

OQR Welcomes Israeli Announcement of Measures to Ease Movement and Access

The Office of the Quartet Representative welcomes Israel's decision to implement a package of measures to ease movement and access restrictions in the West Bank. The OQR has encouraged the Israeli authorities to facilitate these changes. OQR Head of Mission Robert Danin welcomed the development, saying, "some of these steps are significant and should improve the economic and living conditions of the West Bank Palestinian population."

As part of its tourism strategy, the OQR has lobbied the Government of Israel to allow tourists to enter Bethlehem through all available crossings. The Government of Israel's decision to permit tourist buses to enter Bethlehem through all the crossings will increase the attractiveness of Bethlehem as a tourist site and should lead to increases in visitor numbers. In addition, the Israeli decision to issue 50 Israeli tour guides with permits to work in Bethlehem will open up the city to a greater number of tourists, boosting the city's economy.

The OQR has also sought to improve access for Arab-Israelis to travel and conduct commerce throughout the West Bank, following the positive precedent set by opening up vehicular access to Jenin for Arab-Israelis through the Jalameh crossing. The decision to open up all crossings to Arab-Israelis, including the Wadi Nar checkpoint will significantly help the economy and is therefore a very welcome development. In addition, the anticipated opening of crossing 104 to allow Arab-Israelis to enter Tul Karem at weekends will serve to benefit the economic life of the city.

The opening of the Qeidar road near Ma'aleh Adumim for Palestinian traffic will improve transit times for trucks and buses and should help improve internal West Bank commerce.

The Government of Israel has announced a series of other measures that should have a positive impact when they are implemented. The OQR looks forward to the opening of the Adh-Dhahariya crossing, southwest of Hebron. This will allow direct access to Hebron for the 30,000 residents of communities south of the city – giving them easier access to Hebron's commercial and social services. The OQR will continue to lobby for more access routes into Hebron to be opened. The decision to remove the Ramallah roadblock near Ein Siniah as a step towards reopening Route 60 to Palestinian traffic will, once implemented, improve access to the northern road out of Ramallah. As well as helping reconnect villages west of Nablus to the city, the removal of two earth-mounds at the village of Sara will help strengthen the connection between Qalqilya and the economy of Nablus. It will also reduce transit times for goods going from Nablus to the commercial crossing at Tul Karem.

The OQR will continue to work to secure further changes to movement and access that improve the lives of the Palestinian population and which facilitate further economic growth and prosperity.