

Dislocated Communities

# THE CASE OF KHIRBET KHAMIS

Khirbet Khamis is a Palestinian community north of Bethlehem, home to approximately 60 people, including 24 children. Immediately after the 1967 war, Khirbet Khamis, together with dozens of other Palestinian communities, was incorporated into the newly-expanded Jerusalem municipal boundary and unilaterally annexed to Israel. However, unlike the vast majority of Palestinians in the annexed

areas, Khirbet Khamis' residents were issued West Bank, instead of Jerusalem, ID cards. While the reasons are still obscure, the consequences have been dramatic: under Israeli law, they are considered "illegal residents" in their own homes.

Despite their alleged "illegality", residents were able to live in their homes undisturbed and to access surrounding



The Barrier has physically cut off Khirbet Khamis from the Bethlehem urban area, which serves as its main service center

areas in East Jerusalem and Bethlehem until 1993. At that time, Israel imposed a closure regime on the West Bank and introduced a permit system to control the access of West Bank ID holders into East Jerusalem and Israel. Since then, most of Khirbet Khamis' residents have been issued various types of such permits, which incrementally reduced their freedom of movement: while in 1994 they were able to access and stay in any part of East Jerusalem or Israel, the permits issued since 2009 allow them to stay only within a radius of a few meters from their homes and to walk between their community and the nearby checkpoint.

In 2002, following a wave of deadly attacks by Palestinians against Israeli civilians, the Israeli authorities began building a Barrier with the stated aim of preventing such attacks. The vast majority of the Barrier's route, however, has been placed within the West Bank, rather than on the Green Line, in the process separating Palestinian communities and farming land from the rest of the West Bank

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Fuad Jado

and contributing to the fragmentation of the oPt. In East Jerusalem, the Barrier has transformed the geography, economy and social life of Palestinians. Neighbourhoods, suburbs and families have been divided from each other and from the urban centre, and rural communities separated from their land in the Jerusalem periphery.

In the case of Khirbet Khamis, the Barrier physically cut off the community from the Bethlehem urban area, which has served as the residents' main service, livelihood and social center. Since then, their movement to and from that area has been possible only through a Barrier checkpoint (Gilo), on foot, provided they have a valid permit. At present, there are 16



other communities with a combined population of at least 3,870 people, the majority of whom, like the residents of Khirbet Khamis, hold West Bank IDs but find themselves on the 'Jerusalem' side of the Barrier, and therefore face similar access restrictions.

Khirbet Khamis has become an "open air prison" for its residents, says Fuad Jado, a 55-year-old father of five:

*Our lives have become so complicated, and we are under enormous pressure, psychological, financial and social. We are not allowed to work in Israel although our community has been illegally annexed and we are now cut off from the rest of the West Bank on the Jerusalem side of the Wall. This has changed all our lives. Our children, for example, have to cross checkpoints daily to get to their school. While there are no shops in the community we are limited in the quantity of food we can bring in from Bethlehem, especially dairy products. Sometimes the soldiers throw them away if they think the quantities exceed our daily consumption; other times we do it ourselves to avoid waiting for permission to enter. What are we supposed to do? They don't allow us to shop in Jerusalem, so we sometimes have no choice but to rely*

*on friends from Jerusalem to buy things for us or risk going to Jerusalem markets ourselves.*

Of particular concern to the community, access to emergency service providers, including ambulances and fire brigades, has been impaired. On several occasions, the inability to timely access emergency health service had had tragic consequences; Fuad Jado recalls one incident in 2005:

*I lost my 70-year-old mother because the ambulance couldn't reach us after she suffered a severe stroke. I called the Red Crescent in Bethlehem, but they said they had to coordinate first with the Israeli Civil Administration to get permission to get an ambulance into Khirbet Khamis through the checkpoint, which may have taken up to an hour. So I called an Israeli ambulance in Jerusalem, but they told me they couldn't come because we live in a boundary area that is not within their coverage. I had no choice but to carry my mother with the help of my nephew. We walked for nearly a kilometre until we found a gap in the Barrier. We left my mother there and went to look for a taxi to take her to Bethlehem. When we came back she had died. At the hospital they told us that we had arrived too late. It would*

*have taken only three minutes for an Israeli ambulance to reach us from Gilo, so maybe she could have been saved.*

The inability of people to build on their land in order to provide housing for younger generations is a source of additional hardship. Like hundreds of Palestinian homes, Khirbet Khamis is not covered by a planning scheme that has been approved by the Israeli authorities. As a result, residents are unable to obtain building permits and any structure that has been built in the community since the early 1990's, including extensions to existing houses, is at risk of demolition.

