



Euro-Mid Observer
المركز الأوروبي لحقوق الإنسان



ENOUGH WORDS:

Time for Action to Protect Palestinian Rights in East Jerusalem

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Introduction

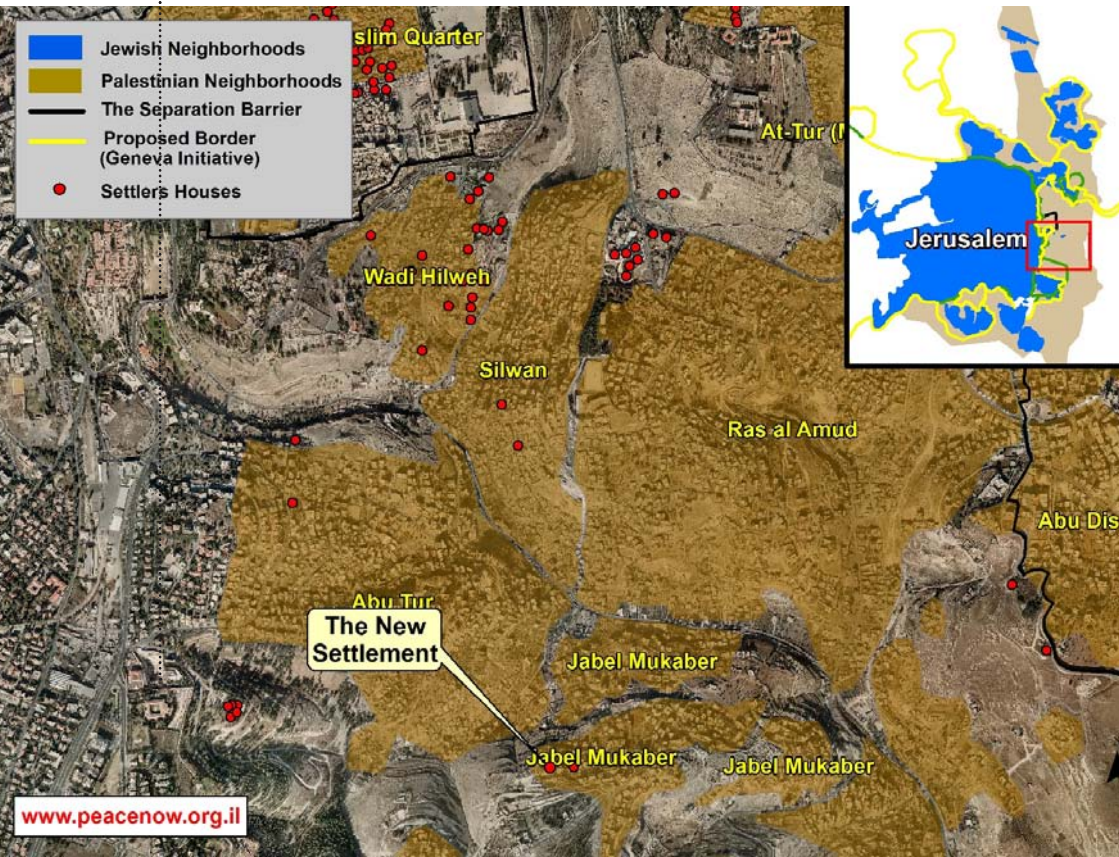
As American and European governments push the Palestinians to stay engaged in yet another round of peace talks, the Israeli government continues to not only condone but promote expansion by Jewish hardliners into East Jerusalem – the city widely recognized as the capital of the Palestinian territory.

In recent weeks, groups of Israeli Jews have insisted on ascending the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City, a sacred site controlled for centuries by Muslims. Dozens of Palestinians, including Jerusalem Mufti Sheikh Mohammad Hassan and Minister of Jerusalem Affairs Adnan Husseini were assaulted and injured by Israeli police when they attempted to protect the city's sovereignty.

