Jenin Refugee Camp



Jenin Refugee Camp: History, the 2002 Massacre, Displacement and the Right of

Return

Jenin Camp is the northernmost Palestine refugee camp in the West Bank, on the western edge of the city of Jenin, overlooking the plain of Marj Ibn Amer. It was established in 1953 for refugees driven from Zir'in, al-Lajjun, Ijzim, Ayn Hawd and other villages of the Jenin and Haifa districts during the occupation of Palestine in 1948. The camp is known across the world for the battle and massacre of April 2002, when the Israeli army besieged and invaded it for nearly two weeks. Since January 2025, its entire population has been forcibly displaced, and as of 2026 its people are still prevented from returning. This guide covers its history, origins, population, living conditions and current situation.

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Quick Facts About Jenin Camp

Jenin Refugee Camp at a glance

Arabic name	مخيم جنين
Country / Region	Palestine, northern West Bank
Governorate	Jenin (on the western edge of Jenin city)
Year established	1953
Area	About 0.42 km² (372 dunums at founding, later about 473)
Registered refugees	15,496 (Encyclopedia of Palestinian Camps, from UNRWA records)
Population density	About 33,333 people per km² (UNRWA)
UNRWA facilities (before 2025)	4 schools serving about 2,000 pupils and 1 health centre
Origin of residents	Mainly Zir'in, and villages of the Jenin district and Mount Carmel in the Haifa district
Known for	The battle and massacre of April 2002
Current status	Entire population forcibly displaced since January 2025; return still prevented as of 2026

The Nakba: Why Jenin Camp Exists

Jenin Camp was born from the **Nakba** (Arabic for "catastrophe"): the mass expulsion of Palestinians during the occupation of Palestine in 1948. Roughly 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes, and hundreds of villages were emptied and later destroyed.

The villages of Marj Ibn Amer, just north of Jenin, and of Mount Carmel near Haifa were among them. Their people fled to the hills around Jenin, where they first sheltered in villages and in a camp that was destroyed by a snowstorm. In 1953, the refugees were gathered on a new site at the western edge of the city, which became Jenin Camp.

The Right of Return

The **right of return** is the central demand of Jenin's refugees. It rests on several foundations in international law:

- **UN General Assembly Resolution 194** (11 December 1948), paragraph 11, resolved that refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid to those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property.
- **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (Article 13) affirms everyone's right to leave any country, including their own, and to return to it.
- **UN General Assembly Resolution 3236** (1974) reaffirmed the "inalienable right" of Palestinians to return to their homes and property.

From the hills of the camp, residents could once see the plain of Marj Ibn Amer where Zir'in and al-Lajjun stood. Today they face a double exile: barred from the villages of 1948, and since 2025 barred from the camp itself.

History of the Camp

Founding (1948–1967)

After the Nakba, refugees first stayed in villages around Jenin and in an earlier camp, which was destroyed in a snowstorm. In 1953, UNRWA established the current camp on land it leased from the Jordanian government, which then administered the West Bank. A youth social centre was founded in the camp in 1954.

Occupation and the Intifadas (1967–2001)

With the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, the camp came under Israeli military rule. In 1995, under the Oslo Accords, Jenin was transferred to

the Palestinian Authority. The camp became known as a centre of resistance during both Intifadas, earning the name "camp of martyrs".

Repeated raids (2003–2024)

After 2002, Israeli forces continued regular raids on the camp, often ending in killings, arrests and destruction. In 2022, a veteran Al Jazeera journalist was killed by Israeli fire while covering a raid on the camp. In 2023 and 2024, larger operations, including airstrikes.

The Battle and Massacre of Jenin Camp (April 2002)

In early April 2002, as part of the large-scale military operation it called "Defensive Shield", the Israeli army launched an assault on Jenin Camp. The invasion began at dawn on **2 April 2002** and lasted until **14 April**. According to Our Palestine's account of the events, the army mobilised more than 20,000 reservists and more than 400 tanks, armoured vehicles and troop carriers, backed by air power and artillery.