Salameh Abu Tarbush, 50-years-old and father of seven, lives in Khirbet Khamis, and operates a kiosk selling refreshments, located between his home and the Gilo checkpoint:

*In 2004, the Israeli authorities demolished a kitchen and a bathroom that I had added to our old house in 2000 to make more room for my family. We had no choice but to make a shed to use as a kitchen outside. Recently, I received two new demolition orders: one for the kiosk, from which I earn my living, and the other is for a cattle shed. We applied*

*Salameh's family was forced to self-demolish this makeshift tent on 8th September 2013 after receiving a final demolition order in August 2013 and paying a 6,000-NIS fine*

*for a building permit, but our request was rejected; they only thing they told us that construction in this area is prohibited.*



**The makeshift kitchen which Salameh's family has constructed outside to replace the one demolished.**



In September 2013, following the issuance of a demolition order and to avoid the payment of fines, Abu Tarbush dismantled the kiosk he built. The following month, Israeli officials demolished the family's house that was built before 1967, displacing 12 people. In the same period, Israeli Ministry of Interior officials visited the community, took measurements of all construction in the community built after 1967, and verbally informed residents to self-demolish these house extensions and other structures.

Unlike other residents of Khirbet Khamis, members of the Abu Tarbush family were never provided with

permits by the Israeli authorities, reportedly due to reasons related to their inability to provide land ownership documents. While the family members have generally been allowed to cross to their home via Gilo checkpoint despite their lack of permits, they have been subjected to multiple attempts of forced eviction. Salameh explains:

*"Ever since the Barrier was completed, we have been under the constant threat of deportation. The first time this happened was in 2004, on Christmas Eve. The Israeli Border Police invaded our house in the middle of the night, evacuated all of us, including my wife and children, and forced us to wait outside in the cold and rain for*

*four hours before they put us all in a jeep and dropped us on the Bethlehem side of the Barrier. We managed to return home the next morning through a very long detour, but they did the same thing several times after that. We are at the mercy of the soldiers at the checkpoint since none of us has a permit to commute between home and Bethlehem. We approached the Israeli Civil Administration for permits many times, but each time we have been rejected. They keep telling us to go solve our problems ourselves...."*

Rula Abu Tarbush, daughter of Salameh, is a 17-year-old student from Khirbet Khamis who attended a school in Bethlehem between 2001 and 2012:

*I was only able to commute between home and school through Gilo checkpoint. The main difficulty was on the way back home. Sometimes I had to wait for hours before I was allowed to cross the checkpoint, other times my parents were called to collect me, or I would be sent back to Bethlehem, in which case I used to take a long detour that took three hours of walking to get home. The situation got worse when I became 16 and got a West Bank ID; I was completely banned from crossing the checkpoint back home because I didn't have*

*a permit. Sometimes I would stay over at my grandmother's house in Bethlehem and frequently, I would just not go to school and miss my classes, just to avoid the hassle at the checkpoint. As a result, I failed a few subjects in the high school matriculation exam, the "Tawjihi", and I couldn't go on to university.*

The pressure on Khirbet Khamis is such that Fuad Jado fears for the future of the community:

*Our sons and daughters face difficulties in finding spouses. Palestinians from East Jerusalem won't marry us because they are worried about the future of their children's residency status and the inability to build their homes. At the same time, it's hard to marry a West Bank resident because they feared being isolated and relying on permits. My daughter is married in Bethlehem, and each time she wants to visit us, she has to come on her own without her children. Our relatives and friends can't visit us without permits, which are difficult to obtain. All I am asking for is to live in dignity, and to be sure that my children will be secure and have a normal life after me. I want to be able to move freely, nothing more than that..."*



