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## JERUSALEM WEB REVIEW

Winter (Nov-Dec) 2010



## Jerusalem Web Review (Winter 2010)

### **Contents**

#### Issawaiya

1. Defiant Jerusalem Palestinians say “we will remain here”
2. The Struggle for East Jerusalem

#### Silwan

3. Are Palestinians not Jerusalem residents, too?
4. Israel: New planning policy for East Jerusalem
5. UN agency condemns Arab home demolitions in Jerusalem

#### Holy sites and heritage debates

6. Kotel Plaza renovations plan gets initial okay
7. Western Wall Feud Heightens Israeli-Palestinian Tensions
8. Rattling The Cage: UNESCO is right, Israel is wrong
9. Israelis replace parts of Jerusalem Old City walls with Jewish symbols

#### Settlements, Settlers and the Israeli State

10. How the state helped right-wing groups settle East Jerusalem
11. New state budget gives settlements NIS 2 billion – and more
12. Resumption of Israeli construction plans in East Jerusalem
13. Bad Intentions: New Jerusalem Settlements and the Prospects for Peace (and Negotiations)
14. Flirting with arrest at Jerusalem's newest settlement (Mamilla)
15. Interview with Herzl Yechezkel, head of the Har Homa residents' committee

#### Peace and land

16. Barak backs Jerusalem partition plan
17. Settlers buoyed by referendum legislation
18. Israeli Settlers Aim to Repel Palestinian Building plans

#### Other Current Issues

19. Wave of ethnic rage worries Israeli PM, activists
20. Jerusalem's long-contested light rail finally ready to roll
21. On Christmas Eve, Number of Christians Living in Jerusalem drops to only 2% of total population

## Issawiya

### **1. Defiant Jerusalem Palestinians say "we will remain here"**

Jillian Kestler-D'Amours, *The Electronic Intifada*, 9 December 2010

<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/printer11667.shtml>

A huge Palestinian flag was carried up a steep hill in Issawiya on 3 December, passed hand-to-hand between the at least 200 Palestinians, Israelis and international activists taking part in the first-ever solidarity march and demonstration in the occupied East Jerusalem neighborhood.

People cheered and shouted as the flag passed over their heads, and many carried signs reading "Stop the imprisonment of Issawiya" and "Stop the occupation of Issawiya."

Indeed, in recent weeks, the contrast between the Israeli settlement of French Hill -- home to the main campus of Jerusalem's Hebrew University and Hadassah hospital -- and neighboring Issawiya has been magnified by the near-constant presence of Israeli soldiers and police forces in the Palestinian village.

"It's as if civilization ends at the borders of French Hill and Issawiya," said Hani Isawi, member of the Issawiya Follow-Up Committee, during a resident-led meeting on 24 November in the neighborhood.

"On the one hand, we are suffering because as the rest of the Palestinian people, we are living under the Israeli occupation, and at the same time, we are suffering from a very clear policy of discrimination from the Jerusalem municipality," Isawi said.

Recently, the Israeli media reported that a group of Palestinian youth stoned a car of Israeli Jews that had gotten lost in Issawiya and were asking for directions back to West Jerusalem.

In what residents say is collective punishment for the attack, the Israeli authorities have closed the entrances and exits to Issawiya. Today, only two entrances remain, including one that has been turned into an Israeli army-monitored checkpoint that causes routine delays for the neighborhood's 15,000 Palestinian residents.

"We very clearly discourage and criticize these kind of actions, such as attacking civilians," Isawi said. "But the Israelis are using this as a pretext for implementing very harsh policies against us."

Israeli soldiers and police forces have arrested at least ten children under the age of 16, and more than two dozen others above that age since October, according to the Issawiya Follow-Up Committee. They have also routinely blanketed Issawiya in clouds of tear gas during clashes with groups of Palestinian youth, including shortly after Friday's demonstration.

On 24 September, an 18-month-old Palestinian child died in Issawiya from tear gas inhalation, after Israeli forces threw canisters at a demonstration protesting the killing of Samer Sarhan in the nearby Silwan neighborhood.

*No room to grow*

Three kilometers away from Jerusalem's Old City walls, Issawiya sits between the Israeli settlements of French Hill to the west, and Maale Adumim -- one the largest Israeli settlements in the West Bank with more than 34,000 settlers -- to the east.

In 1968, the Israeli state confiscated 400 of the 3,000 total dunams (a dunam is the equivalent of 1,000 square meters) of land in Issawiya to build the French Hill settlement, which connects Hebrew University and the Hadassah Hospital to West Jerusalem.

In addition to confiscating land, Israel has also designated 2,000 dunams in Issawiya as "green areas," thereby making it illegal for village residents to build anything in the area. Today, Issawiya residents only have 600 dunams on which to build homes and other structures.

"We are facing a very serious problem of providing a sufficient amount of houses to coincide with the natural growth [of the population in Issawiya]," Hani Isawi said. "While we hear on the news all the time about thousands and thousands of new residential units to be built in Jewish neighborhoods, since 1990 there hasn't been one single zoning plan for Issawiya that would actually allow us to build more houses to satisfy our need for natural growth."

In the past few weeks, Israeli forces have destroyed animal pens, agricultural land and other structures in the village.

"The Israeli border police and other administrative people destroyed twelve farms in the area. This also included the uprooting of trees," explained Sheikh Riad Isawi of the Issawiya Follow-Up Committee.

"Israel is probably the only place in the world that actually allows the uprooting of trees. So not only human beings are suffering from the Israeli occupation but also the trees and nature," he said.

The full extent of Israel's destructive policies in Issawiya was clear as early as July of this year, when Israeli forces destroyed homes and devastated agricultural land in a two-week span.

"We constructed a well, they destroyed it. We planted trees, they uprooted them. We put barbed wire around the area so that wild animals won't enter, they took that off also," said Issawiya resident Abid Darwish in July, as he watched his land being destroyed.

"In all this, we can't find a place for us to just sit and breathe. This land is for the families here in Issawiya: Darwish, Mustafa, Alayyan, Abu Hommos and many others," Darwish added.

Since July, 440 trees have been uprooted and at least 16 structures have been demolished in Issawiya.

### *Annexation continues*

E1, Israel's stalled settlement project that was initially proposed in 1994, would annex another estimated 12,400 dunams of land from Issawiya and the neighboring villages of al-Izzariya and al-Tur. The E1 settlement bloc would contain 3,500 housing units -- for nearly 14,500 new settlers -- and would solidify Maale Adumim by connecting it to West Jerusalem, according to the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem.

To date, the Israeli authorities have built a police station and army base in the area, and have paved some roads, checkpoints and other basic infrastructure in preparation for the project to go ahead.

"Any link between Maale Adumim and West Jerusalem is going to be at the expense of Issawiya," said Hani Isawi. "The aim of these measurements is to pressure more and more of the people of Issawiya, and also to facilitate for future land confiscation in our area."

Still, according to Isawi, whether or not the E1 settlement project goes ahead, the need to stay in Issawiya despite relentless Israeli pressure remains.

"Our struggle against the Israeli authorities is expressed by our staying here in our village and facing all the confiscation plans," he said. "We will remain here. We will always be part of the Palestinian people."

## **2. The Struggle for East Jerusalem**

Jesse Rosenfeld, *Palestine Chronicle*, 31/12/2010

<http://www.eurasiareview.com/opinion/opinion-opinion/the-struggle-for-east-jerusalem-31122010/>

Half way down a hill, sandwiched between Jerusalem's Hadassa hospital and Hebrew University, sits the compact and overcrowded occupied East Jerusalem village of Issawiya.

Before crossing the makeshift police checkpoint of concrete block obstacles at the edge of the University and entering the neighbourhood – which resembles more of a besieged West Bank refugee camp than a Jerusalem municipality – there is a clearly marked 'Dead End' street sign. On the main road leaving towards the hospital on the other side of the neighbourhood there is a wall of concrete cubes blocking any traffic, leaving just a narrow space for pedestrians to cross.

Although the Jewish dominated Hebrew University has expanded onto Issawiya's land, the picture of Jerusalem from both places couldn't be more different. While Israeli students attend classes oblivious to life beyond the 'dead end', Israeli security

forces have orchestrated a campaign of regular night time arrest raids against Issawiya residents in an effort to halt growing popular resistance to segregation, home demolition and land confiscation.

The recent Israeli home demolitions, increasing the pressure on the already squeezed Palestinian community, have given rise to local youth organising ruckus street demonstrations, clashing with Israeli police and border guards at the neighbourhood checkpoints. Now the campaign has expanded and the youth of Issawiya have been joined by Israeli anti-occupation activists.

With Israel continuing to expand Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, squeezing and displacing the Palestinian residents under the banner of an undivided Israeli capital (a claim rejected by most of the world), the Palestinian Authority has been powerless in defending the residents of their future capital. Meanwhile, despite murmurs of discontent from Washington and the international community, international diplomacy has proven just as ineffective in advocating for the rights of Jerusalem's Palestinian residents.

Now, failed by national leadership and abandoned by an international community to the mercy of an Israeli government that is forcing them from sight in order to make way for Israeli control and settlement, Palestinian residents are taking it on themselves to defend their land, rights and presence.

As a result, East Jerusalem Palestinians are seeking to use local resistance to gain a voice in a city where decisions are governed by Israeli national and international interests. Issawiya has become the latest East Jerusalem community to instigate protests inspired by the village of Bi'lin's model of popular demonstrations coupled with international appeals for civil society and legal action. Loosing a vast amount of village lands to Israel's wall and settlements in 2005, the West Bank border village pioneered the modern Palestinian model for using popular resistance to fight land annexation. None-the-less, the leader of Bi'lin's popular committee, Abdullah Abu Rahmah, remains in Israeli military prison after completing an internationally condemned one year military court sentence for his political organising.

At Issawiya's first joint Palestinian-Israeli demonstration on December 3, hundreds of local residents joined by left-wing Israelis chanted "From Issawiya to Bil'in, we are all Palestine" in Arabic.

"There are many checkpoints, the Israelis close many of our roads and we can't get out of our village," said Issawiya resident Rania Arafat who also discussed her brother's arrest in the recent night raids. "They have taken more than 800 dunams of our land. We need that land to build houses, we need to be able to live in our village," she added.

The unrest in Issawiya has built on the momentum of local campaigns against Israeli settler evictions and home occupations in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and more recent unrest against increasing settler presence and Palestinian home demolition in the Silwan neighbourhood. "We are from the same city and are in the same situation. This is what's happening in Jerusalem," contends Arafat.

Responding to Palestinian families evicted from their homes by Israeli settlers, last year Sheikh Jarrah was the first Jerusalem community to mount a popular struggle campaign following Bil'in's example. Yet, despite a broad non-violent protest movement that has brought participation from liberal Israelis, the settlers remain a year on. Not surprisingly, having seen peaceful means yet to remove the settlers, the struggle in Silwan has primarily opted for clashes and rioting to pressure the Israeli government, while Issawiya residents have adopted a mixed approach of joint non-violent struggle with Israelis and local youth clashing with police.

The emergence of these sustaining and expanding local popular struggles is a potential game changer for Palestinians to respond to the increasing segregation and marginalisation in Jerusalem. As Israel has traditionally tried to hamper Palestinian organising in Jerusalem through barring the activity of the PLO and Palestinian national movements, those national grievances are now finding local expression.

While clashes in Jerusalem have traditionally been sparked by emotional responses to Israeli symbolic provocations at sites like the the Al-Aqsa Mosque, now they are part of a calculated escalation that's building neighbourhood by neighbourhood in response an Israeli policy of systematic discrimination.

No doubt this is a new form of struggle for the residents of occupied East Jerusalem, one that relies on sustained local resistance to challenge the Israeli policy of Jewish dominance carried out for National interests and negotiated on the international stage.

For years now the popular unarmed resistance has been spreading across West Bank villages along the rout of Israel's wall, but the recent emergence of this type of campaign in easily ignitable Jerusalem could force a local Palestinian voice onto a political playing field that has treated Jerusalem Palestinians as an oppressed object rather than an agent for change.

- Jesse Rosenfeld is a freelance journalist based in Ramallah and Tel Aviv. He is an editor of [www.thedailynuisance.com](http://www.thedailynuisance.com). (This article was first published in Al Jazeera English)

### Silwan

#### **3. Are Palestinians not Jerusalem residents, too?**

Nir Hasson, Haaretz, 28/12/2010

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/are-palestinians-not-jerusalem-residents-too-1.333473>

According to any measure - the potential for violence, the mutual hatred, the different needs - if it's desirable to separate students from the Haredi residents of Mea She'arim, how much more should the activist group Ateret Cohanim be separated from the Palestinian residents of Silwan?

