

MEMMO

October 31, 2008

Israeli Steps Help Boost Economy in West Bank

As part of Israel's efforts to advance negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, the Jewish state has taken a series of steps during the past several months to improve access and movement for Palestinians in the West Bank. Despite the risks to its security, Israel removed more than 130 roadblocks and checkpoints and opened its borders to increasing Palestinian exports and workers, resulting in reduced travel time and increased economic activity. Unfortunately, terrorists continue to exploit Israel's positive moves by plotting attacks, limiting Israel's ability to accommodate Palestinian needs while preserving its own people's safety.

Israel has facilitated greater access and movement for Palestinians in the West Bank.

- Israel removed more than 130 roadblocks and checkpoints during the last several months, significantly increasing the freedom of movement for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.
- The opening of the Shave Shomeron checkpoint near Nablus alone eased the movement of close to 300,000 Palestinians, according to the United Nations.
- Israel is now using biometric systems at a number of major checkpoints, greatly reducing travel times through a more efficient inspection process. From January to June of this year, Palestinians utilized the systems 500,000 times.
- Israel has provided 1,500 Palestinian officials and businessmen VIP passes to ease movement and spur business and diplomatic activity.
- The Middle East Quartet, comprised of the United States, Russia, EU, and United Nations, issued a statement on Sept. 26 that "commended recent measures by the Israeli Government to lift restrictions on access and movement, and encouraged further steps to ease conditions for Palestinian civilian life and the economy."



Israeli soldiers use a bulldozer to remove a roadblock at a checkpoint near Hebron.

The economy in the West Bank has improved amid Israel's continuing steps.

- The removal of checkpoints and roadblocks throughout the West Bank has allowed Palestinian businesses to reduce the time it takes to export products and has allowed for more regular deliveries of supplies.

- Agricultural exports to Israel have increased by 25 percent, with reduced travel times allowing fresh produce to reach markets. Israel also issued 3,000 permits to Palestinian workers and extended the hours of field access to ensure a successful olive harvest.
- During the first half of 2008, Israel boosted the number of permits for Palestinians to work inside Israel and the West Bank by 11 percent. Daily wages increased 10 percent this year compared to 2006 and 2007.
- Business in the southern West Bank has improved with the removal of the Judea Junction checkpoint. The opening more than cut in half—from 45 minutes to 20—the time needed to go from Hebron to Tarkumiya, the main commercial terminal in the area.
- In the first half of 2008, tourism increased by 42.7 percent in Jericho and more than 95 percent in Bethlehem, according to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- The unemployment rate in the West Bank was 24 percent lower in the first quarter of 2008 compared with the first quarter of 2004, which occurred during the height of Palestinian violence against Israel.

Palestinian terrorists are seeking to take advantage of Israel's positive steps to carry out attacks.

- A Palestinian woman exploited the humanitarian lane at the Hawara checkpoint south of Nablus when she smuggled in acid and threw it at an IDF soldier's face. The same woman carried out a similar attack several weeks later, partially blinding an IDF soldier.
- After a roadblock was removed earlier this year along the route between Jericho and Ramallah, a Palestinian tried to stab settlers at a nearby settlement.
- The IDF has stopped several suicide bombers and confiscated dozens of pipe bombs and other weapons at West Bank checkpoints during the past year. In mid-September, the IDF found 110 pounds of potassium nitrate, regularly used to make explosives, at the Tarkumiya checkpoint northwest of Hebron.
- Palestinian Authority security forces earlier this month located a partially built tunnel filled with hundreds of pounds of explosives, stretching almost 500 feet from Hebron to the Tarkumiya checkpoint.