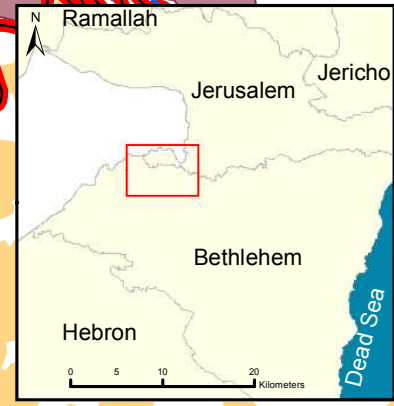
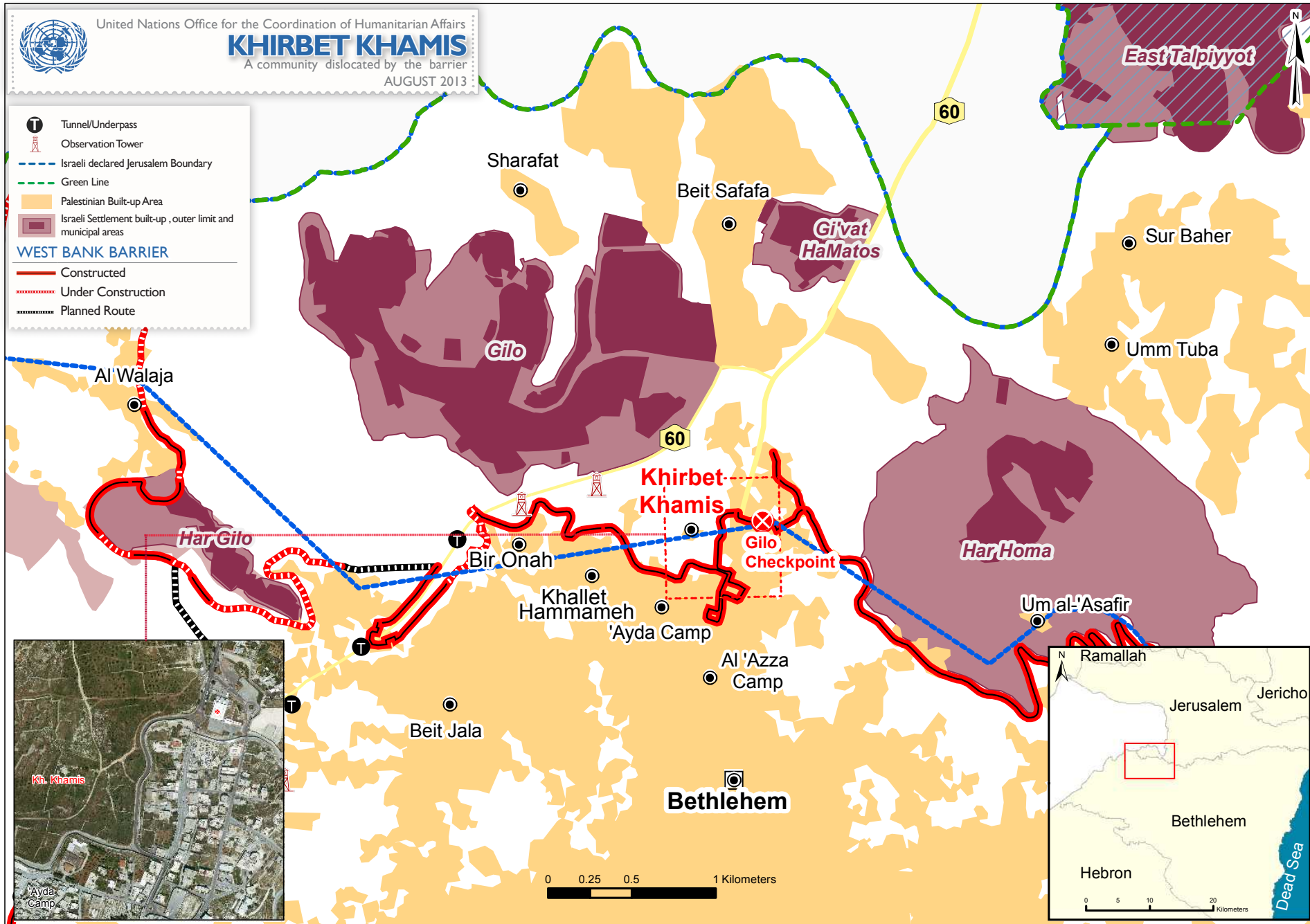
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

# KHIRBET KHAMIS

A community dislocated by the barrier

AUGUST 2013

- Tunnel/Underpass
  - Observation Tower
  - Israeli declared Jerusalem Boundary
  - Green Line
  - Palestinian Built-up Area
  - Israeli Settlement built-up, outer limit and municipal areas
- WEST BANK BARRIER**
- Constructed
  - Under Construction
  - Planned Route



0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometers