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# Eye on al-Aqsa

## Executive Summary

**A Report Documenting the  
Israeli Infringements on al-Aqsa from 22/8/2011 to 21/8/2012**

Released by al-Quds International Institution  
on the Memorial of Burning al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969- 6<sup>th</sup> Report

Together We Safeguard al-Quds

# Eye on al-Aqsa

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*Developing the Concept of the Jewish Presence in al-Aqsa Mosque*

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*Imposing Jewish Presence inside al-Aqsa and Direct Interference in its Administration*

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*Reactions to the Developments in al-Aqsa Mosque*

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# Eye on al-Aqsa

## Executive Summary

Al-Quds International Institution (QII) has been issuing its annual report *Eye on al-Aqsa* consistently since 2005. The report monitors the Israeli attacks on al-Aqsa Mosque and tracks the developments of the Israeli plans in this sense. This report, the sixth in this series, documents the attacks on al-Aqsa between 22/8/2011 and 21/8/2012 and addresses the Judaization process from four perspectives:

*First:* The development of the concept of the Jewish presence in al-Aqsa Mosque at the political, religious and legal levels.

*Second:* The development of the excavation, construction and expropriation works under and around the Mosque and in its vicinity during the period covered by the report. The details and targets of such works are based on the latest available information that shows the Occupation's endeavor to establish a Jewish city that would have the Mosque as its center.

*Third:* The imposition of actual Jewish presence inside al-Aqsa and the attempts at interfering with its management through monitoring break-ins and offensive statements of Israeli officials, extremist Jews and security forces. Additionally, the report examines the above acts and statements, showing the complementary roles between the different sides in achieving their common goal which is dividing al-Aqsa Mosque between Muslims and Jews in the shortest time possible. This report also monitors the continuous ban on renovating the Mosque facilities besides the restrictions on the movement of Waqf employees and preventing them from performing their duty. Moreover, the report presents the Occupation's control over access to the Mosque and its attempts at changing the rules of control over the gates and restrictions on prayers' access according to their area of residence and age.

*Fourth:* Monitoring the standing of the main parties concerned with al-Aqsa Mosque and their reactions to the developments taking place.

## First: Developing the Concept of the Jewish Presence in al-Aqsa Mosque

### A. On the Political Level

The most important and serious development witnessed during the period covered by the report was the positions showing tendency towards dividing al-Aqsa between Muslims and Jews. National Union MK Ariele Eldad prepared a draft bill suggesting the partitioning of al-Aqsa on time basis whereby every side would be allowed to enter the Mosque for performing prayers and religious celebrations. This draft bill brings to mind the division scenario of al-Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron where the Occupation continues to control Muslims' access to it while it is their absolute right.

*The most dangerous political development is represented in the positions calling for the timeline division of al-Aqsa between Muslims and Jews especially through the draft bill prepared by MK Ariele Eldad*

Partitioning al-Aqsa was also proposed by Likud MK Ze'ev Elkin who vowed to work on providing "Jews only" access to the Mosque on specific days. Elkin asserted that Jews were prohibited from praying in al-Aqsa based on an illegal police decision, which violates the Supreme Court's decision allowing them to pray there unless the police decided otherwise based on security threats. Elkin opined that the police decision was based on operational considerations and did not reflect the Israeli government's policy. Elkin's position would be the least surprising if coupled with PM Benjamin Netanyahu's position refusing to give up on al-Aqsa Mosque, which is the "heart" of al-Quds. Netanyahu's stance was presented in the speech he delivered on the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the occupation of the eastern part of al-Quds where he said that conceding the "Temple Mount" would not bring peace but rather lead to religious and sectarian war. Netanyahu's speech, ultimately, reflects his government's adherence to the policy of Judaization and the relentless attempts to assume full control of al-Aqsa.

The Occupation drew a veil on the State Comptroller's report on al-Aqsa like it did before with most of the contents of the report submitted to the Knesset Control Committee in June 2010 by then Comptroller Micha Lindenstrauss. Some said that Netanyahu would not reveal the content of the report because he did not want to be reminded of his "historical scandal" of conceding "Solomon's Stables" to the Islamic Waqf during his tenure as prime minister during the nineties. Yet, regardless of the reasons of the secrecy, it is possible to say that the Occupation is keen on not showing a clear position regarding al-Aqsa or avoiding Islamic, or even, Jewish reactions the report might stir.

### B. On the Religious Level

In response to the increasing calls by some rabbis and religious organizations encouraging Jews' access to al-Aqsa, the official religious institution is still cautious about dealing with this issue. In March 2012, Israel's chief rabbi, along with other senior rabbis, issued a declaration calling on Jews not to visit the "Temple Mount" for it contradicts the Jewish law. According to the signatories, the declaration was issued because of the increased calls for Jews to visit the "Temple Mount." The declaration stated that "It is a sacred duty to inform you that going up to the "Temple Mount" contradicts religious teachings. This prohibition has been simple and clear for a long time, and has been forbidden by all of the great Torah scholars." The

*The representatives of the official Chief Rabbinate in Israel reiterated the ban on Jews' ascent to the "Temple Mount" awaiting the "Savior" who will lead them to it*



declaration added that it was incumbent upon the signatories to reiterate that the prohibition continued because many different organizations have been calling on the public to visit the "Temple Mount." Among the most prominent signatories was the Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, the Ashkenazi chief rabbi Yona Metzger, the former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, the former chief Rabbi of the Old City Avigdor Neventzal and "Rabbi of the Western Wall" Samuel Rabinovitch. This position, which sparked opposition reactions, does not reflect the reluctance of the signatories regarding the "Temple Mount" but rather their keenness on fully controlling it upon the advent of the "Savior" who would lead the Jews to it.

In December 2011, the Military Rabbinate released an educational document ahead of the holiday of "Hanukkah - Festival of Lights" featuring a photo of al-Aqsa without the Dome of the Rock. One reserves officer said that the edited picture was "part of an official release, which is why it's problematic the army is distributing it." The officer also said that the Military Rabbinate should be more alert about educational material it issues especially regarding the "Temple Mount" because "a world war would break if someone would try to do something about the place."

It is possible to say that the religious standpoint towards Jews' access and praying in the "Temple Mount" is still swapping between opposing and supporting sides. Despite the increase in religious voices demanding the permission of performing prayers, Jews' praying on "Temple Mount" is still restricted by the limits drawn by rabbis sticking to Biblical teachings and by the fear of Islamic reactions in case the issue was left uncontrolled.

### B. On the Legal Level

The most dangerous legal development witnessed during the period covered by the report was the circular issued by the Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein considering al-Aqsa an integral part of the Occupation State and thus subject to the Israeli laws. The circular stated that the parties concerned with implementing the law should regularly monitor the surroundings of al-Aqsa and the ongoing work there to ensure the safety of its antiquities. It also urged the concerned authorities to refer to Weinstein should they suspect violations of antiquities and planning laws. The circular comes amidst increasing calls by different Israeli organizations to ban the Islamic Waqf from conducting any reconstruction work in al-Aqsa claiming that such work would cause damage to "Jewish antiquities." The circular was revealed in the context of an appeal filed by the "Temple Mount Faithful" with the Supreme Court demanding the suspension of construction works conducted by Islamic Waqf in al-Aqsa because of damage caused to "Jewish antiquities" there. Gershon Salomon, the leader of the association, said that Waqf workers were putting buckets and construction material on the "Foundation Stone," thus desecrating part of the "Holy of Holies." This circulation is a stark encroachment on the role of the Islamic Waqf and a boost for Israeli political stances regarding the Mosque while consolidating the main objective of building the "Third Temple" on the ruins of al-Aqsa.

*The Israeli Attorney General issued a circular considering al-Aqsa an integral part of the Occupation State and thus subject to the Israeli laws. This circular is issued amidst increased calls for ceasing the reparation works conducted in al-Aqsa by the Islamic Waqf because "they cause damage to Jewish antiquities" in the place*

Earlier, on 7/2/2012, the Israeli Supreme Court responded to a petition filed by the extremist Salomon demanding that he be granted access to al-Aqsa. The Court decided that the



"freedom of expression and the right to pray in the holy place are fundamental rights of every person in Israel;" however, the decision added, the right to access to al-Aqsa was not absolute and could be restricted due to considerations necessitated by public interest. Ultimately, the Court accepted the position of the police stating that the danger was not illusory and it would be a real security risk if Solomon would be allowed to ascend to the Mosque.

On the surface of it, this decision restricts Jews' right of praying in al-Aqsa. Stripped to the core, it legitimizes this right and the break-ins in addition to the performance of Talmudic rites and rituals in the Mosque. As inferred from the Court's decision, only security considerations prevent Jews from exercising their "right" which they should restore after the demise of these risks.

## Second: Excavations and Construction Works beneath al-Aqsa and around it

### A. Excavations

Increasing the excavations beneath al-Aqsa Mosque is no longer a priority for the Occupation after they have branched and spread in the western, southern and northern sides of the Mosque. The Israeli authorities have rather started working on restoring old sites and preparing them to receive visitors along with providing the infrastructure needed to transform the "Historic Jewish City" being built under al-Aqsa into the most visited shrine in the Occupation State.

*The period covered by the report witnessed the beginning of diggings and the opening of 6 new excavation sites. Hence, the total number of excavations reached 47, 25 of which on the western side, 17 on the southern side and 5 on the northern side*

During the period covered by the report, the construction of the "City of David" (the sacred Jewish city) witnessed a distinct development of excavations in terms of type, number and speed. Regarding the size, excavations extended to the far north of the Old City to include its walls and surroundings. In the western side, excavations extended beyond the walls of the Old City to Jouret al-'Innab outside the walls of al-Quds. Besides, the excavations of Silwan, which have started before August 2011, intensified remarkably where the Givati Parking Lot excavations increased to uncover different layers of soil to the north of al-Aqsa. Silwan also witnessed many landslides near Ein Silwan mosque and the road leading to al-Aqsa as well as new excavations inside the excavation and fortification walls.

The Occupation Local Building and Planning Committee approved the construction of Givati Parking Lot in February 2012 according to the new scheme submitted by the architect Arieh Rahamimov. According to the new plan, the parking lot would be built on an area less than that designated in the previous scheme, and it would be raised on stilts to maintain the antiquities and excavations and transform them into a museum. Besides, parking spaces would be reduced and the height of the building limited so that it would not overshadow the southern wall of the city. The scheme suggested by Rahamimov and endorsed by Elad Zionist organization would link "Ophel Garden," the "City of David" and al-Buraq Square. In addition, the period covered by the report witnessed reworking in some locations and reactivating excavations inside Warren's Gate and the Herodian Hall tunnels as well as launching new excavations inside the "Western Wall Tunnel Network."

