

The colonisation and ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem



“Israel’s main motivation is almost certainly demographic — to reduce the Palestinian population of Jerusalem, while exerting efforts to boost the number of Jewish Israelis living in the city — East and West”

Jerusalem and Ramallah Heads of EU Missions Report, December 2005

The Apartheid Wall is almost completed in Jerusalem, slicing through Palestinian communities and shutting many Palestinian Jerusalemites out of their city. Eight areas of settlement have been built for Jews — but none for Palestinians. As well as destroying the fabric of Palestinian society, this destroys the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that Jerusalem enjoyed for over two millennia.

Jerusalem’s heritage

For many centuries Jerusalem was home to a Muslim majority, Christians of different denominations, and a small Jewish community, living in harmony under a variety of regimes.

The seventh century Dome of the Rock, next to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, is the most prominent building of the Old City, and is sacred to Muslims as the place from which the prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven, to meet with God. Jews have always been allowed access to pray at the Western Wall, which borders the Dome of the Rock and which Jews believe to be part of Herod’s Temple, destroyed in 70AD. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is perhaps the most sacred of the many Christian sites in the Old City.

As an international place of pilgrimage, Jerusalem was for centuries the hub of the Palestinian economy. The city is therefore of central importance to both Muslim and Christian Palestinians in political, economic, social and religious terms. They regard East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state.

Under international law, Tel Aviv is the capital of Israel, where

all foreign embassies are housed. However, Israel has proclaimed Jerusalem the “undivided, eternal capital of Israel”.

The beginnings of segregation and colonisation

When the United Nations voted in 1947 to partition Palestine, Jerusalem was designated an international zone, lying in the heart of what was intended as a Palestinian state. However, Zionist militias overran the designated boundaries and occupied 78% of what had been Palestine, including West Jerusalem.

38 Palestinian villages in the Jerusalem district were destroyed and depopulated. 80,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from numerous neighbourhoods in West Jerusalem alone, in a process the Israeli authorities referred to as ‘transfer’. These included Baq’a and Talbiya, al-Maliha, Lifta, Deir Yassin and Ein Karem. The Palestinian inhabitants were replaced by Israeli settlers.

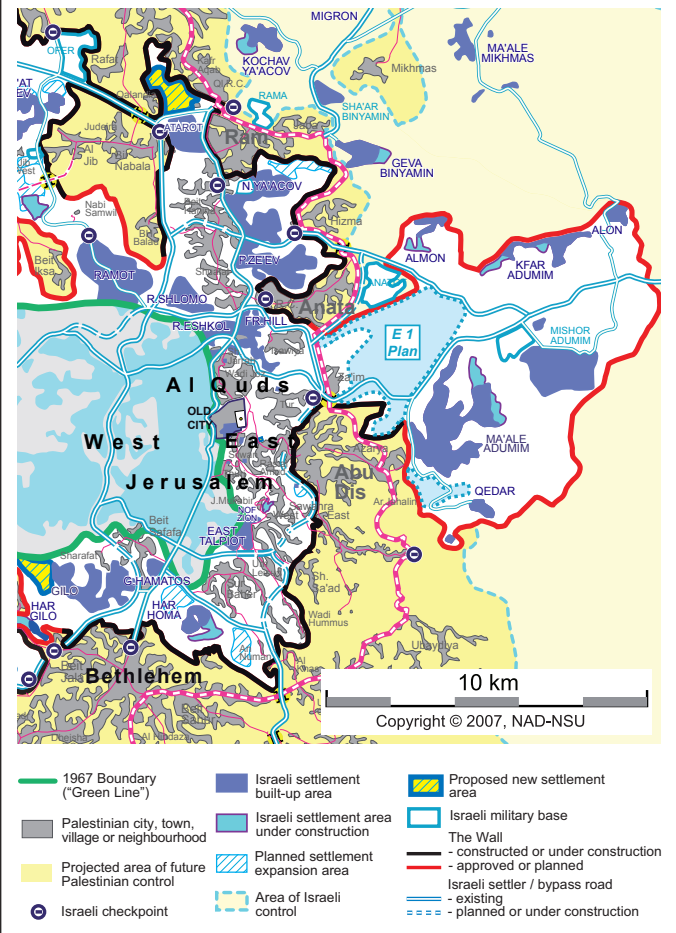
The Old City and the rest of East Jerusalem then lay to the east of the *de facto* border established by Israel (the ‘Green Line’).