In the complicated affair of the Beit Yonatan apartment building in East Jerusalem, there is one question Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat must answer for his city's residents: What's the difference between the settlers of Beit Yonatan in the heart of the Palestinian Silwan neighborhood and a group of secular students in the heart of the ultra-Orthodox Geula neighborhood?

Regarding the Haredization of Jerusalem's secular neighborhoods, Barkat has an answer that he has been using since even before the elections: Every community needs neighborhoods of its own. About a month ago, Barkat's spokesman told Haaretz that "the municipality's policy is that each sector should be developed in its neighborhood ... in an effort to prevent unnecessary friction among the residents." Mixing Haredi and secular residents, says Barkat, is not proper for Jerusalem.

But what is proper for secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews in West Jerusalem is far more proper when the issue is settlers and Palestinians in East Jerusalem. According to any measure - the potential for violence, the mutual hatred, the different needs - if it's desirable to separate students from the Haredi residents of Mea She'arim, how much more should the activist group Ateret Cohanim be separated from the Palestinian residents of Silwan? But in Silwan, Barkat is adopting an opposite policy. In recent years he has been fighting with all his might and even paying a public price to prevent the evacuation of Beit Yonatan.

It's possible that Barkat is not an expert on the situation in Silwan. But his bodyguards are not happy to take him for a visit in the narrow alley that leads to Beit Yonatan, to be besieged by stones and Molotov cocktails. Yet even from city hall in Safra Square it's hard not to see that the settlers' presence in Beit Yonatan is making thousands of the city's residents suffer.

The Jewish presence in Silwan is concentrated in two blocs: the Elad association near the Old City walls and the Temple Mount, and the Ateret Cohanim in the very heart of Silwan, which includes Beit Yonatan, home to 10 Jewish families, and nearby Beit Hadvash, with one family. Naturally, the friction between the settlers in the village and their bodyguards on the one hand and the Palestinians on the other creates conflict. Stone-throwing and Molotov cocktails are a daily occurrence for the settlers. Night-time police raids, dozens of children arrested and the constant smell of tear gas are the lot of the Palestinians.

Removing Beit Yonatan from the equation would almost certainly lead to the end of the Jewish presence in the heart of Silwan. One act that is legally mandated, politically necessary and logically humane would reduce the suffering of Silwan's residents. And thousands of people would exit the cycle of violence. Anyone who is afraid that the Palestinians would look for new centers of friction should ask himself why he is barely familiar with names such as Suwahara and Beit Sahour, Palestinian neighborhoods where no Jews live and there is little violence.

The question remains why the mayor insists on continuing to make his city's residents suffer. The usual political explanation is that Barkat understands that the winner of Jerusalem's next election will be the person who receives the votes of the knitted-



skullcap wearers, who vote for the right-wing parties. Barkat assumes that the ultra-Orthodox won't vote for him and the secular population will, so the deciding factor will be the national religious community. Therefore he must be portrayed as a rightist to guarantee himself another term.

But even according to this cold logic, after innumerable court decisions, including at the High Court of Justice, which demanded the evacuation of the building, and a similar number of threatening letters from two attorneys general, Barkat could easily blame everything on the "leftists" from the Justice Ministry and the High Court.

"I fought for two and a half years," Barkat would explain to his voters. "I delayed the evacuation as long as I could, but 'they' forced me." That's all he has to do, tell the truth. Having said that, with a heavy heart but wholeheartedly, he must order the evacuation. When he does so, we, the residents of Jerusalem, will make do without an answer.

#### **4. Israel: New planning policy for East Jerusalem**

Ma'an staff writer, 16/11/2010

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=333914>

JERUSALEM (Ma'an) -- Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat presented a controversial new city planning policy for East Jerusalem to the public on Tuesday morning, as East Jerusalemites celebrated Eid Al-Adha with friends and family.

The re-zoning plan, according to a statement from the mayor's office, would take into account the "current unsatisfactory situation" and call for a freeze on all current demolition orders until the plan is approved and can go forward.

The plan would have to be approved by the government of Israel before it could go ahead.

Barkat's plan for occupied East Jerusalem includes demolishing several homes, a move that has been fuelling tensions in the flashpoint Holy City.

'Political interference limiting demolitions'

"At the moment, the prime minister's bureau and police are not permitting the demolition of homes," Barkat's spokesman quoted him as saying, after the mayor presented his re-zoning plan to the State Comptroller.

The comptroller, a government watchdog, has criticised the Jerusalem municipality for allowing rampant illegal construction across East Jerusalem in the last decade.

Barkat told the comptroller political interference and the reluctance of police to oversee municipal demolitions has meant only a few demolitions have been carried out this year.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office had no immediate comment on Barkat's remarks, which come as the premier is trying to find a way to move forward with peace talks with the Palestinians, which broke down over Israeli settlement construction.

Netanyahu has also come under heavy international pressure for authorising building projects in Jewish neighbourhoods built in East Jerusalem.

Palestinians see East Jerusalem as the capital of their promised state and oppose any attempts to extend Israel's control over the part of the city that was captured in the 1967 Six Day War.

### *The King's Garden project*

At the heart of Barkat's plan is the so-called Gan Hamelech (King's Garden) project, in which 22 homes would be razed, while another 66 would be legalised in the Al-Bustan Palestinian neighborhood.

The 88 homes all had been slated for demolition because they were built without Israeli permits -- which are nearly impossible to obtain.

"Burying our heads in the sand on all issues concerning the eastern part of the city is no longer an option and I call Israel's government to enlist and adopt the new municipal policy that will substantially improve quality of life for residents of eastern Jerusalem," Barkat said.

The mayor added that after the Gan Hamelech project, the re-zoning project would be extended to four other Arab neighbourhoods in the city.

### *Residents prevent alternative plan*

In the spring of 2010, residents of the community put together an alternative plan proposing a series of measures that would bring the number of forced evictions and demolitions planned by the Jerusalem municipality down to zero. (\* See below for more details)

Days ahead of the announcement of the new policy, a spokesman for the municipality said he was not aware of the plan.

Community officials, observing the start of the Eid Al-Adha holiday, were unavailable for comment by phone.

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### **\*Rejected plan for Silwan includes zero forced evictions**

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=285150>

Bethlehem/Jerusalem - Ma'an - A team of specialists from Jerusalem and Haifa banded together when the Israeli municipality re-affirmed its intention to demolish 88 homes in the Silwan neighborhood, and constructed an alternative city plan.

While the Israeli municipal plan has the area at 80 percent green space, and the community plan has about 20 percent, the Israeli plan would see the displacement of nearly a thousand residents, create a national park and archaeological site out of the former neighborhood and connect it with the excavations at the City of David across the valley.

The cost of the plan is estimated to be some 50,000,000 shekels.

In contrast, head of the urban development team Yousef Jabareen says his plan, created with intensive community consultation and resident input, would cost the Israeli municipality nothing.

Taking into account the resources of the Al-Bustan community, if the plan were approved it would include the legalization of all homes retroactively, and promise permits to residents who decide to rebuild under plan guidelines.

Residents have the money to build and renovate, but strict Israeli policies have prevented them from developing the area, Jabareen explained.

Since 1967, families have been prohibited from expanding their homes, and any additions are built illegally, or with purchased housing licenses that cost hundreds of thousands of shekels above the permits themselves.

“The plan gives residents the incentives to carry out the plan themselves,” Jabareen said.

#### *The Community Plan of Al-Bustan*

The development scheme compiled by Jabareen and a team of five other specialized urban planners and four legal consultants, includes the rehabilitation of green space, historical structures, commercial areas and residential units, all without displacing a single resident.

The plan provides several square kilometers of gardens and planted areas, including rooftop gardens and public parks where historical artifacts are displayed and protected, as per guidelines laid out by Israel's Jerusalem municipality.

The planning team, with support from the Al-Quds Foundation for Development (AFD), developed the Community Plan of Al-Bustan, say it responds to an urgent need within the community, almost totally neglected as an area within the illegally annexed area of Jerusalem.

According to the team's research, no efforts at real city planning had been made since the area was occupied by Israel in 1967 beyond a 2004 Jerusalem city plan, titled a Green Vision for Jerusalem, and a 2010 plan announced by Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barakat, to "restore the area of the King's Garden to its ancient glory," which he said was "part of our fundamental commitment and responsibility to preserve and safeguard Jerusalem, its landscapes and vistas, and historic and scenic sites for the sake of future generations."

The Israeli plan divided the Al-Bustan neighborhood into eastern and western sections, with approximately 350 people living in the western section and approximately 400 people living in the eastern section, documents showed. The western section's homes were all slated for demolition.

### *Avoiding displacement*

Jabareen explained in a briefing about the Israeli initiative that, according to the plan, Palestinians in the western quarter had to find a "partner" family in the eastern quarter and arrange to move in with them. "In other words, implementing the plan requires that every family living in the eastern section of Al-Bustan share their private property and their homes with people from western Al-Bustan," Jabareen wrote.

The city planner noted that anyone living in eastern Al-Bustan who refuses to share their home in accordance with the agenda was threatened with home demolition as well.

Jabareen's plan, more than providing ample green space and reducing the number of enforced home demolitions to zero, also makes room for 70 new apartment buildings for what the plan says will "address the immediate, urgent housing needs of the local community."

When city planners and architects began their community consultations, alongside social workers and neighborhood officials, Jabareen said Al-Bustan residents were more than amenable to city planning, in fact, after long years of prohibitions on home building leading to ad-hoc and piecemeal building almost always declared illegal by Israel's Jerusalem Municipality, residents embraced change and volunteered to participate in the renovation and renewal projects.

What resulted, the planning team said, was the development of a voluntary process of renewal and reconstruction for Al-Bustan, based on the subdivision of the neighborhood into seven semi-autonomous areas.

According to the plan, the residents of each sub-area would have the right to reorganize and renew their zone within a larger plan of built environments, including designated public parks and shopping areas. Such enthusiasm for the plan was garnered, organizers said, because the development process was based on extensive public participation by the local community.

### *A green neighborhood*

A central element in the new, green, Al-Bustan, planners explained, would be the rehabilitation of the natural spring and the historic Ottoman building once used for water redistribution. "The source of running water will also be used to irrigate the neighborhood's private and public green areas," a briefing explained.

Under the community plan, several roads would be eliminated, as part of the vision of changing the area into a walkable neighborhood by promoting pedestrian-only streets, starting with the construction of a north-south pedestrian boulevard lined by an open

channel of water originating from the spring. A main driving artery and designated car parking areas would ensure access to the neighborhood.

Multi-use buildings housing commercial, business and residential areas would make the area more pedestrian friendly, and give the local economy a boost, planners said, and a community center at the heart of the area would provide space for local events and after-school programming currently unavailable in the neighborhood.

The plan was wholeheartedly approved by a council of neighborhood residents, and presented to the community in a protest tent, which currently serves as a community gathering place.

### *A long struggle*

The initial Israeli demolition plan was put in action in 2004, when - according to Israeli rights group IrAmin - Municipal City Engineer Uri Shitreet ordered the clearing of 88 Palestinian homes from the Al-Bustan area under directives from the Department of Building Inspection. In 2005, a report from the group said, Palestinian residents appealed to the Israeli Attorney General to halt the planned demolitions.

At the time, largely due to international objections according to the rights group, Israel's Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski agreed to suspend the demolition plans. The suspension was declared in order to give time for Silwan residents to present an alternative town plan scheme "that would take into consideration the development needs of the residents, as well as the needs for public park land."

One such plan was presented to the City Planning Department in August 2008, but residents were told that it could not be considered because Israeli municipal plans were already in effect. A plan was presented in January 2009, but was rejected because the Israeli municipality had "designated [Silwan] to serve as a green lung for the benefit of Silwan residents, and as a national park."

Silwan residents and team planners set to work and created a building scheme they say creates a "socially, culturally, economically, environmentally and spatially vibrant and sustainable community in Al-Bustan," and describe as a renovation what will "create a place that enriches, uplifts, and inspires the human spirit."

### *Legal Status*

The community plan was submitted formally to the Jerusalem Planning and Building Committee, which registered the plan with a formal number for consideration. However, Jabareen explained, the committee put up roadblocks.

The plan is on hold until the committee has it vetted by several other Israeli institutions, which it plans to do step by step until the government cedes to a compromise. "We will go to the local committees, and if they turn it down we will go to the district committees, and if they turn it down we will go to the courts," he said.

“Over the last six months, I have met with government officials, I have met with the mayor himself trying to convince him that his plan will make chaos in the city,” Jabareen said.