Regarding excavation details, the period covered by the report witnessed the beginning of diggings and the opening of six new excavation sites, four of which to the west of al-Aqsa,



one to the south and one to the north. So, the number of excavation sites under al-Aqsa Mosque reached 47, 30 of which are active, (13 to the west, 12 to the south and 5 to the north) and 17 are completed (5 in the south and 12 in the west).

### 1. Western Side Excavations

The western side of al-Aqsa Mosque, which extends beyond al-Wad Street, is considered the major nerve of the sacred Jewish city the Israeli occupation is building beneath al-Aqsa and in its vicinity. It is on this side that most shrines are set and the route connecting between the south of this city in Silwan and its north at Via Dolorosa lies. In this area, the Israeli Occupation has excavated a half-kilometer network of tunnels starting from the western side of south al-Aqsa until Via Dolorosa in Sisters of Zion north al-Aqsa. The "Western Wall Heritage Foundation" and "Ateret Cohanim" are responsible for preserving the tunnels and excavations including several Judaized hotbeds represented by a number of tunnels and synagogues under the Old City and the walls of al-Aqsa as well as many museums that form a complete Judaized city under the Mosque. By the end of the period covered by the report, the number of excavations in the western side of the Mosque had reached 25, 13 of which are active and 12 are completed.

### 2. Southern Side Excavations

Excavations in the southern side are intended to create the so-called "City of David" that extends, according to Zionist claims, from Ein Silwan compound in the south to the northern wall of al-Aqsa, on the whole area of Wadi Hilweh neighborhood in Silwan. The period covered by the report witnessed the launching of a new tunnel in the southern side, in addition to developments inside the tunnels south of al-Aqsa. Thus, total number of excavation sites in the southern side of al-Aqsa reached 17, 12 of which are active and 5 completed.

### 3. Northern Side Excavations

The northern side excavations have recently spread after they had comprised one site only at the Sisters of Zion pond at the bottom of al-Umariyah School, which the Occupation started working on in 1868. The aim of the recent excavations in this area is creating a fake history to the north of al-Aqsa and linking its excavations by the "Western Wall Tunnels," which are now northerly and southerly extending along the northern wall of the Mosque. The period covered by the report witnessed the start of diggings inside al-Kittan Cave north of al-Aqsa, which yields 5 active excavation sites north al-Aqsa.

### B. Construction and Land Expropriation around al-Aqsa

Construction and land expropriation around al-Aqsa are intended to promote Jewish existence in al-Quds either by imposing the Jewish character around al-Aqsa or by using these buildings as centers for launching attacks and breakings into the Mosque as a cover for excavation works or for security purposes.

Over the past decades, the Occupation was extremely cautious in dealing with construction works in and around the Mosque. This cautiousness was not out of care for Muslims' feelings or respect for their sanctities. Rather, it was due to the fear that haunted the Zionist mind since it established the Occupation state caused by strong reaction against any public Zionist





attempt to consolidate its presence in al-Aqsa starting from al-Buraq uprising in 1929 up to al-Aqsa uprising in 2000.

However, this cautiousness started to wane lately as manifested in 2010 that witnessed a quantum leap with the launch of the so-called "Ruin Synagogue" which is the first huge Jewish milestone the Israeli Occupation is building in the Old City. This development indicates Israel's abandonment of its cautiousness and the increased confidence in its ability to execute its plans not worrying about any reaction that might stop their implementation. Should the situation continue to develop this way, it is very likely for the Occupation authorities to implement major projects like the "Light of Yurushalayim Synagogue" proposed in the Jerusalem First plan.

In 2012, the Israeli government issued Decision No. 4654 calling for building sites that have "Biblical dimension and attraction" in Al-Quds especially in the historical archaeological sites. In addition, the government has allocated two million shekels (about 520 thousand dollars) for the primary observations and plans of these projects.

Most importantly, the District Committee for Planning and Construction in al-Quds endorsed on 2/7/2012 a plan to establish a military complex on the Mount of Olives near Augusta Victoria Hospital to the east of al-Aqsa Mosque. The aim of this plan is to enhance the status of al-Quds as the capital of Israel which is working heavily on transferring governmental offices to the eastern part of al-Quds. Moreover, the Occupation authorities did not stop their attempts at demolishing al-Maghariba Bridge but had to freeze this step under popular and official pressure from the Arab and Islamic world. However, the diggings in al-Maghariba Hill in July 2012 and emptying the soil under al-Maghariba Bridge stress the determination of the Occupation to proceed with its plans in this regard.

### **Third: Imposing Jewish Presence inside al-Aqsa and Direct Interference in its Administration**

The relentless Israeli attempts at imposing Jewish presence inside al-Aqsa Mosque were coupled with a political address calling for its consolidation particularly through the timeline division of al-Aqsa. Thus, various Israeli sides strove to dedicate a fabricated right to pray in al-Aqsa as a preliminary steps towards its full domination. Generally speaking, it is possible to say that the Israeli conduct on the official and security levels was a leverage for break-ins that have become closer to a reality that would not change be it endorsed by a law or not. Parallel to the breakings into al-Aqsa and the positions supporting them, the Israeli authorities showed keenness on monitoring every detail in al-Aqsa especially after increasing the number of surveillance cameras that cover the whole Mosque and its yards.