Meanwhile, illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem also continue to expand, unchecked by the re-start of the peace talks that would supposedly curtail their growth. In fact, in late August, it was reported that the Finance Committee of

the Jerusalem City Council had approved a new budget that included 1,500 units for Israeli settlers in occupied East Jerusalem. Likewise, also in August, bulldozers leveled Palestinian land in the Jerusalem neighborhood of al-Tur to make way for construction of an Israeli national park.

Israeli bad faith in East Jerusalem is nothing new. Numerous third-party reports have documented Israel's long, unbroken track record in this regard. Consider these findings: In East Jerusalem and its environs, 2011 was recorded as the year of the greatest expansion of Israeli settlements since 1967. The Israeli policy of severing political, economic and social links between the West Bank and East Jerusalem caused a serious deterioration in Palestinian living conditions.



“Jerusalem: The Heart of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” March 2012, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union Policy Department, European Parliament

Although East Jerusalem has long served as the economic center of the West Bank, entry permits are required for Palestinians living outside the Israeli-declared municipal limits. In January 2012, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled constitutional the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, which imposes severe restrictions on the right of Palestinians living in Jerusalem to obtain legal residency for a spouse from the West Bank. Likewise, 10,000 children are currently





photo : Ameer Abed Rabbo

unregistered and thus deprived of access to public services such as education. In turn, Palestinian Jerusalemites risk losing their residency status if they live or work outside.

Only 13 percent of the land in occupied East Jerusalem is zoned for Palestinian construction. At least 93,100 Palestinians are at risk of displacement, since they live in structures without a permit. [According to a 2013 UN Human Rights Council report, 33 percent of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem lack building permits, and at least 93,100 residents are at risk of being displaced.]

The humanitarian emergency in East Jerusalem is increasingly visible and tangible. If the current trend in East Jerusalem continues, it will increasingly be closed off and choked by settlement activity, expropriation of buildings



Photo by alquds.edu

and re-allocation of land from living space to parks, historical sites and tram terminals. Tens of thousands of Palestinians now live in buildings that lack permits and thus can be demolished at any time. Housing units are becoming unaffordable. High youth unemployment and low school enrollment/attendance aggravate tensions and increase the potential for violence.

“Report of the Director-General: The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories,” MY 2012, International Labour Conference, 101st Session

East Jerusalem’s poverty rate is higher than the Gaza Strip’s, despite the surrounding Israeli urban metropolis. Poverty jumped from 64 percent in 2006 to 78 percent in

2012. This deep poverty is rooted in the high level of unemployment that affects 40 percent of Palestinian men and 85 percent of Palestinian women in Jerusalem; the lack of municipal infrastructure, housing and economic opportunities; and the adverse impact of the Separation Barrier on the social and political integration with the rest of the West Bank.

“Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the occupied Palestinian territory,” 17-28 September 2012, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Trade and Development Board: 59th session

Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem have traditionally served as the main provider of services for Palestinians in the city. However, since August 2001, the government of Israel has closed approximately 30 of these organizations, including the Orient House, the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce and the Arab Studies Society. The United Nations has continued to call for the re-opening of the institutions.

Only 13 percent of the annexed municipal area in Jerusalem is allocated for Palestinian construction. While natural population growth among Palestinians is estimated to require 1,500 additional housing units annually, only an average of 400 are actually authorized, resulting in an additional shortage of some 1,100 units every year. This differential effectively means that unauthorized construc-



photo by Mahtouz Abu Türk / APA images

tion is the only real option for East Jerusalem Palestinians.

“Palestinian State-Building: An Achievement at Increased Risk,” 21 March, 2012, Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process

Israel’s occupation and unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, followed by its incorporation into Israel in 1980 by law, have occurred in tandem with economic separation from the rest of the Palestinian economy.

Segregation strategies include the city’s annexation and the expansion of Jewish settlements in and around East Jerusalem, as well as the construction of the Separation Barrier, which has effectively redefined the border. The resulting deterioration in socioeconomic conditions has had





a significant impact on Palestinian Jerusalemites' standard of living, housing, health care and education.