“The Israeli plan is a bloody one,” he said, noting the building destructions and the mass displacement of Palestinian residents of the neighborhood would not stand, and would in fact cause an uprising among not only Jerusalemites, but in the West Bank and internationally.

Until now, however, Jabareen said the plan had been “rejected totally.”

### *Politics*

“I learned just yesterday, that the Israeli municipality is preparing a new plan,” Jabareen said on Thursday, the plan involves the wholesale destruction of the Al-Bustan neighborhood, rather than just less than half of the homes under the current plan.

“It is a move to show us where the power is, it is a move to try to force us to compromise, to agree to home demolitions,” he explained.

But under the community plan, not a single home will be demolished. Renovations will go forward under the guidance of city planners, and families who have waited decades to build their homes will be able to do so, with some financial assistance from civil society groups, Jabareen explained.

Residents who have homes that do not make good use of space, and wish to re-build will be guided by city planners, and asked to cooperate with their neighbors in the seven sub-areas the valley is divided into.

“Already we have groups of volunteers who come out and participate in cleaning and restructuring projects,” Jabareen said, and anticipated that more person-power would be harnessed if the plan went forward.

“Not a single home will be destroyed under this plan, not a single person will be evicted,” Jabareen concluded.

"The plan makes sense, it is from the community and we will continue to fight for it until we succeed."

## **5. UN agency condemns Arab home demolitions in Jerusalem**

BBC News, 23/12/2010

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12069482>

The UN relief agency UNRWA has condemned Israel's demolition of homes in East Jerusalem, up 45% this year.

It said 396 buildings were razed in 2010, compared with 275 last year, in occupied East Jerusalem and other West Bank areas under Israeli control.

As a result, 561 Palestinians - including 280 children - were displaced, it said.

Israel's interior ministry says it has the right to demolish homes that are built without Israeli permission.

Israel has occupied East Jerusalem since 1967. An estimated 200,000 settlers live there, alongside 250,000 Palestinians.

Peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians collapsed this month over Israel's refusal to stop building homes for Jewish settlers in the West Bank, where settlements take up some 40% of the Palestinian territory.

Illegal demolitions

"I call on the Israeli authorities to cease demolitions and evictions in occupied areas which are in contravention of Israel's obligations under international law," UNRWA's West Bank Field Director, Barbara Shenstone, said in a statement.

Ms Shenstone cited the case of the nine-member Subouh family, whose home in the Ras al-Ammoud district of East Jerusalem was destroyed on 21 December.

The family has been living on their property in two tents after the Jerusalem municipality gave them 24 hours to demolish their home, she said.

The family destroyed the house themselves at a cost of 60,000 shekels (\$17,000; £11,000), rather than pay the municipality to do so, which costs twice as much, she added.

East Jerusalem is considered occupied territory under international law, but Israel annexed the area in 1981 and sees it as its exclusive domain.

According to a UN report earlier this year, Palestinians wanting to build a home can seek permission to do so only in a small area that comprises about 13% of East Jerusalem and is already densely populated.

As a result at least 28% of all homes have been built illegally.

Out of the 250,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, the UN says, 60,000 are at risk of having their homes demolished by the Israeli authorities.

### *Holy Sites and Heritage Debates*

#### **6. Kotel Plaza renovations plan gets initial okay**

Melanie Lidman, *Jerusalem Post*, 05/12/2010

<http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=190226>

A Plan is expected to spark outrage among Muslim groups, who are opposed to any construction or archaeological excavations at the site.

A new plan to completely renovate the Western Wall Plaza was approved by the Jerusalem Local Planning and Building Committee on Monday, paving the way for the most drastic changes to the layout of the area since the plaza was created after the Six Day War.

“The goal of expanding the entrances and exits of the Western Wall plaza and will give us a solution for allowing large numbers of worshipers and visitors to enter at once, as well as emergency exits,” Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch, the chief rabbi of the Western Wall, told The Jerusalem Post.

The plan is expected to spark outrage among Muslim groups, who are opposed to any construction or archaeological excavations at the site.

Women’s groups are also expressing concern that the plan will not take their needs into account.

The current plaza was created immediately after the Six Day War in 1967, when the neighborhood next to the Western Wall, known as the Moroccan Quarter, was razed to make a large plaza.

The new plan, which is still in the very initial stages of approval, calls for a large underground plaza to replace the current main entrance, located at Dung Gate. A new visitor’s center will replace the current police building, with areas for educational programming, additional bathrooms, an auditorium, lecture halls, and an exhibition space for the archaeological discoveries in the area.

“The number of visitors has increased by 500% at the Western Wall in recent years, and is expected to grow even more, but the infrastructure has remained the same,” Rabinovitch said in a statement. “Hundreds of workers at the Wall, including security guards, guides, and management, are working under impossible circumstances.”

The Western Wall Heritage Foundation claims that more than 15 million visitors come to the Western Wall every year, though the municipality put the figure at eight million. Both expect the number of visitors to the site to double in the next 10 years.

The proposal is a joint project by the Prime Minister’s Office, the Jerusalem Municipality, the Israel Antiquities Authority, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, with involvement from the Jerusalem Development Authority and the Company for the Reconstruction and Development of the Jewish Quarter. The plan was designed by architect Gavriel Kertesz, who has been involved with many historical architectural projects, including the renovations of Mishkenot Sha’ananim, overlooking the Old City.

The plan must still pass a number of hurdles before construction starts; the complicated approval process is expected to take years, if it is passed at all. The



proposal must be approved by the Jerusalem District Planning and Building Committee, part of the Interior Ministry, as well as pass a number of periods during the which the public can file objections.

Women's groups and Muslim worshipers are worried by proposal.

"It looks like the architecture is going to now set in stone, so to speak, the perspective that women are spectators and men are worshipers," said Anat Hoffman, director of Women of the Wall, a monthly women's prayer group that advocates for equal treatment for women at the site.

"There are partitions that are suggested where women can observe men, but men can't observe women," she said.

Part of the plan proposes a moveable mehitza, or barrier, between the men and women's sections.

"The thing is, I'd like to move it all the way out of Jerusalem, but a moveable mehitza is interesting because it allows us to be sensitive to who's coming to the wall," said Hoffman.

"There's no problem for the women, the new entrance will not eat into the women's section at all," Rabinovitch said, in response to concerns expressed by the women's groups. "On the contrary, after the plan is approved, it will allow us to enlarge the women's section, in accordance with a court decision."

Any excavations or construction in the area usually produces outrage in the Muslim community, both here and abroad. Islamic groups say they were not consulted as the proposal was drawn up. Any excavations may upset the tenuous balance in the area. In February 2007, construction of a temporary bridge to the Mugrabi Gate entrance of the Temple Mount sparked international Muslim protests, fueled by distorted media reports of what was actually taking place.

"Unfortunately, it doesn't matter what we do, some of the Muslims will always complain, but these are for political reasons... we're not trying to do this for political reasons," said Daniel Shukrun, the project director from the Company for the Reconstruction and Development of the Jewish Quarter.

Shukrun's company is also working on the construction of an elevator next to the Aish Hatorah yeshiva, announced in August, which will make the Western Wall more accessible to the disabled.

"We've really been trying to fix the area with different types of improvements," said Shukrun. "But this area can't always provide an optimal solution to all the people making requests."

## 7. Western Wall Feud Heightens Israeli-Palestinian Tensions

Isabel Kershner, New York Times, 25/11/2010

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/26/world/middleeast/26mideast.html>

JERUSALEM — The prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, on Thursday strongly denounced a Palestinian Authority paper that denies any Jewish connection to the Western Wall, the iconic holy site and place of Jewish worship in the Old City of Jerusalem, describing the report as “reprehensible and scandalous.”

The episode appeared to signal a worsening atmosphere after a two-month hiatus in peace talks.

Mr. Netanyahu’s statement referred to a long article that appeared in Arabic on Monday on the Information Ministry Web site of the Western-backed Palestinian government, led by President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in the West Bank. Its publication was previously reported by The Jerusalem Post.

Jerusalem and its holy sites are one of the most intractable and emotional issues of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Israel conquered the eastern part of Jerusalem, including the Old City, from Jordan in the 1967 war, and annexed it in a move that was never internationally recognized. About 200,000 Jews live in areas of East Jerusalem that have been developed since 1967, among about a quarter-million Palestinians. The Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

The Western Wall is a remnant of the retaining wall of a plateau revered by Jews as the Temple Mount, the site where their ancient temples once stood. The plateau is also the third holiest site in Islam. Known to Muslims as the Haram al-Sharif, or Noble Sanctuary, the compound now includes Al Aqsa Mosque and the golden Dome of the Rock.

In Muslim tradition, the wall is the place where the Prophet Muhammad tethered his winged steed, Buraq, during his miraculous overnight journey from Mecca to Jerusalem in the seventh century.

The Palestinian paper denying any Jewish historical connection with the site was written by Al-Mutawakel Taha, an Information Ministry official. In it, he stated that “the Al Buraq Wall is the western wall of Al Aksa, which the Zionist occupation falsely claims ownership of and calls the Wailing Wall or Kotel.”

Palestinian officials have often denied claims of Jewish heritage in Jerusalem, arguing that there is no evidence that the plateau was the site of ancient temples.

In the principles for a peace accord laid out by President Bill Clinton in late 2000 after the failure to reach a final Israeli-Palestinian agreement at Camp David, the suggestion was for Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif and Israeli sovereignty over the Western Wall, with mutual consent needed for any excavation in the area.

Mr. Netanyahu's predecessor, Ehud Olmert, proposed in his talks with Mr. Abbas in 2008 that the holy sites in and around the Old City be administered by an international trusteeship made up of Israel, the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United States. Mr. Olmert, who left office in early 2009, says that he got no response.

Mr. Netanyahu has insisted on continued Jewish building in the Jewish areas of East Jerusalem, like all Israeli governments since 1967, but he has not spelled out his intentions regarding the future status of the city since taking office.

The unofficial competition for control of Jerusalem takes place stone by stone and house by house. On Tuesday, Jewish activists moved into a building they had acquired in Jebel Mukaber, a predominantly Arab neighborhood overlooking the Old City and its holy shrines, and on Wednesday another group of Jewish activists moved into an apartment on the Mount of Olives, in a Palestinian neighborhood, A-Tur.

Mr. Taha's paper appeared on his ministry's Web site a day after the Israeli government approved a \$23 million five-year project to renovate and develop the Western Wall Plaza and its environs.

Mr. Netanyahu, in a statement issued by his office, said the Western Wall "has been the Jewish people's most sacred place for almost 2,000 years, since the destruction of the Second Temple." He added that the Palestinian Authority's denial of a Jewish link "calls into serious question its intentions of reaching a peace agreement, the foundations of which are coexistence and mutual recognition."

Mr. Netanyahu called on the authority's leaders to disavow the document. There was no immediate comment from Palestinian officials.

But in another indication of the strained atmosphere, the Palestinian government issued a statement titled "Israeli crimes of destruction," listing Israeli actions in Jerusalem and Israel's demolition in recent days of numerous Palestinian structures that were built without permits in Israeli-controlled areas of the West Bank.

## **8. Rattling The Cage: UNESCO is right, Israel is wrong**

Larry Derfner, Jerusalem Post, 10/11/2010

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=194807>

The UN agency is recognizing Jewish connection to Tomb of the Patriarchs, Rachel's Tomb. What it's denouncing is Israel's claim to sovereignty over these sites, which lie in occupied territory.

The word is that UNESCO is on an anti-Semitic tear, trying to "de-Judaize" and "Islamicize" two of the most holy Jewish sites in this country – the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron and Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem.

“Talk about distortions,” Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu told thousands of American Jews in New Orleans this week. “Can you imagine that UNESCO tried to deny the Jewish connection to Rachel’s Tomb next to Jerusalem and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron? The absurdity to try to erase our past...”

For all good, belligerent Jews, UNESCO is the outrage of the month. But they’re just blowing smoke again, trying to get off the defensive about the occupation by accusing the occupation’s critics of anti-Semitism. (Or rather “delegitimization,” which is the new, approved euphemism now that “anti-Semitism” has begun to sound like “wolf.”)

Read UNESCO’s declaration of October 21. It spells out in black and white that the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Rachel’s Tomb are holy to Muslims, Christians and Jews.

The declaration is titled “The two Palestinian sites of al-Haram al-Ibrahim/Tomb of the Patriarchs in al- Khalil/Hebron and the Bilal ibn Rabah Mosque/Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem.”