As in the previous year, the break-ins were part of the daily scene in al-Aqsa except for a few occasions when they were foiled by Muslims worshipers' reaction or banned due to considerations of the Israeli police authorities that controlled their pace. Indeed, break-ins were prevented on some days to avoid a strong reaction Muslims might show in case of uncontrolled friction with extremist Jews. Thus, Israeli police denied Jews access to al-Aqsa on 29/7/2012, the anniversary of the so-called destruction of the alleged "Temple," in contrast to the preceding days that witnessed consecutive and intensified break-ins. This could be understood as a precaution to avoid any uncontrolled reactions and clashes that might erupt





between Muslim worshipers and Jewish extremists breaking into the Mosque. Similarly, police authorities prevented Jews from entering al-Aqsa on the last days of Ramadan and the days of Eid al-Fitr whereas the intensity of break-ins in early Ramadan suggested that they would increase towards the end of the month of fast. This Israeli conduct triggers questions regarding its implications and whether it is a step towards dedicating timeline division of al-Aqsa by preventing Muslims from entering the Mosque on Jewish occasions like Jews were prevented from entering it on Muslim occasions.

Notwithstanding the occasional prevention of Jews from entering al-Aqsa, the extremists' breakings into the Mosque were facilitated and protected by the Israeli security forces. In fact, police forces would stand toughly against the slightest attempt by worshipers and Mosque guards to counter these break-ins, even by merely exclaiming *Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest), by imposing punitive measures that include paying fines and expulsion from al-Aqsa. Given this fact, the guards and worshipers often choose the lesser evil by avoiding clashes with intruders to avoid the intensification of Israeli security forces in the Mosque intended to protect the extremist intruders.

### 1. Breakings and Offensive Statements by Official Figures

Break-ins by official figures remained relatively limited during the period covered by the report. However, these break-ins usually comprised a platform to reach out for extremists and encourage them to be continuously present in the Mosque on one hand. On the other hand, they were used as a cover for violations conducted by extremists during their breaking into al-Aqsa.

a. On 13/3/2012, Moshe Feiglin, from the Likud Party, broke into al-Aqsa strongly guarded by the Occupation forces where he roamed around the Mosque with a group of the settlers who performed Jewish prayers and Talmudic rituals. In an interview held on 25/3/2012, Feiglin recalled a previous interview with Maariv when he said that the first thing he would do after winning premiership was ascending to the "Temple Mount" and praying there and no one would prevent him.

b. On 17/5/2012, a number of politicians and MKs, including Uri Ariel and Michael Ben Ari, in addition to a group of extremists broke into al-Aqsa within the context of a program dedicated for the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Israeli occupation of al-Quds in its entirety.

c. On 26/6/2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited al-Buraq Wall and reaffirmed its Jewishness saying that one of the reasons for his visit was to pray for rebuilding the "Temple."

d. Mitt Romney, the Republican candidate for the American presidential elections, visited al-Buraq Wall on 29/7/2012, the anniversary of the so-called "destruction of the Temple" and left a message in one of its cracks. He also said, "In this sacred spot and on this special day, I have gotten to know more about the history of the Jewish people, and I feel the pain of the destruction undergone by the Jewish people."

## 2. Breakings and Offensive Statements by Extremist Jews

The pace of breakings into al-Aqsa perpetrated by extremist Jews did not subside throughout the period covered by the report. Indeed, there was keenness on maintaining continuous Jewish presence in the Mosque through small groups supported by a court decision reiterating "the right of Jews to pray in the Temple Mount."

a. On 22/11/2011, about 140 settlers broke into al-Aqsa to celebrate the so-called "Hanukkah" where they performed special Talmudic and Jewish rituals. The break-ins were preceded by calls from Jewish groups to break into the Mosque throughout the "Hanukkah" week to kindle the lights of the "Temple."

b. On the anniversary of the Jewish Passover, dozens of extremists broke into al-Aqsa through successive small groups protected by police forces. These break-ins were carried out in response to calls by senior Jewish rabbis asking observant Jews to gather in al-Buraq Square. The break-ins continued throughout the Passover week from 6 to 14/4/2012.

c. On 20/5/2012, about 90 extremists broke into al-Aqsa Mosque and performed religious rituals commemorating the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of occupying the eastern part of al-Quds. Among the extremists was Rabbi Yisrael Ariel, one of the paratroopers who participated in the occupation of al-Aqsa in the 1976 war. Ariel said that he has waited 45 years to be able to say a prayer of thanksgiving on the "Temple Mount."

d. On 25/7/2012, about 120 extremist Jews broke into al-Aqsa ahead of the anniversary of the "destruction of the Temple" on 29/7/2012 while the police prevented the access of Jews to al-Aqsa on that day.

e. Intensive breakings into al-Aqsa were recorded in early Ramadan with around 350 intruders in the first week of the month.

## 3. Breakings and Offensive Statements by Security Services

Besides police forces' presence in al-Aqsa as a part of providing protection for extremists' break-ins, official security forces carried out independent breakings through small groups that would roam the Mosque frequently. In addition, some soldiers did inappropriate gestures or took pictures against al-Aqsa or the Dome of the Rock while at sometimes they waived the Israeli flag near the Dome of the Rock.

The most important development regarding security break-ins was the decision issued on 01/05/2012 allowing Israeli soldiers to break into al-Aqsa in their military uniform, which was prevented since the outbreak of the second *Intifada* in 2000. This form of break-ins was yet another provoking scene added to the break-ins by officials and extremist Jews.