Dome of the Rock



The Israeli authorities are ‘renovating’ an entrance to the Dome of the Rock, having previously prevented the Islamic Waqf from repairing the entrance. They are also tunnelling under the foundations of the mosque compound, ostensibly to look for archaeological traces of the Jewish temple. Palestinians and Muslims fear the work could damage the Dome of the Rock — especially since extremist Jewish groups say the compound should be destroyed in order to rebuild the temple on the site. This is in complete disregard of the fact that it is a World Heritage site protected by UNESCO, who have objected to the excavations.

Israeli Wall and settlements around occupied East Jerusalem (May 2007)



multinationals will serve settler traffic around Jerusalem, integrating the outer settlements into the city. In this way European money and knowhow condone and support the illegal occupation and colonisation of Palestine. At the same time settler-only highroads connect Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to settlements in the Jordan Valley.

The most ambitious settlement project underway is project E1 to the east of Jerusalem. This is an expansion of Maale Adumim, to form an enormous block comprising 4,000 housing units built on 12,000 dunums of land stolen from Palestinians.

The overall plan will cover over 53 square kilometres, an area larger than Tel Aviv, stretching from Jerusalem to Jericho. It will completely surround the city of Jerusalem with Jewish settlements and will divide the West Bank into two separate geographical areas, rendering a future Palestinian state a non-viable option.

The 'Master Plan' — for ethnic cleansing

An inner ring of Jewish settlement is planned in the 'Holy Basin', around the Old City, while the City itself is being penetrated by settlers who displace indigenous Palestinians.

The aim is clearly to exclude all possibility of a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem.

The most recent Master Plan for the Municipality of Jerusalem was produced in May 2010, to cover the period till 2030. Consultation with the Palestinian community was not part of the process. As Meir Margalit, a Jerusalem city councillor who has written extensively on the subject¹ said: "The planning team apparently sets out from the assumption that [...] there is no reason to ask the opinion of anyone who does not belong to the Jewish people."

A demographic battle is at the heart of the Plan. Currently, about 36% of Jerusalem's 722,000 residents are Palestinians, concentrated entirely in East Jerusalem. Demographic trends suggest that by 2030, the population will be about 1,301,000, of whom 47% will be Palestinian, and soon after that they will become the majority population. The Israeli authorities have openly stated that they do not wish the Palestinian population to exceed 30% — which explains many of the discriminatory planning policies being practised in the city.

Palestinian neighbourhoods are 'contained', for example by having areas in the immediate vicinity zoned as non-residential or as 'green tourist areas', and by allowing a much higher density of building in Jewish neighbourhoods. The absence of sufficient infrastructure, including roads, water mains and sewage facilities further limits the possibility of expansion in the Palestinian neighbourhoods. Some are simply excluded from the planning process altogether, which means that no building permits can be authorised.

Evictions and demolitions

Pressure of every kind is being brought to bear on the Palestinian inhabitants to leave the city. Israeli settler organisations like Ateret Cohamin and Gush Emunim target, seize and redevelop long established, strategically located Palestinian property in East Jerusalem.

500 inhabitants of Sheikh Jarrah, for example, a middle class area to the north of the Old City, have been subject to eviction orders. Fighting the evictions in the courts is prohibitively expensive and the courts almost invariably back the settlers' claims. While the cases are pending, Palestinians sometimes find their homes invaded

Settlement expansion

Following the 1967 war, when Israeli forces occupied the rest of the West Bank and Gaza, they illegally annexed East Jerusalem, then populated largely by Palestinian Christians and Muslims. Plans for the judaisation of the city, as well as the colonisation of other areas of the West Bank and Gaza were put into operation. The first action was the demolition of 125 houses and the expulsion of their residents, to make way for the plaza in front of the Western Wall.

Then construction started on huge blocks of settlements, to form an outer ring around the city and isolate it from the Palestinian cities of Ramallah and Bethlehem. They continue to be built on land confiscated from Palestinians, in and around Jerusalem, and also on land around Ramallah and Bethlehem. There are currently about 340,000 illegal Israeli settlers living in the Jerusalem area, including the outer ring, the major settlements being Maale Adumim to the east, the Givon Bloc to the north-west, Geva Benyamin to the north-east and Gilo, Har Homa and the Etzion Bloc to the south (see map).

More settlements are being implanted in the heart of Palestinian neighbourhoods. Examples include Nof Zahav on Jabal Mukaber, Kidmat Zion in Abu Dis, Almon in Anata.

A light railway built by French



Har Homa. Photo: arij.org

by violent settlers who make life unbearable for the inhabitants.

Throughout the Old City, the Muslim and Christian quarters are increasingly dotted with the security turrets, armed guards and Star of David flags denoting settler takeovers. There are cases where a Palestinian family has gone to visit relatives for the afternoon and returned to find their home has been broken into by settlers who refuse them entry, with the backing of the Israeli army.

In other parts of the city, demolition is the preferred mode of ethnic cleansing. According to Israeli statistics, from 2000–2008 the Israeli authorities demolished more than 670 Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem. According to the UN, about 60,000 Palestinians risk losing their homes.² Families may pay large sums of money to the Israeli authorities, simply to have the demolition order postponed.

In the working class Palestinian area of Silwan, on the east side of the Old City, 88 houses in the Bustan district await demolition. This is to make way for the ‘Gardens of the City of David’, part of the extension of the archaeological site that aims to prove that King David once lived there. The settler organisation Elad that controls the site is also tunnelling under Palestinian homes, causing some of them to collapse.

It is virtually impossible for those made homeless to find new homes in Jerusalem.

This means that, within East Jerusalem, the Palestinian population is being steadily reduced, through methods of land confiscation and laws discriminating against non-Jews.

Discriminatory laws

- **The identity and residency laws** are continuously being tightened. Palestinian Jerusalemites, many of whose families have lived in the city for centuries, are obliged to carry annually renewable blue Israeli ID cards, which give them ‘the right’ to live in East Jerusalem. However, the ID card can be revoked on a variety of pretexts. Many Palestinians studying or working abroad temporarily have lost their ID cards – and their right to return. 4,000 IDs were revoked in 2009 alone, 20 times more than in any other year.

Jerusalemites living in the city but working in the West Bank risk having their residency revoked. Palestinians who have Jerusalem ID, but who live to the east of the Wall, also face losing their ID.

Due to the advanced biometric identification technology used on the checkpoints, the Israeli authorities know if a Palestinian spends even one night ‘illegally’, on either side of the barrier.

Couples where only one has a blue ID card must live separately – or both live in the West Bank and lose all Jerusalemite status.

- **Building permits for Palestinians** on their own land are all but unobtainable and Palestinian homes built in the area without permits are routinely demolished. The actual process of applying for a permit is both very expensive and can take years. Detailed documentation is required to prove land ownership, although such documents were rarely issued, either under the Turks or the British Mandate. The only solution for growing families is therefore ‘illegal’ construction or emigration.

- **Property is seized** on the pretext that it was once in Jewish ownership, often on very flimsy or forged evidence. However, similar arguments cannot be used by Palestinians, even if they have retained title deeds to property in West Jerusalem, Haifa, Jaffa or elsewhere, after their expulsion in 1948. If property is left empty (usually because Palestinians have been denied access) it is seized by the Israeli government. Jewish settlers are then encouraged to move into these homes declared “state property”.



A street in a Palestinian neighbourhood. Photo: activistills.org

- **High taxation is imposed** on Palestinian Jerusalemites, while expenditure on services and amenities, such as schools, roads, rubbish collection and so on, is totally inadequate.

Access denied

The long-standing checkpoints controlling all movement in and out of the city have been ‘upgraded’ to what the Israelis call “international terminals”, causing even more harassment to Palestinian Jerusalemites.