Siege and resistance

The camp was placed under total siege, and electricity, water and communications were cut. Fighters inside the camp declared that they would not withdraw. For eight days, the army was unable to enter the camp, and it turned to intensified bombardment from the air and the use of armoured bulldozers to destroy homes, in many cases with their occupants inside. On 9 April 2002, an ambush in the camp killed 13 Israeli soldiers in a single day.

Destruction and victims

- According to UNRWA, the army occupied the camp after ten days of intensive fighting, **destroying more than 400 houses**, severely

damaging hundreds more, and **displacing more than a quarter of the camp's population**.

- About 10% of the camp, at its centre, was razed to the ground.
- At least **52 Palestinians** were killed, about half of them civilians, according to UN figures, while Palestinian sources speak of a higher toll. 23 Israeli soldiers were also killed.
- Reports documented the use of civilians as human shields, killings in the streets and people buried under the rubble of their homes. A French journalist who entered the camp on 14 April described its centre as resembling Berlin in 1945, and reported bodies under the rubble and in burned buildings.

Aftermath

The UN's Middle East envoy, who visited the camp after the siege, described the scene as horrifying beyond belief. A UN fact-finding team was formed but was disbanded after Israel refused to cooperate with it. UNRWA later coordinated the reconstruction of the destroyed area, and an additional small plot of land was added to the camp to ease overcrowding.

Read more on Our Palestine: Jenin: From An Epic Place to Massacre and Balata and Jenin: a new Sabra and Shatila.

Operation "Iron Wall" and the Displacement of 2025–2026

On **21 January 2025**, two days after a ceasefire took effect in Gaza, the Israeli army launched a large-scale operation in the northern West Bank, which it called "Iron Wall", beginning in Jenin Camp. Within days, Israeli forces took control of the camp and forced its entire population out, going door to door. Around 20,000 residents of the camp and its surroundings were displaced into Jenin city and dozens of nearby villages, where they have lived with relatives, in community centres and in wedding halls.

- Israeli forces carried out systematic demolitions and bulldozed wide roads through the camp's alleys, changing its layout.
- Israeli officials stated that residents would not be allowed to return, and Israeli media reported plans to reduce the camp's population.
- By October 2025, about **52% of the camp's structures** had been destroyed or damaged, according to the UN Human Rights Office.
- In September 2026, the UN Human Rights Office reported that Israeli forces had forcibly displaced the entire populations of Jenin, Nur Shams and Tulkarm camps and continued to prevent their return, in violation of international law, raising serious concerns of the crime against humanity of forcible transfer. More than 33,000 people from the three camps remained displaced.

For the people of Jenin Camp, this is a renewed Nakba: the grandchildren of the refugees of 1948 have been expelled again, this time from the camp that was meant to be a temporary stop on the road home.

Origin of the Name

The camp takes its name from the city of **Jenin**, one of the oldest inhabited towns in Palestine. According to Our Palestine, its Canaanite name referred to the springs and gardens around it, and the Arabic name "Jenin" is linked to the many gardens (*jana*'*in*) that surrounded the town.

Location and Geography

Jenin Camp lies on the western edge of the city of Jenin in the northern West Bank, about 41 km north of Nablus and 75 km north of Jerusalem. It sits in an area surrounded by hills, overlooking the plain of Marj Ibn Amer to the north, with the village of Burqin to the south. It is the northernmost refugee camp in the West Bank.

Area and Land

The camp was established on about **372 dunums** and later expanded to about 473 dunums (about 0.42 km²). UNRWA estimates its population density at about 33,333 people per square kilometre, one of the highest in the West Bank.

Villages of Origin

Most of the camp's refugees come from villages of the Jenin district in Marj Ibn Amer, and from the Mount Carmel area in the Haifa district, all depopulated in 1948:

- **Jenin district:** Zir'in, the village from which the majority of residents come, as well as 'Ayn al-Mansi, Al-Lajjun, Al-Mazar and Nuris
- **Haifa district and Mount Carmel:** Ijzim, Ayn Hawd, Al-Kafrayn, Sabbarin, Al-Sindiyana, Kafr Lam, Al-Sarafand, Jaba', Al-Ghubayya al-Fawqa, Al-Ghubayya al-Tahta, Al-Naghnaghiyya and Zammarin

Population and Demographics

Population of Jenin Camp

Period	Population	Source
2002	More than a quarter of residents displaced after the April invasion	UNRWA
Before 2025	15,496 registered refugees	Encyclopedia of Palestinian Camps (UNRWA records)
Mid-2023	About 11,674 residents	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)
January 2025 onward	About 20,000–22,000 people from the camp and its surroundings displaced	UN and local sources

Period	Population	Source
2026	Camp emptied of its residents; return prevented	UN Human Rights Office

Note: UNRWA's current camp profile does not publish an updated registration figure. The figures above come from the sources indicated.