Besides the breakings into al-Aqsa by soldiers and security forces, Chief of Staff Benny Gantz broke into the Mosque on 18/8/2012 shortly after the circular issued by Attorney General Weinstein considering al-Aqsa an integral part of Israel had been revealed.

Along with break-ins, the blatant Israeli interference in the administration of the Mosque continued on three tracks: preventing restoration works and interfering in the work of the Islamic Waqf, restricting the movement of the Waqf staff, in addition to controlling access to



the Mosque and restricting worshipers' movement. In this context, the most significant intervention was the private session held by the Knesset Committee on Education, Culture and Sport on 13/3/2012 to discuss the issue of al-Aqsa and the Committee's claim that the Islamic Waqf was causing damage to "Jewish antiquities" in the Mosque. Moreover, the Occupation authorities continued to impose age and geographical restrictions on worshipers visiting al-Aqsa, especially in the holy month of Ramadan, and attack Muslim students and worshipers within relentless attempts to prevent their presence in the Mosque.

#### Fourth: Reactions to the Developments in al-Aqsa Mosque

Despite the Occupation's unprecedented violations against al-Aqsa, reactions by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and different factions were mainly condemnatory statements void of any serious solution or political strategy. They also demanded Arab and Islamic countries to defend al-Quds while appealing to the international community to stop Israel's violations of international law and resolutions pertaining to the holy city.

*The reactions against the Israeli infringements on al-Aqsa are generally weak as compared to the magnitude of the Israeli violations while support for al-Aqsa is not enough*

Amidst the Occupation's fervent attempts at dividing al-Aqsa, Arab and Islamic reactions, were at best timid and short of an influential standing that could foil the Israeli Judaization plans or aggression. It is possible to say that the Palestinians of the 1948 Occupied Territories were the most active defenders of al-Quds and al-Aqsa Mosque against the vicious Israeli attacks.

#### On the Palestinian Level

The Palestinian internal scene can be best described as paralyzed regarding the position towards the issue of al-Aqsa. This paralysis is further enhanced by the political schism on the domestic level which continues despite the signing of the conciliation agreement. The capacity of the Palestinian resistance to make Israel pay for any assault on al-Aqsa is now hindered by the continuing security cooperation between the PA and the Occupation authorities in the West Bank.

Notwithstanding the statements stressing the commitment to the resistance as a strategic choice, the Palestinian factions are still incapable of any genuine reaction on the ground. Besides their condemnatory statements, Palestinian factions would demand the Arab and Islamic world and the international community to defend al-Aqsa and put an end to the Israeli infringements on the Mosque.

The incompetence of the PA and its inability to achieve a Palestinian State through the so-called "peace negotiations" or through the Security Council, have encouraged the Occupation to accelerate its infringements on al-Aqsa and set the stage for its partitioning. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's plan to support al-Aqsa entailed a call upon Arabs and Muslims to visit the Mosque since the visit would be "a form of support for the prisoner rather than normalization with his warden," according to Abbas. This call triggered wide controversy that would be yet added to the other controversial issues distracting Palestinians and Muslims from the consensual ways for supporting al-Aqsa. Besides Abbas's call, the reaction of the PA towards the issue of al-Aqsa is still weak and unable to counter the Israeli infringements on it.



Apparently, the Palestinians of the 1948 occupied territories were the forerunners in supporting al-Aqsa through their massive participation in the programs of *Masateb el-'Elm*, *Masirat al-Bayareq* and weddings in the Mosque. In addition, a major role is being played by different Jerusalemite figures and institutions to draw attention to the dangers threatening the Mosque.

### On the Arab and Islamic Level

The Arab and Islamic reaction against the Israeli infringements on al-Aqsa was similar to that witnessed upon the burning of the Mosque in 1969. Thus, there were a plenty of condemnatory statements and conferences that would "criticize the unprecedented attacks on al-Aqsa" as opposed to a few pledges to support the Mosque that usually fail to crystallize for lack of follow-up.

The convening of the Doha International Conference on al-Quds held in February 2012 was probably the most important official solidarity event on the Arab and Islamic scene during the period covered by the report. The Conference was concluded with "The Doha Declaration," which expressed the conferees' concern with the Israeli excavations and archeological diggings under al-Aqsa Mosque and its surroundings. The Declaration also approved a comprehensive strategy for supporting different sectors and funding various projects in al-Quds. It also reiterated the intention to head to the Security Council to push for the adoption of a resolution that would allow the formation of an international committee for investigating all steps taken by Israel since its occupation of al-Quds in its entirety in 1967. As for financial support, only \$37 million were paid out of the \$500 million pledged in the Arab Summit in Sirte in 2010, according to Ahmad Qurie', the head of al-Quds Affairs Department in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Despite the convening of the exceptional summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Mecca on 14-15/8/2012 in concurrence with Weinstein's circular, Eldad's draft bill and the American annual International Religious Freedom Report pointing to preventing non-Muslims from entering al-Aqsa, the closing statement failed to mention these or other dangers facing al-Aqsa. The summit, however, endorsed the Strategic Multi-Sector Development Plan adopted in the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in Kazakhstan on 30/6/2011 as a framework for setting the priorities of Islamic funding in al-Quds. Yet, "the challenge facing Islamic leaders is how to translate these decisions effectively to support al-Quds and Palestine," as confirmed by Mohamad Sobeih, the Arab League Assistant Secretary General for Palestinian affairs.