It describes the sites as follows: “Located in the old town of Hebron in the southern part of the West Bank, the Haram al-Ibrahimi is venerated by Christians, Muslims and Jews as the burial place for the Biblical figures Abraham (Ibrahim) and Sarah, Isaac (Ishaq) and Rebekah and Jacob and Leah. Located in the Palestinian town of Bethlehem, Rachel’s Tomb is considered the traditional gravesite of the Biblical Matriarch Rachel and is home to the Bilal ibn Rabah Mosque... These cultural treasures are special to all of humanity in addition to the religious significance ascribed to them by people of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish traditions.”

So UNESCO is recognizing the Jewish connection to the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Rachel’s Tomb. What it’s denouncing is Israel’s claim to sovereignty over these sites, which happen to lie in occupied Palestinian territory. UNESCO is denouncing Netanyahu’s loudly-stated intention to turn these holy places into “national heritage sites,” which would politicize and exploit them as a means to entrench Israel’s hold on the West Bank.

And UNESCO, guided in this dispute by the Palestinian Authority and the Arab states, is right. It’s Israel that’s wrong, which is nothing new; whenever Israel does anything to strengthen its rule over the Palestinians and the land where they live, Israel is wrong.

This latest controversy started in February after Netanyahu, reportedly under pressure from Shas, added the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel’s Tomb to a list of about 150 historic Jewish and Zionist sites to be developed for the public.

The Palestinians didn’t complain about the sites in “Israel proper,” only the two new ones in the West Bank. And they weren’t alone; Meretz also protested. “This is another attempt to blur the lines between the State of Israel and the occupied territories. Just a little pressure from the right and Netanyahu immediately toes the line,” said Meretz chairman MK Haim Oron at the time. (Anyone who thinks Meretz is anti-Semitic, too, is beyond reasoning with.)

ISRAEL'S CHAMPIONS in this affair are focusing on the Bilal ibn Rabah Mosque at Rachel's Tomb, saying it didn't exist until the 1990s, their point being that Rachel's Tomb belongs to Jews and Jews alone.

My point is this: Who cares when the Bilal ibn Rabah Mosque was built? If UNESCO is saying Rachel's Tomb is holy to three religions, why do we have to insist that's it's only holy to one, to our religion?

And even if it's true that the Palestinians only put up a mosque at Rachel's Tomb to compete with the Jewish claim to the site, we Jews have been doing the same thing to them all over this country. Muslims destroyed Jewish synagogues and cemeteries? Israel destroyed Muslim mosques and cemeteries.

“[T]he history of the struggle on the holy sites is not about the war of the Jewish sons of light against the Palestinian sons of darkness, but the story of a war in which both sides have committed barbaric acts to the other's holy sites,” wrote Meron Benvenisti, a historian and former Jerusalem deputy mayor, in Haaretz in 2005.

After the War of Independence, Israel destroyed some 100 of the 140 mosques that had stood in the emptied-out Arab villages, he wrote. The 40 mosques left standing were put to use by Israeli Jews. “The mosque of an abandoned village in the Irron Valley serves [as] a kibbutz carpentry. A mosque in an artists' community in the Carmel serves partly as a restaurant and bar. Other mosques serve as museums and galleries,” Benvenisti wrote. He added: “And we haven't even mentioned yet the tombs of sheikhs that have become graves of holy Jewish figures...”

But we're not supposed to think about that kind of stuff – we're only supposed to go on hollering “delegitimization!” at UNESCO. And at the next anti-Semite of the month. Remember: When anybody accuses Israel of lording it over the Arabs, the best defense is a good offense.

## **9. Israelis replace parts of Jerusalem Old City walls with Jewish symbols**

Ahlul Bayt News Agency, 30/12/2010

<http://abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&id=219042>

Israel in an alleged project to restore and maintain Jerusalem's city walls has replaced some of the structure's original features with stones marked with Jewish biblical symbols, one of them depicting the alleged temple, and another a six-pointed star, the Aqsa heritage foundation in Jerusalem said in a press release Wednesday.

Israelis replace parts of Jerusalem Old City walls with Jewish symbols OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (Ahlul Bayt News Agency) - Israel in an alleged project to restore and maintain Jerusalem's city walls has replaced some of the structure's original features with stones marked with Jewish biblical symbols, one of them depicting the alleged temple, and another a six-pointed star, the Aqsa heritage foundation in Jerusalem said in a press release Wednesday.

Israel's intent is to sabotage Islamic and Arab monuments, the Aqsa foundation stressed. "Israel has no right to effect these monuments or to make changes to these historical walls."

The Aqsa foundation received phone calls ahead of meetings it held with witnesses from the Sahira Gate area of Jerusalem's Old City, including Salah Al Shawish and Jalal Hijazi, both of whom are familiar with the area's history. Shawish and Hijazi told the foundation that Israel had recently Judaized a number of stones on the city's wall, which was built and restored by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent during the early Ottoman state.

An Aqsa foundation media crew later found during a ground visit that a stone had been removed from the wall and replaced with an alleged temple etched inside in a section to the left of the Sahira Gate, known by Jews as Herod's Gate. Several stones on the gate's interior were also replaced with stones etched with six-pointed stars. A historic stone was removed above the interior arch of the gate, and another in the New Gate area.

Israel covered up the crime by alleging restoration, repairs, and maintenance on the wall, the Aqsa foundation said. The entity has been for the past few years been taking shots at Judaizing parts of the Old City's wall in a project exposed by the Aqsa foundation more than three years back.

The Israelis have made similar changes to several sections of the city wall, including the Amud Gate, one of the wall's most famous gates, the wall's southwestern section, and the New Gate. Names of some of the wall's structures have also been Judaized in apparent attempts to change the wall's history.

### *Settlements, Settlers and the Israeli State*

#### **10. How the state helped right-wing groups settle East Jerusalem**

Nir Hasson, Haaretz expose, 7/11/2010

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/full-haaretz-expose-how-the-state-helped-right-wing-groups-settle-east-jerusalem-1.323312>

A Haaretz investigation shows the state used a controversial law to transfer East Jerusalem assets to the rightist organizations Elad and Ateret Cohanim without a tender, and at very low prices.

On October 8, David Be'eri started his car in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan and drove off. What happened next has been seen by millions of viewers and surfers: Two children threw rocks at his car. An instant later, one was thrown up onto the front windshield, while the other was pushed aside by the car's bumper. This

incident further escalated the violence that has made Silwan a theater for clashes between Palestinians and settlers and police for the last year.

The Elad organization, which Be'eri founded, has settled some 500 Jews at 15 sites in Silwan to date. Ateret Cohanim, which was founded by Mati David and specializes in gaining control of assets in the Old City in general, and the Muslim Quarter in particular, has brought 60 Jewish families to this quarter, along with hundreds of yeshiva students.

The state has transferred hundreds of assets to both groups without the requisite tender process. Each year, the state also allocates millions of shekels for security at these sites, including security cameras and fences that separate the settlers from the neighborhoods' Palestinian residents.

Information revealed here for the first time provides a glimpse of the relationship between the state and these Jewish organizations. The information was made available to leftist activist Dror Etkes by court order following a three-year legal battle.

Elad, arguing that disclosure would lead to bloodshed, fought to prevent publication of the information. The state supported this claim by furnishing cautionary opinions by security experts. But in the end, Etkes obtained a list of 11 assets relayed by the state to Elad and Ateret Cohanim, mainly from 2003-2008, without full transparency and at eyebrow-raising prices.

The state has licensed Elad to manage the historic City of David tourist site; the organization also runs archaeological excavations in the area. Since Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar decided that each school pupil should visit Jerusalem three times, the City of David has been saturated with schoolchildren. The Israel Defense Forces also sends soldiers to the site for Jewish heritage tours.

The Ir Amim nonprofit, along with a number of public figures, recently went to court to demand that Elad not be allowed to operate a national site. But for now, the City of David remains associated with Elad, and this association lends public legitimacy to Elad.

In October 2008, David Be'eri took then-Public Security Minister Avi Dichter on a tour of the City of David and described Elad's activities. Parts of a transcript of this tour, documented by one of the participants, are revealed here for the first time:

"I left the army ... and I need to purchase a home here," Be'eri, a former deputy commander of the IDF's Duvdevan undercover unit, told the public security minister. "So I take a Hezbollah man. He comes to us and buys the house for us. He buys it from an Arab and sells it to us. We finish this business and then we have a party. I see that the wife of the Hezbollah guy keeps looking at Yaki [a Duvdevan veteran who assists Be'eri]. After an hour or two she says to him: 'Tell me, weren't you the beggar who lived under our window?' Do you see what kind of world this is? ... It's very complicated ... very difficult.

"The Palestinian Authority, of course, tries to torpedo [such sales], and it has no restrictions: threats, forgery, murder - it can do anything. And we need to abide by the law."

Secrecy is essential, to protect the lives of Palestinian sellers, realtors and middlemen, Elad claims. The State Prosecutor's Office, in response to Etkes' petition, also wrote an apocalyptic warning about the possible results of disclosure.

But Judges Dan Cheshin and Noam Sohlberg recommended that the sides agree to a compromise under which the assets the state transferred to Elad and Ateret Cohanim would be disclosed with certain restrictions: The information would be incomplete, encompassing only the date when a contract was signed between the state and the Jewish organizations, the amount paid for the asset, the asset's size, its general location and whether there was a tender. The sides were forced to assent to this compromise, and Etkes received a list of 11 secret transactions between the state and these two organizations.

Five of the state's deals were with Elad and six with Ateret Cohanim. Via rentals, sales or leases, the Israel Lands Administration transferred buildings and land to the two groups. The two earliest deals, dating from the 1980s, involved truly paltry sums: For example, Ateret Cohanim paid a monthly rent of NIS 466 for a four-room apartment in the Old City.

All the Ateret Cohanim buildings are in the Old City, apparently in the Muslim Quarter. They include one large, 340-square-meter building sold to the organization in October 2006 for just NIS 912,000 and a 266-square-meter building sold in April 2008 for NIS 1.241 million. In January 2006, Elad paid NIS 433,000 to lease a one-dunam area for 49 years.

11 assets reported, only 3 identified

A Haaretz investigation has conclusively identified three of the 11 assets on the list. The first is Beit Hama'ayan. Its owner, Musa al-Abasi, is considered an absentee, so following efforts by Elad, the state appropriated the house in 1988. Three years later, Elad rented it for a monthly fee of NIS 23.73. An ILA document indicates that a 1,075-square-meter plot containing a 134-square-meter building (Beit Hama'ayan ) was leased to Elad in June 2006 for 49 years for NIS 382,000.

When Minister Dichter's group passed by Beit Hama'ayan during its October 2008 tour, Be'eri related the house's history and described his organization's methods: "We purchased two rooms, this room and the one below it, and the entrance was from the other side. I decided at the time that we would build a visitors center here. What can you do here with two rooms? Nothing. So then I said, we will break down this wall, and we tore it down.

"I went to the Antiquities Authority and said: We're renovating. There was a terrace way up there, and so [I said] we'd renovate right up to the terrace. We started to dig up to the terrace, which was up here, and at nights I would move the terrace ... until we got to where the door is, over there."



The second house identified by Haaretz was sold to the organization in July 2006 for NIS 275,000. Be'eri also told Dichter about this building during their tour. He discovered in archives that the house, known as Guzman House and also as the Glass House, was purchased early in the 20th century with Rothschild money by the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association.

"They set Guzman there to guard the land," Be'eri said, "and he guarded it excellently. He simply listed all the land in his own name. So then I went to the Jewish National Fund and I said: 'You're the owner.' They told me, 'get out of here.' I told them: 'I'll volunteer for the JNF; don't pay me any money, and I'll return the land to you.' And I really volunteered. I went to a lawyer and I told him, 'look, I don't have money to give you. What I have is room on my volunteer certificate where I can add your name ... To make a long story short, he agreed to volunteer, and in the name of the JNF, we sued the trespassers."

Settlers first tried to enter the house in 1991, but this attempt was foiled by media pressure. The Shamir government, which was in power at that time, was also worried about American objections. In 1998, Elad made another bid, but this also failed. Finally, in 2006, a few months before Elad received full control of the building, the Guzman family was removed from its house.

The Guzmans subsequently filed various appeals to the courts. Among other things, they presented an effusive letter of gratitude from Jewish residents of Silwan praising members of the Guzman family for saving Jewish lives during the 1929 riots. But one after another, the family's appeals were rejected by the courts. Today, three Jewish families live in the house.

