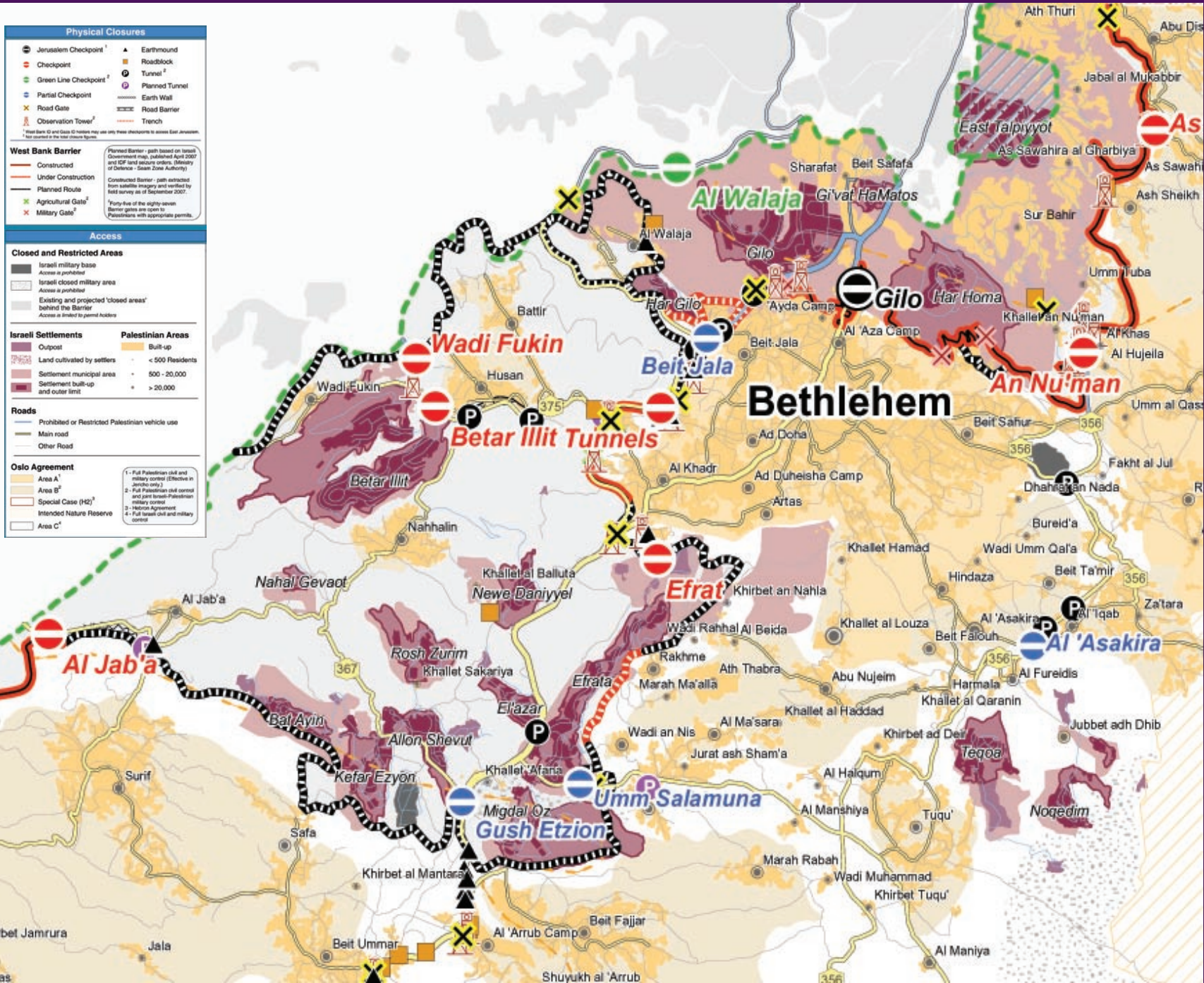


*Establishment:* found from the Kanani era (4<sup>th</sup> century BC) and the Roman era (1<sup>st</sup> century BC)  
 Population: 1,238  
 Services: 1 school  
 Industries: Agriculture, day laborers in Israel and public sector  
 Unemployment: Estimated 40%