In general, Arab and Islamic interaction with the issue of al-Aqsa did not witness major developments where conferences and summits addressed the generalities and their decisions were far from serious implementation. Summits and conferences remain needed yet while activating their decisions that should be built on the power of Islamic right in al-Aqsa rather than on fear and hesitation.



## **On Grassroots Level and the Reaction of Civil Society and Institutions Working for al-Quds**

Support for al-Aqsa by civil society and institutions working for al-Quds was limited during the period covered by the report. So were popular demonstrations that expressed temporary emotional outbursts which soon lost their vigor with the end of the solidarity event. Thus, they failed to urge Islamic and Arab governments to assume a strong position or take firm decisions to counter the Israeli infringements on al-Aqsa.

Notable was the document issued by al-Azhar Institution on 20/11/2011 against the Judaization of al-Aqsa. The document stressed the Arab face of the Mosque that is deeply rooted in history as compared to the temporary and extrinsic Jewish presence.

On grassroots level, celebrating Land Day on 30/3/2012 under the title "Global March to al-Quds" was the most prominent event expressing solidarity with al-Quds and its people against the fiercest Judaization attempts ever faced since the occupation of the city. The March paved the way for a new phase of interaction with al-Quds on the international level, since it was able to rally all Palestinians wherever they are, unify their interests and mobilize them for one cause. It also channeled support towards al-Quds and all its components, without excluding al-Aqsa as the Mosque is part of the city and lies at its heart.

Popular interaction with al-Quds and al-Aqsa waxed and waned throughout the period covered by the report. True it did not have a major, influential role yet looking at the Arab uprisings and the changes they triggered heralds the possibility of achieving similar outcomes regarding al-Aqsa especially through pressure on Islamic and Arab governments, to urge them to defend al-Aqsa and protect it against the Israeli aggression.

## **On the International Level**

The international reaction towards al-Aqsa could be deduced from the international stances towards the issue of al-Quds in general. During the period covered by the report, these standings did not exceed denunciation and verbal conviction parallel to continued support for Israel while serious measures are needed to curb its violations. Thus, while the USA reiterated the illegality of settlement building that jeopardized the two-state solution, it vetoed a resolution by the UN Human Rights Council to form a fact-finding committee investigating Israeli settlement in the Palestinian Territories, including al-Quds. The double standards of the American positions are embraced by the Occupation authorities as a sign to proceed with their violations against al-Aqsa, al-Quds and the whole of Palestine.

In the same context, the State Department released its annual International Religious Freedom Report for 2011, which pointed out to "a government policy since 1967, repeatedly upheld by the Supreme Court and routinely enforced by the police citing security concerns, denies all non-Muslims opportunities to worship at [al-Aqsa]." This "description of facts" was quickly followed by MK Ariele Eldad's bill proposing the splitting al-Aqsa prayer time between Muslims and Jews.

The statements made by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Republican candidate for the American presidency Mitt Romney at al-Buraq Wall reflected their disregard of the fact that the Wall is an integral part of al-Aqsa while reiterating the Occupation's claims based on building the "Third Temple" on the ruins of al-Aqsa. In this respect, Putin stated that one of



the reasons for visiting the Wall was to pray for the construction of the "Temple." Romney, for his part, said that he felt the pain undergone by the Jews over the destruction of the "Temple."

### **On the Media Level**

In light of the preoccupation of Arab and Islamic media with the changes in the Arab world and their repercussions, al-Quds or al-Aqsa did not receive adequate coverage except from Palestinian local media and Palestinians of the 1948 occupied territories' websites.

In April 2012, the Ninth Islamic Conference of Information Ministers in Gabon called on media outlets to focus on the issue of al-Quds through dedicating the last Friday of Ramadan for comprehensive coverage of the holy city. However, Ramadan passed and al-Quds never received adequate coverage and al-Aqsa was only timidly present in media coverage.

In conclusion, Arab and Islamic interaction with the issue of al-Aqsa was even short of "a slap on the wrist" that could urge Israel to halt its violations against the Mosque. Holding summits and conferences to issue statements of denunciation or to pledge aid is useless if not taken to the level of execution and implementation. On grassroots level, mobilization is still weak if we take into consideration the demonstrated capacity of the masses to trigger change and revolt against subservience and submission. The PA's approach towards the issue of al-Aqsa is not proportionate with the threats it is facing and President Abbas's call on Arabs and Muslims to visit al-Aqsa does not provide a solution as much as it triggers controversy. Unless the Arab and Islamic sides depart from the weak statements of condemnation towards a positive, practical and genuine standing, Israel would continue to feel at ease with its violations and aggression on the Mosque and proceed with its plans unworried about any prices it might have to pay.



## Fifth: Recommendations

This report is the sixth in a series observing the Israeli violations against al-Aqsa issued successively since 1/1/2005. It builds on the accumulative reading of various developments witnessed during the period it covers, and traces the absence of the deterrence equation that has always been the first and foremost factor for defending al-Aqsa from the Israeli aggression. It also stresses the absence of Arab and Islamic strategy for supporting the Jerusalemites and the Palestinians in the territories occupied in 1948. Pinpointing the ailment, the report addresses various parties concerned with the issue of al-Quds and al-Aqsa with recommendations that form a roadmap for re-establishing this deterrence equation and a safety net for the Mosque from the Israeli violations and Judaization plans. This equation should ultimately delay the Zionist project and even foil it should efforts be unified and targeted towards the protection of the Mosque.