The third identified asset is a one-dunam plot sold to Elad for NIS 262,800 in February 2005. The City of David visitors center is built on this asset. In the past, the land belonged to the Qari'in and Sabrin families, and some members of these families continue to reside in the area, living among the thousands of tourists. Like most of the assets on the list, this plot was appropriated by the state (in 1989 ) under the Absentee Property Law. Elad finally purchased the plot after 20 years of renting it from the state for a monthly fee of just NIS 41.

A committee headed by then-Justice Ministry Director General Haim Klugman was appointed by the Rabin government in 1992 to review relations between the state and nonprofit associations. It identified 68 assets relayed to such organizations by the state. The gap between the list of 11 assets made available to Etkes and the Klugman Committee's figure of 68 has two possible explanations.

First, other organizations, some of them foreign, are affiliated with Elad and Ateret Cohanim, and a number of transactions are listed in the name of these affiliates. In at least one case, in 2007, the ILA transferred an asset to the Hama'ayan organization, which is owned by Elad, but there is no mention of this property in the document whose disclosure was just authorized by the court.

Ateret Cohanim has control of no fewer than seven organizations that are not officially registered in Israel. Some of them are registered in tax shelters like the Virgin Islands and Guernsey.

In 2007, accountant Yamin Georgi conducted a thorough review of Ateret Hacoanim, relying largely on the official registry of nonprofit organizations. In his report, he wrote, "These firms have no business activity other than purchasing and holding rights to assets in Jerusalem."

The report added, "Security officials believe the disclosure of these firms could endanger them, as well as the welfare of Jewish and Arab residents of Jerusalem's Old City, and of East Jerusalem. It is thus impossible to furnish more details about them."

Lawyers who specialize in tax shelters say the Virgin Islands and Guernsey have lax corporate disclosure laws that allow companies to sell assets without revealing the identities of either seller or buyer. When a person sells an asset to a company based in such a locale, he can receive compensation in stock, and thereby bypass any requirement to record the transaction in a deed.

The second explanation for the small number of assets on the newly disclosed list is that the ILA may have violated the court order by failing to relay all the documents it was instructed to deliver. For instance, an ILA press statement issued in October 2007 revealed that a 29-dunam property in the Sheikh Jarrah area was rented to Ateret Cohanim. Yet this property is not on the list.

Tender exemptions for all

The words "exempted from tender" appear alongside each of the 11 assets. In 1992, the Knesset passed a law obligating all state agencies to hold public tenders on which any citizen may bid, though the law does allow exemptions from the tender requirement for certain defined purposes, ranging from expanding agricultural areas to promoting tourism.

But Yehiel Leket, who was JNF chairman from 1998-2006 and in that capacity a member of the ILA board, said, "I don't recall that transactions involving the sale or transfer of land in Jerusalem to the Elad or Ateret Cohanim organizations in a tender-exempt process were ever brought to the ILA board."

Another former senior ILA official added, "The ILA has general regulations on exemptions and specific regulations on exemptions, but there is also a blanket regulation that allows the conferral of an exemption in special cases that are not covered by the other regulations. This blanket regulation is applied to parties to whom there is a strong desire to give land - in some cases rightly so, and in other cases wrongly."

In its 1992 report, the Klugman Committee wondered why tenders were not held before the houses were transferred. "It appears," the report stated, "that the true reason was stated openly in the affidavit from Mr. Elihu Babai [an ILA official]: 'The political leadership decided that any asset transferred to the ILA in this particular area would be rented to Ateret Cohanim. Two people from Ateret Cohanim who worked for the ILA were engaged to identify such assets.'"

In its transactions with these organizations, the state made excessive use of the Absentee Property Law. This law, originally enacted to appropriate Palestinian property left behind by refugees in 1948, has also been applied by the state to assets in East Jerusalem. In some cases, the owners of these assets live on the West Bank, which is not under the jurisdiction of Israeli law.

"These are not people who moved to an enemy country," argued attorney Shlomo Lecker, who is currently working on a case involving this controversial application of the law that is being heard by a panel of seven Supreme Court justices. "Instead, these are cases in which we've decided to annex property without annexing the people who left it. Thus two attorneys general recommended that this law not be applied to East Jerusalem."

In its discussion of the use of the Absentee Property Law, the Klugman Committee deemed the role played by the Custodian of Absentee Property "extremely flawed." The report concluded that the custodian confiscated Palestinian houses on the basis of affidavits submitted by the two organizations, without either verifying the reliability of the people who made the affidavits or checking whether anyone was living in these houses. It thus deprived any existing residents of the right to present their accounts of the properties' histories and ownership.

"I remember there were minutes of meetings held at the Housing and Construction Ministry at which Be'eri and other Elad members took part as though they belonged to the [Klugman] committee," recalled Shimon Dolan, who at that time was Jerusalem's assistant district attorney and a member of the Klugman Committee. "I asked, 'how could this be?' I'm not surprised by this list supplied by the Israel Lands Administration."

The Klugman report resulted in the two organizations' ties with the state being weakened, so they began to concentrate on acquiring property directly from Palestinians.

Then, in 2004, the Sharon government authorized the Custodian of Absentee Property to transfer assets in East Jerusalem to the Jerusalem Development Authority. About six months later, the attorney general ruled that the government had no authority to make this decision. But as the ILA list shows, assets that had been transferred to the authority during this half-year window were later handed over to the control of these two organizations.

Elad is one of Israel's wealthiest organizations. According to its 2008 financial statements, its assets totaled NIS 104 million, of which donations accounted for NIS 94 million. But the organization asked for, and received, a controversial order from the registrar of nonprofit organizations conferring confidentiality on its list of donors.

The remaining NIS 10 million came mainly from the City of David tourism site. In addition, it gets from NIS 500,000 to NIS 1 million a year from the Education Ministry.

Due to a decision made by Ariel Sharon when he was housing and construction minister in the early 1990s, security at Elad assets is funded by the Housing and

Construction Ministry. The ministry hires a private security firm for this purpose. Since these assets sprawl over a wide area, this security work is complicated and expensive: In 2010, NIS 54 million was allocated to protect Jewish settlers in East Jerusalem neighborhoods.

After 24 years of settlement, the number of Jews in this area does not exceed 500 - a mere 1 percent of the area's total residents. However, Elad members insist that they control most of the land in the City of David area and constitute half the residents.

As he has on other occasions, Be'eri claimed during his tour with the Dichter that the settlers had good relations with their Palestinian neighbors. "I've lived here since the end of 1991," he said. "We went through the intifada and all that here ... I always go around with a gun, so there will be no misunderstandings. But we have succeeded with them, with the neighbors ... I have real relations of trust. Still, when I enter any house, I enter it as though it were a military operation."

The ILA commented that "as far as we know, Mr. Dror Etkes received all the information he asked for in accordance with what is stated in the [court's] ruling. If there are questions regarding the information relayed to him, he has the right to appeal to the official responsible for implementing the Freedom of Information Act at the administration."

Elad said, "The Elad organization works to strengthen Jewish bonds with Jerusalem via, among other things, settlement. The organization did and does operate in full accordance with the law. It did and does work to purchase rights to assets in Jerusalem in exchange for sums that well exceed regular market prices. In such activity, the organization (like any third-sector organization ) has to work in cooperation with various parties and agencies, and it does so in a responsible, transparent and honest way.

"Courts that have been asked to review transactions by the organization have recognized their legality and validity. Opinions submitted to the courts by the State Prosecutor's Office have stipulated that the lives of the parties involved would be at genuine risk in the event of a disclosure of information connected to transactions that involve the transfer of land rights from Arabs to Jews. And two ruling handed down by the Jerusalem District Court stressed the need to strike the right balance between the danger posed to these parties and the public's right to information.

"The organization believes that violating this balance is dangerous. It regrets the fact that various parties, which oppose its work for political reasons, chose to overlook these facts, and are not afraid to endanger others as they seek to obtain their ends and undermine Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem."

Ateret Cohanim did not respond to this article.

Regarding the allegation that the state collaborated with the two organizations in an effort to conceal information regarding the transfer of assets, the Justice Ministry said, "The Israel Lands Administration's position, which we represented in two [court] proceedings, was formulated on the basis of security officials' view that transferring

details connected to the assets could pose security risks. The plaintiffs were thus given the contracts they requested with identifying details omitted."

Regarding the confidentiality of Elad donors, the ministry said, "Elad was required by the registry of nonprofit organizations to submit the names of donors who donated more than NIS 20,000 in a year. In response, the organization submitted the names of these donors and lodged a request that it be exempted from citing these names in its financial report, partly on the grounds that such disclosure would harm the organization and its donors ... After looking into this matter, and in light of the fact that the registry did not receive any information that raised suspicions of irregularity in the donations, a decision was made to approve the organization's confidentiality request."

## **11. New state budget gives settlements NIS 2 billion – and more**

Akiva Eldar, *Haaretz*, 31/12/2010

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/new-state-budget-gives-settlements-nis-2-billion-and-more-1.334390>

Security expenses for settlers living in Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem went up in the new budget, reaching NIS 3,160 per settler.

The 2011-2012 budget, approved on Wednesday by the Knesset, allocates NIS 2 billion to settlements, their services and security, and hundreds of millions of shekels more hidden among the different clauses of the bill.

According to the budget, 200 housing units will be marketed in Maaleh Adumim next year, with NIS 58 million allocated to the city's development in 2011 and NIS 31 million in 2012. In 2011, 500 housing units will be marketed in the Har Homa neighborhood beyond the Green Line in Jerusalem; NIS 238 million will be spent on its development over the next two years.

The budget also indicates the settlement division of the World Zionist Organization supports at least 16 illegal outposts: The Central Bureau of Statistics lists the number of official settlements in the West Bank at 120, but the budget say the WZO works in 136 communities.

The treasury also allocated NIS 180 million to Route 20, a road set to link Jerusalem's Pisgat Ze'ev neighborhood to Route 45, toward Modi'in and Tel Aviv. Peace Now, which traced the settlement support clauses in the budget, said yesterday Route 20 was a clear obstacle to peace, as it cuts across neighborhoods meant to become a part of the Palestinian state.

Some NIS 225 million were allocated to repairing the road between the Adumim plain and the Good Samaritan junction, and Pisgat Ze'ev and the Zeitim intersection.

The state will also transfer more than NIS 22 million to exporters operating from settlements, to compensate for the loss of sales to the European Union, which no

longer recognizes settlement produce as Israeli produce under the terms of its free trade agreement.

Security expenses for settlers living in Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem went up in the new budget, reaching NIS 3,160 per settler. This represents a rise of 40 percent in the settler security budget, from NIS 54.5 million in 2010 to NIS 146 million in 2011 and 2012.

Most of the settlements have been defined as areas of first national priority, in which the Israel Land Administration subsidizes 69 percent of the cost of land, or second national priority areas, in which the subsidy reaches 49 percent of the price of the land.

The purchasers of flats in a national priority area can receive a subsidized loan up to NIS 97,000, whether the flats are located in a priority area within Israel or in the West Bank. The housing assistance budget comes up to NIS 87,368 million in 2011, and NIS 86,518 million in 2012.

The Judea and Samaria Higher Education Council, responsible for all post-high school educational institutions operating in settlements will receive NIS 900 million to support three colleges. The state's share in school buses in settlements using bullet-proof buses that are bullet proof will reach 90 percent, as opposed to other local councils, where it comes up to between 40 percent and 85 percent. Subsidies for public transport (described as "support for other populations," meaning settlers and the ultra-Orthodox) will reach NIS 31 million per year, and protecting buses with armor or window bars will cost another NIS 10 million.

Every settler can request that his personal car get added protection from stones at the state's expense, and the overall reinforcement and security ingredients in settlements and conflict zone areas reaches over NIS 630 million.

Most of the settlement budget is concealed in general clauses, and the budget itself lacks regional detail, making it impossible to find how much of which clause is destined for settlements.

As the settlements issue is politically controversial, Peace Now said it demands the ministries be obliged to report on the geographic allocation of the budget so as to allow for better monitoring of this information.

## **12. After months of a de facto freeze, planning authorities in Jerusalem have resumed Israeli construction plans in East Jerusalem**

Ir Amim, 12/12/2010

<http://www.ir-amim.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=311&ArticleID=1003>

Since March 2010, the Jerusalem planning authorities have not promoted any Israeli construction plans in East Jerusalem. However, in recent weeks, against the backdrop

of ending the settlement freeze, they have resumed a slew of plans to build hundreds of new units, among them:

\* Plan No. 13290A for the construction of 130 housing units in Gilo – comprised of three residential towers situated on the border between Beit Safafa and Gilo. Approved for deposit for public review by the District Committee on December 14, 2010.