*From the Wadi Fukin Local Popular Committee*



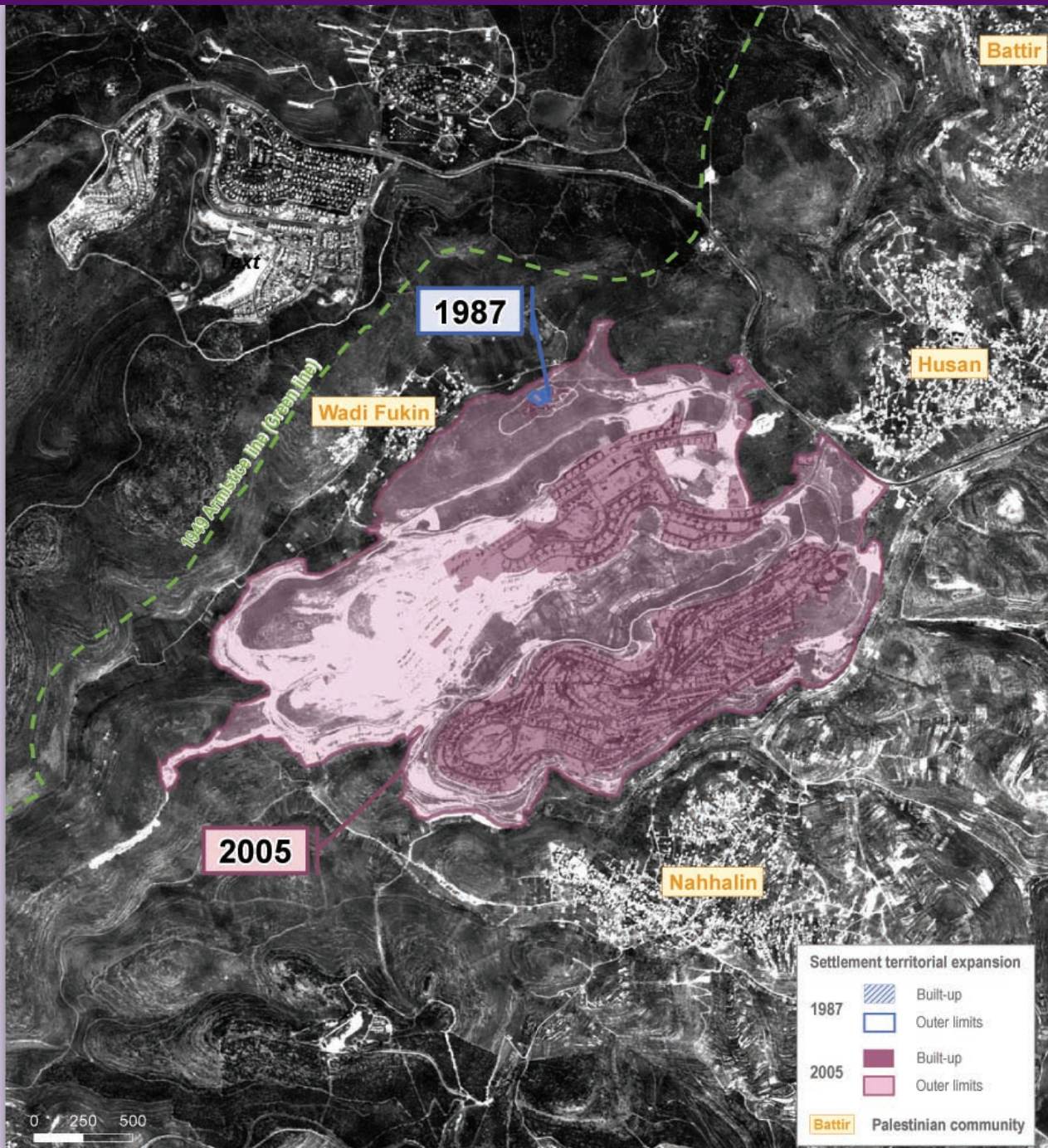
# Wadi Fukin Close-Up\*



\* Source: excerpted from OCHA West Bank map, September 2007



# Bitar Illit Expansion\*



\* source: *The Humanitarian Impact on Palestinians of Israeli Settlements and Infrastructure in the West Bank*, July 2007, p. 29.





## About the Apartheid Wall

- The Apartheid Wall is a series of high cement walls, barbed wire “smart” fences, patrol roads, guard towers and gates that Israel is building around Palestinian West Bank communities. In November 2007, it was planned as 724.5 km long.
- 10% of the West Bank lies between the Wall and the Green Line and special permits are required for Palestinians to reach this land.
- Only 18% of those who once worked farms now behind the Wall in the northern West Bank are given the special Israeli permits required to access the farms, found an OCHA study.
- In July 2004, the International Court of Justice declared that the Wall, where it encroaches into the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – some 90% of the route – is illegal.