### A. Recommendations for the Palestinian Resistance

Resistance forces have always proved that they have a major role in creating the deterrence equation important for the Occupation to know that its assaults on al-Aqsa are not without cost. The resistance has always inspired the Palestinian people and consecrated al-Aqsa in the Palestinian awareness, always reminding that the power of right needs a material power to enhance it and protect it. Thus, the resistance is demanded to regain the initiative in confronting the Occupation and to overcome all differences and political divisions. It also needs to benefit from the atmosphere created by the Arab uprisings and to defend al-Aqsa as the side most capable of confronting the Israeli assaults on the Mosque.

The Palestinian resistance is asked to reconsider the level of its political and media address that has recently been identified with the official position. More importantly, the resistance is required to adopt al-Aqsa as a priority in its political programmes and a constantly present topic in its media outlets. Resistance factions are also required to organize awareness campaigns, mobilize support and seriously prepare for the liberation project which remains their essential moral responsibility.

### B. Recommendations for the PA and the PLO

It is obvious that the PA is incapable of making a firm stand on the issues of al-Quds and al-Aqsa as is clear from its weak position and continuous concessions in addition to foiling any efforts to support al-Aqsa through security coordination with the Occupation which is relentlessly establishing facts on the ground. Accordingly, the PA is demanded to reconsider its current formulation which is based on the Oslo Accords that prevented its genuine presence in al-Quds and turned it instead to a police officer repressing whoever tries to face the Occupation. It is ultimately required to adopt a strategy that seeks to support the steadfastness of the Jerusalemites and adopt al-Aqsa as an inalienable right that cannot be waived or conceded.

### C. Recommendations for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Jordan's role in confronting the assaults on al-Aqsa is essentially based on the fact that it is the exclusive representative of Islamic authority over the Mosque. This is so because of its guardianship over al-Aqsa and the Islamic Waqf in al-Quds through the Department of Islamic Waqf in the city. Facing the increasing Israeli aggression and attempts to break Islamic exclusivity over the Mosque, the Jordanian government is invited to address these



violations strictly, and to consider any assault on a Waqf employee as an assault on any Jordanian employee and any assault on al-Aqsa as an assault on the Jordanian sovereignty.

The Jordanian government is also demanded to coordinate the efforts of different parties and channel them towards enhancing the support for al-Quds and al-Aqsa. The Jordanian government should take a decisive stance by threatening the Occupation authorities with reconsidering the peace agreement between the two sides in retaliation against the escalatory Israeli measures being pursued against al-Aqsa.

Jordan's quest to consecrate its exclusivity in the maintenance of al-Aqsa is far from being supported by its political performance that is supposed to have rallied all Arab, Islamic and international opinion behind this issue. The least in this sense is for Jordan to adopt a strong political address that expresses its firm stances and rejection for any concession.

Given the uniqueness of Jordan, the Jordanian masses from all sorts and stripes and all active forces are called upon to embrace a stronger role in supporting al-Aqsa. The Jordanian parliament is demanded to adopt the issue of al-Aqsa and to monitor the performance of the government in this respect.

#### **D. Recommendations for Arab and Islamic Governments**

The Arab and Islamic governments are still failing to adopt a position that matches the magnitude of the Israeli aggression on al-Aqsa and the Judaization plans that cannot be countered and foiled unless by strong reaction. In the light of the changes that swept the Arab world and their consequent reverberations, Arab and Islamic governments are primarily required to depart from the language of condemnation and begging towards a position that emanates from the power of their right to restore the Mosque in its entirety. In addition, these governments are demanded to work together and create a joint front to exercise pressure on the Occupation authorities through international institutions and through their common interests with the most prominent international players.

Arab and Islamic governments are also demanded to provide financial support and other forms of aid to protect al-Aqsa, as they recently proved capable of action when there is will. They are also required to activate diplomatic and economic boycott and sever any relation with the Occupation authorities as a way for urging Israel to stop its violations.

The range of possible actions on the official level is not limited but it extends to include different steps essential for supporting al-Aqsa. Thus, ministries of education and Waqf in the Arab and Islamic countries can include the issue of al-Aqsa in their programmes while it would be easy to establish a Waqf trust in every Arab and Islamic country dedicated for supporting the Mosque.

#### **E. Recommendations for the Palestinian Peoples**

It goes without saying that the Palestinians themselves are demanded to be the first to embrace the issue of al-Aqsa and defend it. Restoring al-Aqsa necessitates continued struggle and steadfastness to face the Occupation practices and overcome internal division. The report calls on the Palestinians of the territories occupied in 1948 to embrace their historical responsibility as the major supporters for al-Aqsa. Calls are for them to defy Israeli



restrictions and to increase their presence in the Mosque while making it the center of their lives more than ever.

Likewise, Jerusalemites are invited to rise above the lack of support and to overcome the restrictions set by the Occupation and enhance their interaction with al-Aqsa through confronting any assault on it.

The Palestinians in the West bank and Gaza Strip are invited to revolt against the current status quo that is preventing them from supporting al-Aqsa for which the second *Intifada* broke out. Palestinians in the West Bank are especially demanded to assume a historical stand regardless of the position of the PA and to defy its restrictions on demonstrations and solidarity events. As far as the Gazans are concerned, their hardships caused by the Israeli blockade on the Strip should not distract them from the besieged Mosque that is in dire need for every form of support.

