Press Release on the:

Intentional Destruction of the Historic City of Nablus

At the time when the world was celebrating the advent of the New Year 2004, Israeli military was busy in demolishing the remaining part of the historic town in Nablus in Palestine. In the last two weeks of continued military siege imposed on the city of Nablus a series of historic buildings were demolished by Israeli forces, including the Abdelhadi palace in Qaryoun quarter. The palace, built in 17th century is regarded as a major cultural heritage site in the old city of Nablus. Archeological tunnels and more than five other major buildings were also demolished. The final assessment of damage is not possible due to the continuous military siege and severe curfew imposed on the city.

We recall the great damage that has been inflicted on cultural heritage sites in the Palestinian areas since October 2000. These sites have suffered military bombing, shilling causing partial or even total destruction. The attack on cultural heritage sites has been intensified since the last major incursion in April 2002, causing irreparable damage, especially in the historic towns and cities, including Bethlehem, Hebron, Gaza, Beit Jala, Tulkarem, Salfit, Jenin and Nablus. Siege, curfew and roadblocks and military closure imposed on the Palestinian cities and villages have prevented the Palestinian Department of Antiquities from attending its task in the protection of cultural heritage. Many archeological sites, historical buildings, public and religious buildings have been the target of the Israeli military aggression. But Old City of Nablus represents the most severe case.

Referring also to the great damage that has been inflicted on the Old City of Nablus by the Israeli Army from the major incursion of April 2002 to the last incursion of 2004. The damages are spread all over the Old City, including domestic buildings, religious building (Churches, mosques Sanctuaries), traditional soap factories, old markets, historical baths, water tunnels and the city infrastructure. The damage in the historic core is estimated more than 70% of the city fabric and includes; Al-Khadra Mamluk Mosque, the Greek Orthodox Church, Sheikh Musalm Sanctuary, six traditional soap factories, including al-Nabulsi and Cannan factories in Al-Yasmina quarter, Abu Samat factory, the Caravansarei of Khan et-Tujjar were demolished. More than one hundred domestic units are estimated to have partial or complete damage including, twenty domestic complexes in Al-Qaryoun quarter, on the southwestern border of the old city. This includes the whole infrastructure of the city such as roads, electricity and sewage.

The name of Nablus, is identified with the Roman city of Neapolis founded in 72 A.D by the Flavian emperors and continuously inhabited till our time. It is the political and economic capital of the northern districts. The city famed with its history, handicrafts and sweets looks now as a city devastated by a severe earthquake. It suffered damages all over its quarters. The collapsed buildings have created a situation of great danger on the public safety of the people. Many people were killed and wounded. Hundreds of families were obliged to leave their homes forever.

The old city of Nablus is a component of the cultural identity of the Palestinian people, and an integral part of the human heritage, its intentional destruction has an adverse consequence on the human dignity and the human rights of the Palestinian people. At the same time its destruction is a great loss for humanity.

Recalling that in the absence of a final agreement, and with continuous Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land, Israel remains the military occupant in the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza strip, and consequently bound by provisions dealing with its responsibility for the protection of cultural heritage, in accordance with the international law, especially the Hague Convention and regulations of 1907, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and the Hague Convention and protocol of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. And UNESCO Recommendations on International Principles Applicable to Archeological Excavations in New Delhi in 1956, Convention on the Means of prohibiting and Preventing Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970 and many other resolutions and recommendations concerning cultural property in Palestine.

The renewed attack on the old city of Nablus is a clear violation of the UNESCO declaration against intentional destruction of cultural heritage. The Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquity is appealing on the international community, especially the UNESCO, World Heritage Committee, ICOMOS, and other international organizations to condemn Israel for their continual violations of the international law and in military targeting cultural heritage sites and particularly demolishing the old city of Nablus as an act of intentional destruction of cultural heritage contrary to human rights. The Ministry urges the member states of UNESCO and the Director General of UNESCO to take immediate measures to stop the intentional destruction of cultural heritage in the old city of Nablus.

Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage

Ramallah, Date 4.1.2004