The two major checkpoints for Palestinians, Qalandiya towards Ramallah and the Gilo crossing towards Bethlehem, render movement in and out of the city extremely difficult. ID cards, automated turnstiles and metal detectors are the order of the day. West Bank Palestinians are denied access into the city unless they obtain special permits from Israel. However, even permit carriers can be banned from leaving or entering Jerusalem on a whim.

This has led to additional commuting times and hardships, reduced access to religious sites and to the major Palestinian medical and education centres, and severe disruption to economic activity. A steady exodus of Palestinian organisations and businesses

Anata: a case study

In 1967 the district of Anata covered over 7,500 acres within the Jerusalem Governorate, to the north-east of the Old City (see map).

According to the Anata Local Council, upon completion of the apartheid Wall, only some 575 acres will remain for the use of Anata residents. Israel has expropriated or isolated the rest. Anata and the adjacent Shu’fat refugee camp will be enclosed on three sides by the Wall. To the west, natural expansion will be prevented by the Wall and a major road now under construction, and to its east by the Israeli military base Anatot, in addition to four settlements that will eventually control 4,750 acres.

The impact of this enclosure of Anata on the economic future for its residents is devastating. Some 45% of Anata’s labourers depend on work in Israel, but the vast majority have lost their permits to travel into Jerusalem or Israel and are unable to work. Other Palestinian centres of population outside the Wall, such as Abu Dis, Ram and Eizariyya, are suffering similar fates.



Photo: activestills.org

from the centre of Jerusalem into outlying areas and to Ramallah has resulted. These closures have also led to the disintegration of cultural and social life, of which Jerusalem was the hub for many generations.

The fate of Jerusalem hangs in the balance. Israel will soon have cleansed most of East Jerusalem of its indigenous inhabitants and utterly changed its traditional character, in blatant violation of international law and every notion of natural

International law

All the above policies and actions are in contravention of international law, and have been condemned by dozens of UN resolutions — to no avail.

- “The occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its civilian population into the territory it occupies.” Article 49, Paragraph 6 of the IVth Geneva Convention
- “It is forbidden for an occupying state to destroy any movable or immovable private property belonging to individuals, groups, states, public authorities, social organisations or cooperatives unless military operations require such destruction.” Article 53 of the IVth Geneva Convention
- “The lives of persons, and private property must be respected: private property cannot be confiscated” Section IV, Article 46, The Hague Convention on Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land
- The International Court of Justice ruling on 9 July 2004 declares the Wall illegal and instructs the International Community “not to render any aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by it.”

justice. Western governments have criticised Israel’s actions but continue to support the regime politically, economically and militarily. It is up to all people of conscience, who value the rule of law, to put pressure on our governments to radically change their approach.

What you can do

- Support the Days of Action — contact PSC for details
- Support the Boycott campaign, till Israel agrees to abide by international law
- Contact PSC for campaign material
- Express your views to the media
- Lobby your MP and MEP to urge the suspension of the EU Israel trade agreement
- Write to your MEP protesting about the French multinationals’ involvement in the settler railway project
- Support the Palestinian economy in Jerusalem and the Occupied Territories

Find out more

- PSC provides fact sheets online on many aspects of the situation, past and present: www.palestinecampaign.org
- A grassroots organisation organising opposition to the Wall: www.stophthewall.org
- The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Occupied Palestinian Territory: www.ochaopt.org; provides many detailed reports and maps
- The United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine — unispal.un.org — for UN reports, resolutions etc concerning Palestine
- www.palestineremembered.com for a visual and oral history of pre-1948 Palestine
- www.Activestills.org for photo reportage of life in East Jerusalem and the rest of the OPTs
- The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions — www.icahd.org — monitors and opposes the demolition of Palestinian homes
- An Israeli human rights organisation that monitors the situation in the occupied territories: www.btselem.org
- Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine — www.apjp.org — for the implications of the planning and design of settlements and their infrastructure

¹ Meir Margalit: *No place like home: house demolitions in East Jerusalem*, 2005; *Seizing control of space in East Jerusalem*, 2010.

² UN report April 2009: *The Planning Crisis in East Jerusalem*, <http://unispal.un.org/pdfs/EJerSpFocus300409.pdf>

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