\* Plan No. 10310 for the construction of 983 housing units in Har Homa C – approved for deposit for public review by the District Committee on November 5, 2010.

\* Plan No. 11647 for the construction of 625 housing units in Pisgat Ze'ev North – a plan intended to bring Pisgat Ze'ev closer to the entrance to Beit Hanina. Approved for public review on November 25, 2010.

\* Plan No. 12825 for the construction of 42 housing units in Har Homa – deposited for public review in November 2010.

\* Plan No. 3092 for the construction of 24 housing units in Beit Orot, on the Mount of Olives – building permits issued by the District committee on December 13, 2010.

There are additional plans on the agenda of the planning authorities, among them:

Plan to construct 1362 housing units in Givat HaMatos, bordering Beit Safafa – the plan was slated to be discussed by the District Committee on October 7, 2010 but was shelved.

Plan to establish a "Theological Center" affiliated with the Or-Sameach Yeshiva in Sheikh Jarrah – the District Committee intended to discuss the plan on November 29, 2010, which calls for the construction of two buildings, but it has since been taken off the agenda due to "improvements" that will make its authorization easier. The plan is slated to be built on the "Glassman Campus" grounds, not far from Um Haroun.

Furthermore, in a peculiar move, the Custodian for Absentee Property is promoting the expansion of the Seven Arches hotel on the Mount of Olives. Plan number 14142 calls for the addition of 75 rooms, two conference halls and an indoor swimming pool. The town planning scheme was filed in June 2010.

All this data indicates the end of a policy of restraint and a clear and dangerous shift in the Jerusalem planning authorities' approach. It is important to note that there are tens of thousands more construction plans for housing units in East Jerusalem in the "pipelines" which, if executed, even in part, may have grave consequences for Israeli foreign relations as well as the political future of Jerusalem.

### **13. Bad Intentions: New Jerusalem Settlements and the Prospects for Peace (and Negotiations)**

Lara Friedman and Hagit Ofran, Huffington Post, 26/11/2010

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/hagit-ofran/post\\_1329\\_b\\_788152.html?view=print](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/hagit-ofran/post_1329_b_788152.html?view=print)

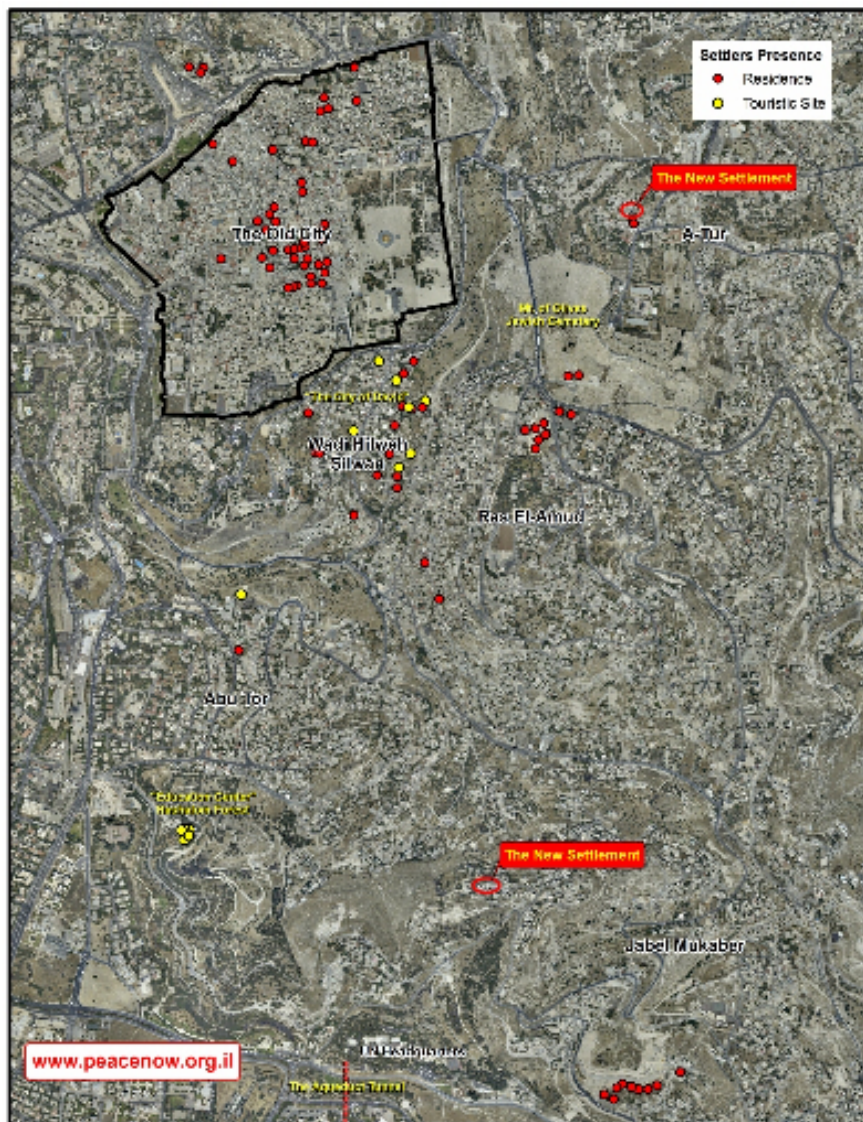
Two more houses in Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem taken over by settlers over the past two days, in the neighborhoods of Jabel Mukaber and A-Tur. Are these just routine settler provocations or something more? The answer is: both.

They are routine because settlers have been doing this for years, supported by Israeli police and courts. The phenomenon peaked in the beginning of the 1990s in Silwan then dropped off after Klugman Commission, which documented rampant Israeli government illegal support for settlers. It quietly picked up again after 2000, with return of Ariel Sharon to the political stage.

But what is happening is something more insidious and dangerous, too. Settler evictions of Palestinians picked up most visibly over the past year with new settler efforts targeting Sheikh Jarrah. This has been part of an effort by the settlers to aggressively expand their domain in the Palestinian neighborhoods in the heart of East Jerusalem and to establish a continuous (and ultimately contiguous) ring of Jewish settlement around the Old City. These past two days are the latest evidence of this expansionist trend. This growing penetration of Palestinian neighborhoods by settlers and the gradual encirclement of the Old City by settlement is, in turn, intended to block the emergence of any Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem. And of course, without a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem, there will never be any two-state solution.

With their latest acquisition in Jabel Mukaber (their first in this neighborhood), the settlers are completing a continuous Jewish presence -- a chain of settlements and touristic projects -- in the area south of the Old City. The new property is located only a little to the north of the ancient aqueduct/tunnel that is the site of a major tourist project run by the Elad settlers association, and northwest of the house there is the "educational center" that Elad runs out of the "Hashalom Forest." The new house, whether the settlers use it as a residence or a tourist center, completes a wide belt of settlements around the southern areas of the Old City.





With their latest takeover in A-Tur, the settlers are set to expand their existing settlement in the neighborhood. The building where the apartment that was taken over is located is next to what the settlers call "Beit Hachoshen," a large building that was taken over by settlers in 2006. This building houses residences and is used for tourist activities by the settlers. It is well known to all in the area of the Old City as the building with the enormous Israeli flag flying on its roof.

So we have two incidents in two days of settlers taking over Palestinian properties in the heart of densely-populated neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. These evictions were well-organized and prepared in advance. The police assistance that the settlers received in both cases demonstrates unquestionable political intervention in both situations -- intervention most likely at the ministerial level, if not the level of the Prime Minister himself.

While the entire world is watching Prime Minister Netanyahu and waiting to see if the partial moratorium will be re-imposed, Netanyahu's actions speak volumes. While he

engages in public theater of trying to sell President Obama's package of incentives to his Cabinet, he is supporting and assisting the settlers as they undertake actions that clearly threaten the possibility of any re-starting of negotiations, regardless of any resumed West Bank moratorium.

It is very hard to take Netanyahu's commitment to negotiations -- and to selling the American deal to his Cabinet -- seriously when he is deliberately creating provocations in the heart of the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. Indeed, one conclusion that could be drawn from the events of the past two days is the Netanyahu is actively seeking to torpedo the Obama Administration's efforts to re-start negotiations by making sure that the Palestinians will refuse to come back to the table -- a cynical strategy designed to ensure that talks will never re-start and that the Palestinians, not Netanyahu, are blamed.

Another even more troubling conclusion is that Netanyahu's support for settler penetration into the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem is evidence that his officially articulated support (or better yet, acceptance) of the two-state solution is an exercise in duplicity. Because while Netanyahu insists to all who will listen that settlement activity in Jerusalem does not effect final status, the reality is that these settlement activities inside Palestinian neighborhoods are designed, explicitly and unapologetically, to block the two-state solution.

The situation today in East Jerusalem is volatile. Israelis and Palestinians are both already fed up and fearful from what they have seen going in Sheikh Jarrah. Palestinian families have been thrown out of their homes by Israeli police, who hand the properties over to celebrating extremist settlers. It is these images and this trend -- a trend that in 2010 is adding a new category of Palestinian refugees to the 1948 and 1967 groups -- that has energized one of the most significant grassroots protest in Jerusalem in recent years, in the form of weekly popular demonstrations in Sheikh Jarrah, which have continued for more than a year.

More of this, at a time when hopes for re-starting peace talks hang in the balance and a sense of despair and hopelessness is spreading in neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, could be disastrous. Barring a decision by Israeli political echelons to stop this madness, one of these provocations -- or the inevitable next one -- might prove to be one step too far.

#### **14. Flirting with arrest at Jerusalem's newest settlement**

Bradley Burston, Haaretz, 17/11/2010

<http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/a-special-place-in-hell/flirting-with-arrest-at-jerusalem-s-newest-settlement-1.325167>

It is a sublime Tuesday in the midst of Jerusalem's hottest November since 1941. Leaving the dentist's office, I begin to worry that I may be late picking up my wife from a conference across town. A security guard, the cords in his neck growing taut as racing halyards, has just threatened me with arrest. The suspicion? Standing on the sidewalk.

Not just any sidewalk. This one runs past the San Quentin-like entrance to a building site, walled at every facet. The only sign warns of dire penalties for blocking the one entry point, also elaborately walled off. Without warning, a rare event: the entry gate unlocks for a moment. Careful to keep my distance, a full 15 feet from the wall, I peer in to see what appears to be a group of visitors from abroad, perhaps prospective donors, some of them religious, all of them smartly dressed. They are touring the property, which has been bulldozed bald. The only structures are prefabs.

In fact, the only actual work being done today is taking place on the sidewalk beside me. A group of workmen is putting up yet another high white wall, this one meant to block future access to the sidewalk.

If you didn't know better, you'd swear that this was a settlement. Especially when the pent-up security man is dressed in the loose vest characteristic of government ministry bodyguards, among them, the former commandos who keep the outside world out of particularly sensitive East Jerusalem settlements.

Still, something doesn't add up. This is the heart of Jerusalem's Jewish Western half. Apparently no one told the guard. Or maybe he thinks that I am an Arab.

Guard [Furious]: You're starting to make me mad, sir.

Journalist [Also losing it]: This is a sidewalk. It belongs to the city. It's a public place. I'm just standing here. Is this illegal?

Guard: One more word and I'll have the police here – you'll be detained for questioning.

Journalist: I'm a citizen. I'm a journalist.

Guard: Stay here, and I'll see that you get sent to prison.

I demand his name. I write it down. The cords in my neck now match his.

It appears that I was right the first time. Welcome to Jerusalem's newest settlement. Or, as it is formally known, the Center For Human Dignity – Museum of Tolerance Jerusalem.

For years now, I've wondered what the purpose of this place was. The project's guiding spirit, Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center of Los Angeles, has called the project a beacon of hope and a "great landmark promoting the principles of mutual respect and social responsibility."

One thing is clear. It has been anything but that.

It is only when the security man, eyes ablaze, threatens jail time that I at last realize what this project goes to show: With enough political connections, enough funding, and one court ruling, you can put a settlement anywhere.

Why hadn't I seen it before? After all, the Jerusalem Museum of Tolerance has many of the classic characteristics of a settlement. Here are some of them:

It is being built on disputed land.

From a range of location options offered by the Jerusalem Municipality, the Los Angeles-based Wiesenthal Center chose the site of the ancient Mamilla Muslim cemetery, despite opposition by moderate Muslims, concerned Jews, and relatives of those buried there.

Professor Yehoshua Ben-Aryeh, a laureate of the nation's prestigious Israel Prize and one of the foremost authorities on the geography of Jerusalem, has refuted at length the core arguments put forth by the Wiesenthal Center for the suitability of the cemetery site.

