Introduction:

Nablus, the uncrowned Queen of Palestine, situated 63 km north of Jerusalem between the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal, Nablus was founded in 72 AD by the Roman Emperor Titus in honor of his father Flavius Vespasian. It was called Flavia Neapolis, the “new City”, until 636 AD when the Arabs took the town, changing its name to Nablus. It is one of the Canaanites cities that came from Arabia to Palestine in 2500 B.C. Its geographical position on the trade roads made it an important commercial center for the most of the successive civilizations as Pharaohs, crusades, Mongols, Mamluks, Ottomans and others. The old town is built at the bottom of Mt. Gerizim where at the time twenty natural springs supplied the town with water. It is a large residential and market area featuring many old buildings and lively streets scenes and activities. The religious and administrative buildings are from the Ottoman period and a walk through its colored alleys will give you a pleasant historic cultural flavor. Nablus was the center of the Arab soap-making industry with over 30 factories in 1882. The abundant local production of olive oil explains why so many soap factories has been created.

Before the Israeli latest invasion in April 3, 2002, the old town of Nablus used to be well-preserved and home about 20000 persons. Nablus, the commercial heart of the West Bank, which was in continuous use since Roman times, had recently carried out renovation and restoration projects with international and local funds. Since 1995 the Municipality of Nablus has started taking measures to revitalise the urban environment of the Old Town. Efforts began by renewal of the infrastructure; sanitation work and street tiling were carried out. This was followed by stone cleaning of some street facades, repainting and repairing of windows and doors, and consolidation of dangerous or potentially unstable structures such as walls, street facades, or street coverings. Most of this careful cultural heritage preservation work has been under over the past two weeks.

Until April the third, the historic Old Town of Nablus, was one of the most beautiful, economically viable, and lively historic centre, unfortunately it suffered the most devastation. The Israeli Army bombarded the historic town for ten executive days using F16 and heavy tanks as well as Apache helicopters. The destruction in the Old Town is tremendous and is expected to increase if urgent actions were not taken. The Old Town of Nablus has a very dense urban fabric composed of the main commercial streets and six residential quarters formed of clustered courtyard houses. Many monumental buildings in the old city were destroyed. Pin point missile air attack on Nablus targeted a 12th century mosque, 17th century church, Ottoman-era structures such as, Khan, and 18th century Hammam (public bath), number of traditional soap factories and exceptional historic family palaces.

Post-Disaster efforts:

Site investigations revealed that all buildings, which dated back to more than 600 years in the old city, were to different extent affected by the Israeli latest aggression. Damages, which were detected, ranged from light damages such as broken windows, doors, and fallen plaster to severe damages and total destruction.

The municipality of Nablus which is the main governmental body responsible for city has taken immediate operational and administrative actions to avoid further loss and damage in cultural heritage and to insure the safety of the residents of the historic city. The absence of risk preparedness strategy and management plan of cultural heritage reduces the efficiency of recovery attempts. The municipality in spite of the financial constrains and enclosure of the city succeeded to take in these actions

A. Rapid installation of the infrastructure of the historic city. This includes the following

1. Removal of debris and rubble from the destructed sites in order to allow access municipality’ , trolleys and rescue of people : in this process priorities were given to rescue people under the rubble, the pressure of time has affected the way in which debris has to be moved, unfortunately many historical evidences were disappeared during the removal. What makes the problem worse is that there are no details documentation on these historical buildings.

2. Installing the infrastructure. This includes fixing the electricity and sanitation pipes and repairing damaged pipes.