

## **PLO Negotiations Affairs Department**

### **ISRAELI SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IN AND AROUND THE OLD CITY**

**FEBRUARY 2008**

---

Illegal Israeli settlement activity in and around occupied East Jerusalem has intensified following the re-launch of peace negotiations between the PLO and Israel at the Annapolis conference in November 2007. New settlement housing units are being constructed in and around the Old City of Jerusalem to form an inner ring in the so-called “Holy Basin”, a densely populated Palestinian area, as well as an outer ring around the whole of East Jerusalem.

The accelerated construction of settlements and the Wall around East Jerusalem is clearly intended to preempt the outcome of negotiations and consolidate Israeli control over the Holy City, as well as most of Metropolitan East Jerusalem, thus forestalling the vision of Jerusalem as the capital of two states and, along with it, prospects for a two-state solution.

The Israeli government, together with settler organizations, is constructing a ring of 17 settlements around and within the Old City of Jerusalem, with the aim of preventing the city from being re-divided along the 1967 border and of preserving Israeli control over the city’s most significant holy and tourist sites. These settlements alone will house approximately 5,000 new settlers, stretching from the Wadi Ar-Rababa, to the west of the Old City, to the Mount of Olives in the east, and over to Sheikh Jarrah in the north. This new settlement activity would form a continuous chain of Israeli settlements east of the Old City, thus further fragmenting Palestinian neighborhoods and restricting their development, and blocking Palestinian access to the Old City.

Inside the Old City itself, Israeli settlement activity outside of the existing Jewish Quarter usually consists of taking over Palestinian-owned houses and other properties and settling them to create new Israeli outposts in the heart of Palestinian areas. Currently, there are approximately 3,100 settlers, including 600 settlers living outside the Jewish Quarter, living among roughly 30,000

Palestinians in the Old City. The latest Israeli plans for settlements in the Old City include the Burj al Laqlaq and Omar Ibn Khattab square.

The Israeli government has approved the construction of 33 housing units for settlers in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City around the historic north-eastern “Storks’ Tower” (Burj al Laqlaq), while issuing demolition orders for six Palestinian houses in the area. Another settlement is planned near Jaffa Gate in Omar Ibn Khattab square where a settler group alleges that it purchased two hotels from the Greek Orthodox Church and is currently trying to take over these two hotels. If successful, these two new settlements will be added to more than 60 property seizures that have been settled outside of the Jewish Quarter in the Old City.

The latest form of Israeli settlement activity in the Old City consists of a number of tunnels that are currently planned or under construction. A 100-meter tunnel is being excavated in the Haman El Ein area of the Muslim Quarter of the Old City towards the Haram compound. In addition, excavations are being carried out in the existing Western Wall tunnel underneath the Haram compound, which according to eye witness reports, have resulted in structural damage to several adjacent properties, including, Islamic Waqf Headquarter, Ribat al-Kurd, the historic Uthmaniyy School and Al- Tankazi School (see attached map).

Another Israeli tunnel is being excavated by the Israeli Antiquities Authority under Ain Silwan Mosque and private Palestinian houses in the Silwan area, in order to connect Israeli settlers in Silwan with the southern edge of the Haram compound. This tunnel excavation is being funded by the Elad Foundation, a fundamentalist Jewish group committed to Israeli settlement in Jerusalem. At present, some 200 meters of the tunnel have been completed, with an additional 400 meters remaining.

Israeli excavations are threatening the integrity of the Old City and that of the Haram compound, and run counter to Israel’s obligations as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention which prohibits the destruction of property. Furthermore, Israeli excavations violate UNESCO rules on conservation of World Heritage Sites.

Israel should cease excavations in and around the Old City and halt future plans to carry further excavations and create new settlements and outposts in East Jerusalem, in particular in and

around the Old City. The continuation of Israeli activities severely prejudices the future negotiation on the issue of Jerusalem, thereby destroying any chance for a viable two-state solution or for a **Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem.**