It will cause direct, prolonged damage to relations between Palestinians and Israelis.

Prof. Ben-Aryeh: "Building the museum will create an irreversible situation which will constitute damage for generations - a reason to criticize our attitude toward the cemeteries and holy sites of the members of other communities."

It erodes the basis of Israeli sovereignty, and bolsters allegations of Israeli arrogance.

"If one were intent on undermining Israel's claim to Jerusalem, there would be no better way to accomplish this goal than to build a Jewish museum atop a historic Muslim cemetery in the heart of the city," Rabbi Eric Yoffie, head of the Union for Reform Judaism and a professed admirer of the other works of the Wiesenthal Center, has written.

It tarnishes Israel's image as a democratic state respectful of the rights of other faiths and peoples.

"Let's admit the simple truth," Rabbi Yoffie concludes. "There is something profoundly disturbing about the idea of putting a Jewish Museum of Tolerance on a plot of land where Muslims have been burying their dead for most of the last 800 years."

It has a huge budget, aimed at establishing a superfluous, extrinsic, and lavish entity in a surrounding environment of social need.

And, for good measure, It has arbitrary, self-legislated security regulations, and, if the sidewalk is any measure, progressively takes up more space formerly devoted to others. In the end, does it truly matter if the Museum of Tolerance project goes forward on the present site? It does. The question goes well beyond the eventual fate of the museum, or the good name of the Wiesenthal Center and Rabbi Hier.

It goes to the heart of Israel's brief as a custodian of the Holy Land, which the world rightly sees as a treasure belonging to all peoples. The rule of thumb is a just one: As Israel treats Jerusalem, so shall the world treat Israel. As Jerusalem goes, so goes Israel.

**15. INTERVIEW / Herzl Yechezkel, head of the Har Homa residents' committee**

Interview Nir Hasson, Haaretz, 10/11/2010

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/interview-herzl-yechezkel-head-of-the-har-homa-residents-committee-1.323889>

*Why is it so important to build at Har Homa right now, at the risk antagonizing Israel's allies?*

Anyone who believes Israeli bureaucracy cannot move things must visit Har Homa in Jerusalem. The hills east of Hebron Road in the city's south, close to the Mar Elias monastery, have become home to a giant neighborhood in less than a decade. Har Homa (officially Homat Shmuel - "Samuel's wall" ) has 20,000 residents, wide streets, modern infrastructures and plans to build another 2,000 housing units.

The neighborhood was set up in the face of strong Palestinian and international protests during Benjamin Netanyahu's first term as prime minister. This week it once again made the headlines, in the wake of reports that the Interior Ministry's regional council for planning and construction is advancing a plan to add another 1,000 housing units to the neighborhood.

Once again the planning authorities in Jerusalem have proven just how expert they are at choosing when to make plans public, in order to cause the greatest possible damage to the prime minister. This time the publication came while the prime minister was busy with diplomatic meetings in the United States. Last time around, the planning officials embarrassed Netanyahu during a meeting with U.S. Vice President Joe Biden in Jerusalem, and during his visit to the White House.

This time around, U.S. President Barack Obama condemned the construction. "This kind of activity is never helpful when it comes to peace negotiations," he said, adding that this could destroy the trust between the sides.

Attorney Herzl Yechezkel, one of the first residents of the new neighborhood, has been the head of its residents' committee since its inception. He is not bothered by the international crisis, and is busy with setting up a new park and traffic islands in the neighborhood.

Are you disappointed that after so many years, and despite the neighborhood's success, you are still considered outside international consensus?

"I remember the fight that accompanied the birth of the neighborhood. It was led by Faisal al-Husseini. The deputy mayor, Shmuel Meir (after whom the neighborhood is named ) led the fight to build the neighborhood. Then everyone threatened that there would be a third world war.

"The bottom line was that Husseini made some noise and some headlines but when we started to actually build, the whole world was quiet. It was much ado about nothing.

"It's our right to build up Jerusalem. You are not talking about Judea and Samaria but Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish people."

Why is it so important to build at Har Homa right now?

"Har Homa is the future of Jerusalem. Building here is saving the city. Building here is an existential necessity, it's not a luxury. It's not merely to annoy the Gentiles. The northern part of the city is completely ultra-Orthodox. What is left for the secular and national religious public in Jerusalem is the south of the city.

"The people who live here are young couples, people in their 40s, creative types, working people, taxpayers. That is the middle class that keeps Jerusalem going. We must build so that they don't leave. Homat Shmuel is Jerusalem's hope."

Where is the neighborhood supposed to spread?

"It currently has 20,000 residents in 4,000 homes, and we are already the size of a local council. Right now Har Homa Gimmel is an uninhabited hill, as the entire neighborhood was in the beginning. When Gimmel is completed, there will be 6,000 homes there; that plan has been approved. There is talk of Har Homa Daled and Har Homa Hey later on, and then we will have 9,500 housing units. That is already the size of an Israeli town."

And are you not concerned that international pressure will stop all these plans?

"I can say not only what I think but what all the residents of the neighborhood think - it doesn't faze us. The demands of the world are hallucinatory. It's as if I were to say: Don't build in Washington. It doesn't concern us. I am repeating things that were said by those greater than I am. Ben-Gurion said it wasn't important what the Gentiles said. What was important was what the Jews did. We must build - and if they want to yell, let them. I am not trying to annoy or irritate people, but we have our own pride."

How much does an apartment cost in Har Homa?

"A three-room apartment costs NIS 1.2 million, like in the rest of Jerusalem. It used to be cheaper here but now we have closed the gaps.

"If it weren't for Homat Shmuel, many of the residents here would have moved to the periphery. As it is, Jerusalem has negative migration of 18,000 residents a year.

"I think the construction here should be something trivial, a necessity in this reality. I think the plans and the approval should be speeded up. We're in the middle of a real estate bubble. If you don't build more homes, you can't complain that apartment prices are going up. They have prevented people from building in Judea and Samaria, so let them allow us to live in Jerusalem."

On the top of the hill where Har Homa Gimmel is supposed to rise, there is a beautiful pine forest now. What will happen to it when the units are built?

"They will make every effort not to touch it. Most of the grove will remain."

Background: Har Homa is a very young neighborhood. Yechezkel believes that 50 percent of the residents are under age 18. Over the past few years it has become one of the most attractive options for young secular people who wish to remain in the city. About half the residents are secular, and the other half are national religious.

Yechezkel is also busy with the approaching elections. For the first time since the neighborhood was founded, elections will be held for the neighborhood council.

### Peace and Land

#### **16. Barak backs Jerusalem partition plan**

Yitzhak Benhorin, *Ynet news*, 11/12/2010

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3997367,00.html>

Defense minister expresses support in division outline proposed by former US president Clinton; 'There is no contradiction between two-state solution, security of Israel,' he notes.

WASHINGTON – Defense Minister Ehud Barak on Friday night said he supported a plan to divide Jerusalem, as suggested by former United States President Bill Clinton in 2000.

During a speech at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy's seventh annual forum in Washington, Barak noted that the western part of the capital and the Jewish neighborhood belonged to Israel, while neighborhoods with dense Arab populations should be under Palestinian control.

The defense minister stressed that any future peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians must include a declaration stating that the conflict has ended and that the sides cannot make additional claims. He added that strict security arrangements must also be included in such an agreement.

We need to demarcate Israel's borders so to secure a solid majority of Jews on the one hand, and a demilitarized Palestinian state on the other, he added.

Barak also noted that the settlement blocks must remain under Israeli sovereignty while the few isolated settlements should be returned home.

The defense minister commented on the current regional situation, saying that Israel finds itself yet again in a critical junction of opportunities and challenges, wedged between negotiations with its neighbors and the radical camp of Hezbollah, Hamas and global terror networks.

Without a peace process, he noted, both Israel and the Palestinians will fall back into a cycle of bloodshed and violence.

"We must find a way to renew negotiations; we must overcome suspicion," he said, adding, "There is no contradiction between a two-state solution and the security of Israel."

Barak reiterated the need for a two-state solution and noted that the world is no longer willing to accept Israel's continuous control over another nation.

United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also spoke during the conference, and stressed that core issues need to be resolved.

Clinton also reiterated the United States' active role in future negotiations.

## **17. Settlers buoyed by referendum legislation**

Tovah Lazaroff, *Jerusalem Post* (Reproduced in Peace Now), 24/11/2010

<http://peacenow.org.il/eng/content/settlers-buoyed-referendum-legislation>

After years of feeling betrayed by the legislative process, settlers on Tuesday quietly celebrated the Knesset's passage late the previous night of the National Referendum Law, which they believe will make it much harder to create a Palestinian state.

"This is very good news, because we know that an overwhelming majority of Israelis oppose a Palestinian state and the evacuation of settlements," said Naftali Bennett, the director-general of the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip.

Some of those on the Left, who also believe the bill was designed as a stumbling block for any peace deal, have argued that the bill was improperly legislated and could possibly be overturned by the High Court of Justice. Peace Now is studying the feasibility of petitioning the court.

Until Monday, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu had to bring any peace deal that involved relinquishing sovereign Israeli territory to the Knesset, where it needed an absolute majority of 61 to pass.

But as of Monday night, according to the National Referendum Law, which Netanyahu himself supported, he would need 80 MKs to ratify any diplomatic agreement that involved giving away sovereign Israeli territory.

If the deal passed but failed to obtain 80 votes in the Knesset, under the new law the issue would go to a national referendum and would need the approval of a majority of voters to pass.

Media descriptions of the Referendum Law's significance have focused on its impact on any agreement with the Palestinians or Syria with respect to territory that Israel has



annexed, such as east Jerusalem, or where it has extended Israeli law, i.e the Golan Heights.

But settlers on Tuesday said they understood that the Referendum Law, which marks the first time the Knesset has approved the use of such a vote, had a much broader significance.

This means that almost any peace deal would have to come before the public for a vote, said Bennett, since it could be applied to any plans by the Israeli government to relinquish territory within sovereign Israel, such as swapping land in the Negev for settlement blocs.

“The passing of this law is an historic landmark event,” Bennett told The Jerusalem Post.

“We think that a decision of this magnitude has to be a decision of the people and not of local political maneuvering.”

This referendum would have to be applied to any final-status agreement and as a result it will become “an additional barrier” to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, settlers’ council head Dani Dayan said.

“It could prevent a disastrous decision by a weak government that has lost faith in its principles,” Dayan said.

For settlement supporters who watched two Likud prime ministers, first Ariel Sharon and now Binyamin Netanyahu, campaign on promises on which they later reneged, the Knesset vote was the first ray of light in an otherwise gloomy legislative tunnel.

News of the Referendum Law came as settlers are engaged in a fierce battle to prevent the government from approving a 90-day settlement freeze.

“It is a huge boost to morale and a practical boost to all supporters of the Land of Israel,” Bennett said.

But attorney Michael Sfard, who would represent Peace Now if it petitioned the High Court against the law, warned that the settlers were celebrating prematurely.

Any coalition that had the kind of parliamentary majority that allowed it to govern and to negotiate a peace deal with the Palestinians, “would also have the needed majority to erase this law,” Sfard said.

The law could be repealed by the Knesset in a simple majority vote, he said.

Bennett dismissed this possibility as unlikely. It would be met with tremendous public resistance, he said, because it would be tantamount to telling the voters in a democracy that they were irrelevant.

But Sfard said that there was a separate and more significant legal issue in that he believed the Knesset had overstepped its authority by passing the Referendum Law.

The Knesset has transmitted one of its most important powers to another organ, the voter, he said.

But the way to change the powers of the Knesset is not through a regular bill, but rather by amending a basic law, Sfarid said.

## **18. Israeli Settlers Aim to Repel Palestinian**

By Joshua Mitnick, *Wall Street Journal*, 30/12/2010

[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204204004576049900872906890.html?mod=googlenews\\_wsj](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204204004576049900872906890.html?mod=googlenews_wsj)

TEL AVIV—A leading Palestinian businessman is bidding to take over an ill-fated real-estate venture in an Arab neighborhood of East Jerusalem, upsetting Israeli settlers who are trying to put together a counteroffer.

Nof Tzion, Hebrew for Zion View, is a half-built project located in a mostly Arab neighborhood of East Jerusalem, marketed two years ago to wealthy U.S. Jews as a luxury residence with a panoramic vista of Jerusalem's Old City. Though the 91 units of the first phase of the development have been sold and occupied, Israeli developer Digal Investment & Holdings Ltd. couldn't complete the project or repay its bondholders, mostly Israeli institutions. Representatives of Digal weren't available to comment.