#### **F. Recommendations for the Arab and Islamic Masses**

During the period covered by the report, the Arab and Islamic masses were able to overthrow the regimes that used to conspire against the Palestinian cause thus rejecting further submission and dependence. However, their preoccupation with the repercussions of the uprisings and regime changes should not distract them from the issue of al-Aqsa that should always be their priority. We appeal to the masses that have led the change to embrace al-Aqsa as a daily concern and focus on holding solidarity events and massive marches that express wide popular support for the issue of al-Aqsa. Popular masses are also demanded to put pressure on their governments to take practical and serious measures against the Israeli infringements on the Mosque. Voting for candidates in any elections should be based on their support for the issue of al-Aqsa and al-Quds.

#### **G. Recommendations for the International Bodies and Organizations**

The League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation are both invited to build on the changes that broke the stalemate on the Arab and Islamic scene and interrupted its conformity with international silence on the issue of al-Aqsa. Thus, both sides are demanded to pursue a strong political and practical stance while effectively working to halt the Israeli violations in this sense. Besides, they are required to activate the legal side of the issue based on Security Council resolutions in this respect in addition to activating the role of their offices and committees created for the support of al-Quds and al-Aqsa.

The United Nations is invited to adopt the necessary mechanisms needed for the implementation of the resolutions on al-Quds and al-Aqsa. Moreover, it is demanded to expand the step adopted by the Human Rights Council regarding the establishment of a committee tasked with probing settlement building to include all violations by Israel, especially those against al-Aqsa which is a historical right for Muslims recognized by different international bodies.

#### **H. Recommendations for Parties Concerned with al-Quds**

Efforts of Arab and Muslim civil community and public groups, agencies and institutions are still limited in terms of material and emotional support for al-Quds and the resilience of its people. Accordingly, this report appeals to charity organizations to invest in al-Quds and allocate permanent programmes for the city with a special attention to development rather





than relief side. Of high importance are the projects of *Masateb el-'Elm* and *Shadd el-Rihal* that guarantee continuous presence of worshipers and students in the Mosque and protect it against extremists' break-ins. Parties concerned with al-Quds are also demanded to work on finding popular and official Waqf trusts that would create a long term support for al-Quds and al-Aqsa in addition to forming a charitable alliance to support the Mosque.

Different parties and bodies are demanded to bring up the issue of al-Quds and al-Aqsa in their statements, educational programs and mobilization campaigns to spread awareness among the public and mobilize the masses to support the nation's rightful causes, al-Aqsa being at the heart of these causes.

### **I. Recommendations for Religious Authorities**

Religious authorities, institutions and unions besides jurisprudential academies are entrusted with a huge responsibility towards al-Aqsa. They are thus required to reiterate its sanctity and consider any assault on the Mosque as an infringement on the dignity of the whole nation. Religious authorities are also demanded to clear the misconceptions related to al-Aqsa including its physical details like its borders and its area which is considered religiously as 144 thousand square meters that embrace all what the Mosque's fences include (courtyards, domes, wells, etc...). Consecrating al-Aqsa as a central issue for Muslims and Arabs is a huge responsibility that is part of convictions and beliefs, while religious authorities have a major role in mobilizing the masses towards the support of al-Aqsa.

### **J. Recommendations for Media and Journalists**

The scenes of blood and the news of transitions in different Arab countries overshadowed all other news where the Israeli infringements on al-Aqsa did not receive adequate coverage even when they reached unprecedented levels. Taking into consideration the big role played by the media in spreading awareness and forming public opinion, media outlets and journalists are demanded to keep al-Aqsa in the spotlight and expose all Israeli violations perpetrated against the Mosque.

The role played by the media in creating and orienting public opinion upon the time of Arab uprisings yet demonstrate its ability to play a similar role regarding the issue of al-Aqsa once there is will. Different media outlets are required to adopt a strategy that addresses al-Aqsa and al-Quds as a top priority. Journalists are also invited to dedicate more space for al-Aqsa in their articles and reports to clear the misconceptions and expose the Israeli continuous violations.

Youths of all stripes are invited to enhance individual initiatives and to benefit from electronic media as an effective means for enhancing world wide support for the issue of al-Aqsa and thus counter Israeli activity which is way more advanced compared to its Arab counterpart.

## Statistical Briefings

### Excavations under al-Aqsa and around it

Area	Excavation classification	Current number	Former number
Western side	Completed	12	12
	Active	13	9
Total western side excavations		25	21
Southern side	Completed	5	5
	Active	12	11
Total southern side excavations		17	16
Northern side	Completed	-	-
	Active	5	4
Total northern side excavations		5	4
Total excavations		47	41

### Development in Excavation Sites between 22/8/2011 and 21/8/2012

Area	Number of excavation sites until 22/8/2012	Number of excavation sites until 21/8/2011	Percentage of change
Western side	25	21	+19%
Southern side	17	16	+6%
Northern side	5	4	+25%
Total	47	41	+15%

### Building and land Expropriation in al-Aqsa and around it

Infringement type	Construction works between 22/8/2011 and 21/8/2012	Construction works until 21/8/2011	Total
Buildings under construction	5	7	12
Completed buildings	-	20	20
Total	5	27	32