Housing and Infrastructure

Before 2025, the camp was densely built, with narrow alleys and homes rebuilt after the destruction of 2002. Repeated raids damaged roads, water and electricity networks. Since 2025, more than half of the camp's structures have been destroyed or damaged, roads have been bulldozed through its neighbourhoods, and water, power and sewage networks have been cut, making return impossible even without the military ban.

Health Situation

Before 2025, one UNRWA health centre provided primary health care, including reproductive health, child care and immunisation. Repeated violence had a deep impact on residents' psychological wellbeing, especially among young children. Since the displacement, the camp's health facilities have been inaccessible, and displaced families depend on services in Jenin city.

Economic Situation

Jenin Camp has one of the highest rates of unemployment and poverty among the 19 West Bank camps. Many residents once worked inside the 1948 territories, but this was severely curtailed by the Separation Wall and the permit system. Unemployment has hit young people especially hard. Since 2025, displaced families have lost their homes, shops and livelihoods.

Social Life

Jenin Camp is a closely knit community, bound by shared village roots, family ties and a long history of resistance. Its youth social centre, founded in 1954, and many community associations have played a central role in camp life. Displacement has scattered these families across dozens of towns and villages, threatening the camp's social fabric.

Education

Before 2025, UNRWA ran **four schools** in the camp, serving around 2,000 pupils. Unemployment and violence contributed to higher dropout rates among younger children. Since the displacement, children have had to continue their education in temporary arrangements outside the camp.

Frequently Asked Questions About Jenin Camp

Where is Jenin refugee camp located?

It lies on the western edge of the city of Jenin in the northern West Bank, overlooking the plain of Marj Ibn Amer. It is the northernmost refugee camp in the West Bank.

When was Jenin camp established?

It was established in 1953, after an earlier camp in the area was destroyed by a snowstorm, for refugees from villages of the Jenin and Haifa districts depopulated in 1948.

What happened in Jenin camp in April 2002?

From 2 to 14 April 2002, the Israeli army besieged and invaded the camp. More than 400 houses were destroyed, more than a quarter of residents were displaced, and at least 52 Palestinians were killed, about half of them civilians, according to

UN figures.

Where do Jenin camp's refugees come from?

Mainly from Zir'in, and from 'Ayn al-Mansi, al-Lajjun, al-Mazar and Nuris in the Jenin district, and from Ijzim, Ayn Hawd, Sabbarin and other villages of Mount Carmel in the Haifa district.

Can Jenin camp's residents return in 2026?

No. Since January 2025, the camp's entire population has been forcibly displaced, more than half its structures have been destroyed or damaged, and the UN reported in September 2026 that Israel continues to prevent their return.

Conclusion

Jenin Camp was built by refugees from Zir'in, al-Lajjun and the villages of Mount Carmel, within sight of the plain they had lost. In April 2002 it became a symbol of steadfastness and of the destruction inflicted on Palestinian refugees, and since 2025 its people have been expelled once more. Scattered across Jenin and its villages, they continue to demand the right to return, first to their camp, and ultimately to the villages their families left in 1948.

Sources and References

- UNRWA – Jenin Camp profile
- Our Palestine – Jenin: From An Epic Place to Massacre
- Our Palestine – Balata and Jenin: a new Sabra and Shatila
- Our Palestine – Jenin and its depopulated villages
- UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) – report on the forcible displacement of Jenin, Nur Shams and Tulkarm camps (September 2026)
- Encyclopedia of Palestinian Camps (mokhayyam.com) – Jenin Camp
- UN General Assembly Resolutions 194 (III) and 3236 (XXIX)

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