“Israel works slowly,” says Shadi Sucre, 33, a local activist. “They think: don’t worry, in the end we will take the land, even though we [Palestinians] win one case.”

Wadi Fukin residents are prevented from building on most of the village’s remaining lands (those outside the 250-dunam construction area drawn by the occupation). If they do, the houses could be demolished by the occupation forces.

*The road leading behind the Wadi Fukin School marks the perimeter around the village where villagers are allowed to build. When the owners of the land tried to plant olive trees here, occupation forces uprooted them*





These separate and unequal living conditions between Arabs and Jews in the West Bank are now being consolidated with a segregated road system. For Wadi Fukin, that means being restricted to the new underpass running below Route 60, connecting with the town of Bethlehem 13 kilometers away.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 38% of the occupied West Bank is effectively off-limits to Palestinians as a result of the occupation policies of settlements, road systems and related infrastructure. Under international law, occupying authorities are prevented from introducing new populations and are responsible for the well-being of existing residents.

### ***The Politics of a Phone Call***

Wadi Fukin residents are currently connected to the Israeli phone system. This means that every call from the village to nearby Hosan (placed under Palestinian Authority civil control by the 1993 Oslo agreements) is an expensive country-to-country to call.

Most Wadi Fukin residents have no access to Israeli post offices or the phone company to pay their bills. They carry West Bank ID cards and must get a permit to travel to Jerusalem or Israel from Israeli military authorities. In order to pay their phone bills, they must rely on the good graces of friends who carry the coveted permits.

Both the village council and the Palestinian phone company have repeatedly requested permission from Israeli authorities to extend Palestinian phone lines into the village, only to be denied.

“If the phone lines were Palestinian, I could go to Bethlehem to pay [the bill],” says one man wistfully. “It would come in Arabic, and they could fix it when it is broken. The Israelis say they are afraid to send someone to fix the lines for ‘security reasons’.”

Until then, Wadi Fukin is locked in a no-man’s-land where the services it is allowed are delivered by the very occupation that threatens its resources and property.



***“...Palestinians are compelled to use an alternative road network of secondary and more circuitous roads that run between the Israeli road network... Limited Palestinian travel is still possible on the primary Israeli road system, but Palestinian drivers wanting to travel on these roads need permits. A different permit is generally required depending on whether the vehicle is commercial, public transport or private car. Few drivers of private cars are able to obtain these permits.”***

– United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in *The Humanitarian Impact on Palestinians of Israeli Settlements and Infrastructure in the West Bank*, released June 2007





### *Uncertainty and Need Define Life for One Wadi Fukin Family*

We found Um Nader having a cup of tea in the olive grove. The water for the tea was drawn from the village spring and heated on a small wood fire.

She is the head of the Wadi Fukin women's committee, a group started in the first intifada. Today, the committee is registered with the Palestinian Authority and hosts training courses introduced by international organizations. Often, however, Um Nader finds that these programs do little to resolve the real problems faced by her and other women.

"We need work, something to help us earn for our families," she tells us. "These organizations come from outside [with other agendas], and we are tired of this."

Um Nader lives with her son, Nader, and his family. He is usually unemployed, she says. After months without work, he was given a permit to work in Israel for four or five months. But now the permit has expired and he has spent the last week sitting at home.

Their family lives off of the vegetables and fruits that she harvests from their plots of land. Medical needs and food staples are obtained through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency that serves refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

About the Israeli settlers living on the hilltops, Um Nader says: "When you see that they took your land, the water, your produce, of course this affects you. Even when you are driving on the street, and they are in the way, we have to go around *them*. They don't even budge."

*"The solution is in the hands of the aggressors. People like us just want to live."*



*– Hajj Rabah, 82, recalls how he and his family kept returning to Wadi Fukin after being expelled in 1954, harvesting the fields at night so as not to attract the suspicion of patrolling Israeli soldiers*

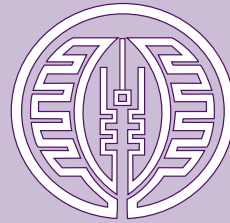




An elderly couple lives in this ramshackle home close to the Wadi Fukin fields. The Apartheid Wall is slated to run just next to the house, certainly displacing this family







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