Poverty among Palestinians in East Jerusalem has been rising steadily over the past decade: In 2010, 77 percent of Palestinian households in Jerusalem lived under the Israeli poverty line, compared to 25.4 percent of Jewish families. The picture is even bleaker for children. In 2010, 84 percent of Palestinian children in East Jerusalem were poor, compared to 45 percent of Jewish children. Although Palestinians accounted for a third of the city's population, only three welfare offices were operating in East Jerusalem compared to 18 for Israelis in West Jerusalem.



Persistent economic adversity has forced Palestinians to rely on emigration and education to cope with high poverty and unemployment. However, the education system in East Jerusalem has been greatly affected by Israeli neglect. According to the Israeli compulsory education law, all children between the ages of 5 and 18 years are entitled to free education. The Israeli Ministry of Education is responsible for overseeing and providing education, including in East Jerusalem. All Palestinians who hold valid Jerusalem ID cards should be entitled to enroll in municipal schools. However, fewer than half of Palestinian school-age children actually are able to do so due to a severe classroom shortage. Families are forced to seek costly alternatives.

The employment situation is no better. Employment conditions for East Jerusalem Palestinians are harsh and manipulative, and Palestinian workers are not allowed to participate in Israeli labor unions. The economic separation of East Jerusalem resulted in the contraction in the relative size of its economy and the gradual redirection of employment towards the Israeli labor market, where Palestinians traditionally form the lowest rank. Palestinians dominate manual labor, such as construction workers hired on a daily basis. While facing the same cost of living as Israelis, the average monthly wage for East Jerusalem Palestinians working in Israel and its settlements was 4,032 NIS in 2009, less than half the average monthly wage in Israel.

In addition to being paid less than Israeli employees, Palestinian workers have a longer working day, the average length of which exceeds 10 hours -- often with no additional compensation as required by Israeli labor law.

There is an entire program of possible improvements that are incumbent on Israeli authorities as the occupying power. But the record to date suggests that they are less interested in integrating the Palestinian East Jerusalem economy than in driving Palestinians from the city and replacing them with Israeli settlers. Daily confrontations by aggressive settlers, along with the intensification of government-funded settlements ringing the city, imply nothing less.

The disputed status of Jerusalem under law means that external interventions are not only legitimate but also incumbent upon the international community, which in 1949

assumed moral responsibility for the city's future. An international consensus persists (in Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 478) that the occupation/annexation of East Jerusalem must be reversed, notwithstanding "facts on the ground."

"The Palestinian economy in East Jerusalem: Enduring annexation, isolation and disintegration," 2013, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development



Conclusion:

How can Palestinians be expected to continue to negotiate with good will when Israel seems intent on asserting and expanding its control in East Jerusalem, without regard for international law or consensus?

If the international community is not yet prepared to declare this latest round of talks a failure, it must back up the numerous reports and expressions of concern with concrete action. In a March 2012 investigation titled “Jerusalem: The Heart of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” the European Parliament’s Directorate-General for External Policies concluded that actions must be taken to:

- Halt Israeli settlement activity in East Jerusalem. Promote and strengthen the status of East Jerusalem as the capital of the future State of Palestine.
- Advocate for the return of the Palestinian political leadership to East Jerusalem.
- Encourage full respect for international law and UN resolutions, as well as mobility and social and econom-

ic development in East Jerusalem, as an integral part of Palestinian territory.

- Support the organisation of Palestinian elections (presidential, legislative and municipal) throughout the Jerusalem Governorate, including East Jerusalem.
- Reactivate economic ties between East Jerusalem and the rest of West Bank.

The solutions are well known. What has been lacking is political will. Without protecting Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem, there can be no just peace.



Euromid Observer

المرصد الأورومتوسطي لحقوق الإنسان

جميع الحقوق محفوظة
المرصد الأورومتوسطي لحقوق الإنسان

Maison des Associations Rue
des Savoises 15 CH-1205
Genève
جنيف – سويسرا

 info@euromid.org
 www.Euromid.org