Jewish residents of the project are now livid at the idea that the project could be turned over to a Palestinian. The Palestinian businessman, Bashar Masri, said that if his bid is successful, he plans to offer houses in subsequent phases to Palestinians. His bid was discussed at a meeting of bondholders in Tel Aviv on Tuesday afternoon.

Mr. Masri, a U.S. citizen who grew up in the West Bank, is offering to repay 80% of bondholder debt totaling \$17 million, according to a person close to the bidder. Digal also owes some \$20 million to Bank Leumi Ltd. of Israel for project financing.

Mr. Masri leads an investment company building a separate, massive Palestinian development in the West Bank.

Though Israelis consider all of Jerusalem their capital, the international community considers the Arab neighborhoods annexed to the city in 1967 as part of the occupied Palestinian West Bank. Jewish neighborhoods there are deemed settlements. Continued Israeli building in East Jerusalem has triggered U.S. protests and prompted the Palestinians to refuse to participate in peace talks.

Unlike most Jerusalem building projects, which were initiated by the government, Nof Tzion was the first Jewish development in East Jerusalem to be financed by a public offering on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange. Situated on a hillside facing north

toward the walled old city and the golden Dome of the Rock mosque, the project originally envisioned a hotel and a shopping mall, in addition to 400 residences.

Bemunah Ltd., an Israeli builder that specializes in housing for Orthodox Jews, said it is preparing its own offer to compete with Mr. Masri's. The company declared on its website that it is trying to stop the "hostile takeover" of East Jerusalem and called for the "rescue" of Nof Tzion.

"Of course the purpose is to keep the territory Jewish," said Israel Zeira, chief executive of Bemunah.

Corrections & Amplifications:

Sabih Masri, a minority shareholder and vice chairman of Arab Bank PLC, is the great uncle of Bashar Masri, a Palestinian-American businessman who is bidding to take over a real-estate venture in East Jerusalem. A previous version of this article about the venture incorrectly said Bashar Masri's family controls Arab Bank.

*Other current issues*

## **19. Wave of ethnic rage worries Israeli PM, activists**

Steve Weizman (AFP) 23/12/ 2010

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hzv8bjsozxpSHKzaHCHRKfFSbjAA?docId=CNG.8e3122d26f285f9098472daa98df0cd1.de1>

JERUSALEM — A wave of protests and discriminatory acts by Jewish Israelis against Arabs and Africans is worrying rights activists and has prompted an unprecedented appeal for calm from Israel's prime minister.

The past week alone has seen a string of passionate protests targeting "fraternisation" between Arab men and Jewish women and criticising the rising number of African migrants.

Also this week, Jerusalem police said they had arrested a gang of young Jews accused of multiple hate crime attacks against Arabs, shortly after the publication of a letter signed by dozens of Israeli rabbis, many of them state employees, calling on Jews not to rent or sell property to non-Jews.

And on Thursday night, some 10,000 people gathered in Jerusalem to protest against any freeze on Jewish settlement building in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem and to support the rabbis.

Among the mostly ultra-Orthodox Jews and young settlers, many shouted "no to those who would sell off Eretz Israel," a reference to the biblical frontiers of Israel.

They also took to task Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has spoken of the possibility of withdrawing settlers from the West Bank ahead of the creation of a Palestinian state.

"Bibi (Netanyahu), keep your hands off Eretz Israel," demonstrators shouted.

Separately, a number of rabbis from the outlawed and racist Kach movement demonstrated in support of other clergy over the call for a block on selling or renting to non-Jews.

On Wednesday, Netanyahu took the unusual step of addressing the incidents in a video message posted on his YouTube and Facebook pages.

"We are a country run by the rule of law, we respect all peoples, whoever they are," he said.

"I insist that citizens of Israel do not take the law into their own hands, not through violence nor through incitement."

Earlier this month, Israel's attorney general began investigating whether the rabbis' letter broke the law against incitement to racism.

Ronit Sela of the Association of Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) said there was a growing climate that sanctioned discrimination, nurtured by the formation almost two years ago of a coalition government embracing the Jewish nationalist Yisrael Beitenu party and the ultra-Orthodox Shas.

"We definitely see a connection between these different instances, most of them targeting either Arab citizens or non-Jewish people living in Israel," she told AFP.

She said muted condemnation by those in power, coupled with "racist and xenophobic" declarations by Israeli lawmakers and their promotion of discriminatory legislation, encouraged hatred.

In October, ACRI wrote to Netanyahu and parliamentary speaker Reuven Rivlin warning that legislation including a bill compelling non-Jewish citizens to swear allegiance to Israel could damage Israeli democracy.

And on Thursday, Israeli-Arab lawmaker Ahmed Tibi said the current parliament was "the most racist ever," claiming its house committee had for months blocked an equal opportunities bill, Israeli news site Ynet said.

In the blue-collar Tel Aviv suburb of Bat Yam on Monday, demonstrators at a "keeping Bat Yam Jewish" protest reportedly called for Jewish women who consort with Arab men to be put to death.

And Ynet on Thursday reported on five Israeli Arab men who said they had been forced to abandon their rented Tel Aviv flat after it was vandalised and they were threatened with violence.

Israel has 1.3 million Arab citizens -- Palestinians who remained in the country after the creation of the Jewish state in 1948 and their descendants.

There are also some 200,000 Arab residents of east Jerusalem, which Israel captured in the 1967 Six Day War and later unilaterally annexed.

On Tuesday, hundreds of people marched through Tel Aviv neighbourhoods calling for the expulsion of illegal migrants from Africa.

"(Avigdor) Lieberman, where are you when we need you?" read some banners, referring to the foreign minister and head of Yisrael Beitenu, while others proclaimed: "Eli Yishai we are with you," referring to Shas' political head.

About 35,000 economic migrants and asylum-seekers, many from Sudan and Eritrea, have slipped into Israel through its porous border with Egypt since 2006, with many congregating in rundown neighbourhoods of south Tel Aviv.

Veteran residents say the newcomers are overloading social services and boosting crime levels, though police dispute the latter charge.

The liberal daily Haaretz on Thursday carried several opinion pieces on tolerance and an editorial asking President Shimon Peres to intervene.

## **20. Jerusalem's long-contested light rail finally ready to roll**

Charly Wegman (AFP) – 21/11/ 2010

[http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gJU\\_wi\\_H96EM845Lpe6iHyA-TzeA?docId=CNG.d64e886087cb396858c9027769019133.3a1](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gJU_wi_H96EM845Lpe6iHyA-TzeA?docId=CNG.d64e886087cb396858c9027769019133.3a1)

JERUSALEM — After years of delays and a billion-euro price tag, Jerusalem's light rail system, which has stirred controversy across the Holy City, is gearing up for its long-awaited launch in the first half of next year.

Construction work has backed up traffic in already car-choked Jerusalem for years, leaving locals and shopkeepers frustrated and fed-up.

"The population has suffered since the work began in 2006, but we've achieved our goal," said Shmuel Elgrably, spokesman for the Jerusalem Transport Management Team, a group of experts advising the transport ministry and the city's mayor.

The project was supposed to be finished in 2008, but the completion date has repeatedly been pushed back for a variety of reasons, ranging from construction errors to the unexpected discovery of historical artifacts.

It has also come under political attack because the completed network will run through mostly Arab east Jerusalem, which was occupied by Israel during the 1967 Middle East war.

A pro-Palestinian group is suing Alstom and Veolia, the two French companies involved in the project, arguing that they are violating international law by allowing the network to run through occupied east Jerusalem.

"This has earned us boycott threats and lost us important contracts," a Veolia official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The Palestinians oppose any extension of Israeli control over the eastern part of the city, which they see as the capital of their promised state.

Israel considers the whole of Jerusalem to be its "eternal and indivisible" capital.

On the ground, residents and shopkeepers along the tram's route complain of having suffered years of loud, dirty construction work.

"We had to live with the dust, we were assaulted by jackhammering, and as a result our customers abandoned us," grumbled one merchant in the city centre.

While acknowledging the difficulties that the building work has caused, Elgrably said there was no alternative.

"It had to happen. The city is going to have more than a million people within 15 years," up from 790,000 today, he said. "The light rail is the only solution to solve the traffic problems."

Israel's government is relying on the new tram system to cut the number of cars in the centre of the city, increasing pedestrian access and reducing pollution.

During the bidding in 2004, it offered a 30-year concession which was won by City Pass, a consortium comprising Israeli civil engineering firm Ashtrom, along with France's Alstom and Veolia, backed by funding from Israel's Harel Insurance and Polar Investments.

The initial line will include 24 stations strung along a 14-kilometre (nearly nine-mile) route.

It will travel from Pisgat Zeev, a Jewish settlement neighbourhood in east Jerusalem, to Mount Herzl in the west, passing along Jaffa Street, the Holy City's central shopping artery.

According to Elgrably, who expects around 320,000 people a day to use the new tram system, "profitability was the sole criterion for deciding the project's route."

The projected figures are based on a report showing some 37.7 percent of people living along the tram's route use public transport.

In total, some 46 carriages, each able to carry 250 passengers, will be put into service. During peak hours, a train should arrive every five minutes.

Eventually, the network is to be extended to the Hebrew University in the east of the city and Hadassah hospital in the west.

The project has run up against a number of logistical challenges, some of them common to any city planning project and others more unique to Jerusalem's peculiarities.

Some 300 families were evicted and compensated to make way for the rails, and numerous topographical problems had to be worked out.

The project also required the formation of a special anti-terror unit, and the renovation of roads dating back to the Ottoman period.

One final challenge involved finding a way for the tram to turn at a right angle at the western end of Jaffa Street.

A tunnel was proposed, but in the end the city decided on a bridge, and commissioned Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava to design the project.

The result? A striking suspension bridge with "strings" to resemble the harp said to have been played by the Biblical King David, who conquered Jerusalem and made it capital of the Kingdom of Israel.

## **21. On Christmas Eve, Number of Christians Living in Jerusalem drops to only 2% of total population**

Jiis -*Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies*, 24/12/2010

<http://www.jiis.org/?cmd=newse.370&act=read&id=657>

Statistics released by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies indicate that only 15,400 Christians live today in the Holy City, divided into 13 different communities and other institutions. The Jiis calls on the Israeli government to adopt a more proactive approach towards the churches and Christian communities in the city. Jerusalem, Israel, Dec. 21, 2010 – On Christmas Eve, Christians account for only 2 percent of the total population of Jerusalem, compared to 20% before the 1948 War, according to new statistics released today by The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies.

The figures indicate that only 15,400 people currently identify themselves as Christians, compared to 31,000 at the end of the British Mandate in 1948.

The Christian community in the Holy City is comprised of 12,800 Arab Christians and another 2,600 clergymen, monks and immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

Despite their relatively low number, the Christian communities and organizations continue to play a prominent role in the Holy City. They strongly influence the character of Jerusalem, operating dozens of religious and social institutes representing

a wide range of churches, denominations and groups. The Holy City continues to be the only place in the world where 13 different communities live side by side with representative Christian churches from the four corners of the world.

The JIIS is currently drafting recommendations calling on the Israeli government to take a more active role in improving relationships with the different churches and communities and in easing the lives of the Christian residents of Jerusalem.

“We believe that in a time of growing tension between Israel and the international community, the government should put special emphasis on improving relationships with the Christian world,” Dr. Amnon Ramon, JIIS’s expert on the churches and the Christian communities, said. “Israel has a strong interest in strengthening Christian presence in the Holy Land and tightening bonds between the Christian world and Jerusalem. Such a move could improve Jerusalem’s position as world center, will carry economic benefits and may help to ease tensions between Israelis and Palestinians.”

Ramon noted that a positive step was taken two months ago when the Jerusalem Municipality allowed the completion of a new Arab-Christian neighborhood in Bethphage on the eastern slopes of Mount Olive.

The JIIS, he said, recommends that the Israeli government will form one central body that will draft a unified policy towards relationships with the Christian world and will coordinate all aspects associated with it.

“The basic needs of the Christian churches and communities are not being addressed today because of red tape and uncertainty concerning who is responsible,” said Ramon. “Often, bureaucratic and legal obstacles prevent any positive activity because officials fear to set a precedent that would influence in either way the Jewish or Muslim sides.”

Last Thursday, the JIIS held a special symposium dealing with the last Synod for the Catholic Church in the Middle East that was held in Rome in October. Some 150 participants attended, including the heads of the Catholic churches of Jerusalem, government officials, researchers and others.

“This could represent the beginning of a new Jewish-Christian dialogue,” Ramon said.