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House demolition in Jerusalem July 2007, by P. Mukerji

No Place Like Home

House Demolitions in East Jerusalem

By **Meir Margalit**

Introduction

The years 2003-2005 were among the worst known to East Jerusalem for house demolitions; not only did the number of demolitions reach a peak of 350 buildings, but there was also an unprecedented severity in punitive enforcement measures. Residents of East Jerusalem found themselves: in a far more severe situation: enforcement measures were stepped up and there was an increase in red tape; those wishing

to build legally found themselves frustrated at almost every turn.

This report shows that from 2003 until 2005 the authorities took increasing steps to tighten the noose around the necks of East Jerusalem residents; faced with the incessant proliferation of bureaucratic, planning, legal, and economic hurdles, making it hopeless to obtain a building permit, they had to resort to unlicensed construction. Thus,

fewer than 100 buildings were built under licence in East Jerusalem each year. Yet in the same period demand for housing in East Jerusalem rose steeply, due to the Wall construction around Jerusalem. As a result, thousands were forced inside Jerusalem's municipal boundaries, enormously boosting illegal construction, which peaked in 2004 at 1,189 houses. Various red lines were crossed during that period. Shamelessly eager to demolish

houses at all costs, municipal and Ministry of Interior inspectors resorted to underhand tactics of evasion or deception, disregarding court-issued decisions. The inspectors were prepared to trample the rule of law underfoot, so that the bulldozer did not, heaven forbid, return to base without having destroyed a home.

The Policy of House Demolition

In 2004, 152 buildings were destroyed in East Jerusalem, 128 by the Municipality and 24 by the Ministry of the Interior (MOI).¹ By end-2005, 94 more buildings had been destroyed, a figure relatively low compared to previous years; this, however, disguises the fact that the total area of demolished structures increased dramatically from 9,000 square metres in 2004 to 12,000 square metres in 2005, as the demolitions concentrated on large buildings, including four, five and even seven-storey structures.

The above table does not include homes demolished by owners themselves when offered a plea bargain whereby they could destroy



Ownership documents, by A. Appel

their own home in return for being awarded only a small monetary fine. We do not have figures for houses demolished in this category, but estimate their number at only slightly less than those destroyed by the authorities. As the figures show, the years 2003-2005 were amongst the worst since the Occupation commenced, as to administrative demolitions. Uri Lupoliansky's term as Mayor of Jerusalem, coinciding with that of Avraham Poraz and Ophir Pines-Paz as Ministers of the Interior, is characterized by harsher enforcement measures, in order to deter residents from building without

Meir Margalit, Ph.D. (Haifa), is a researcher of the history of the Jewish community in Palestine during the British mandatory period. He served as a member of the Jerusalem City Council, representing the Meretz Party (1998-2002), and worked for over 20 years in education and community development for the Jerusalem Municipality. He works now as field co-ordinator for The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, and is an expert on issues related to municipal policies, especially in East Jerusalem.

Demolitions in East Jerusalem during recent years ²													
	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Municipality	7	15	6	9	12	17	11	32	36	66	128	76	73
MOI	22	10	11	7	18	14	7	9	7	33	24	18	10
Total	29	25	17	16	30	31	18	41	43	993	152	94	83

a permit. These measures include, apart from the actual demolitions, a significant increase in financial fines, confiscation of building equipment and imposition of prison sentences for building offences.

Between 2001 and 2006, the Municipal Court collected the massive amount of NIS 153,240,833 (\$34,053,518) in fines. Here too, available figures make no distinction between the eastern and western parts of the city but the great majority of that amount collected by the Municipality - fully 70% - came from Palestinians and the entire amount collected by the Ministry of the Interior came from Palestinians.⁵

Discrimination in the Application of the Law

The proportion of cases that either result in or end in a demolition order being awarded against structures, out of all the building infractions taken to court, is far higher in the case of East Jerusalem. In West Jerusalem, far fewer structures receive demolition orders; in fact, in West Jerusalem no entire residential buildings have ever received demolition orders or been demolished. One notes that in 2005 there was a 65% rate of demolition in West Jerusalem, whereas in East Jerusalem the rate was 95%. There is a certain screening process at work by which infractions in East Jerusalem



Minutes after a house demolition on the Mount of Olives December 2006, by B. Madsen

are dealt with faster, while in West Jerusalem there is a system at work that delays such legal procedures.

The State of Israel's Contribution to Illegal Construction

Any attempt to explain the reasons for illegal construction in East Jerusalem must take into account the tremendous demand for housing arising in recent years as a result of two policy decisions of the Government of Israel: annulment of

residency of those living outside the municipal boundaries, and construction of the Wall around Jerusalem. Since the government instituted these two moves, housing demand in East Jerusalem has increased, giving illegal construction a tremendous boost.

The policy of annulling resident status of those residing outside the city's municipal boundaries has been in force for more than ten years. The



former Minister of the Interior, Eli Suissa, instituted the policy. Until that time, young couples had preferred to live on the city's outskirts, due to a shortage of rental apartments and the high rents collected within the city. Many communities of Jerusalemites arose in the peripheral villages, from Beit Jala in the south to Ar-Ram in the north, and in eastern villages such as Hizma, Anata, Abu Dis and Al Azariah. In 1993, the Ministry of

Interior published regulations revoking the residency of those living outside the city's boundary, also removing social rights ranging from health care services to the various National Insurance allowances. Confiscation of blue identity cards (Jerusalem IDs) even deprived such individuals of freedom of movement within the city, access to places of work, and prevented them from visiting family. As a result, tens of thousands of Jerusalemites started migrating back inside the city causing a tremendous demand for apartments and a steep increase in rent. Many families that had difficulty in paying free market rents preferred to buy a low-priced parcel of land - usually lying within a 'green area' - the cheapest on the market - and build themselves a modest home without a permit.

This phenomenon was stepped up again in 2002, when construction of the "Separation Barrier" or "Jerusalem Envelope" started to be discussed, and yet again in 2003, when people realised the implications of living behind the Wall. We have since witnessed waves of families relocating to the 'right side' of the Wall, locking their houses and leaving everything behind, moving to any vacant spot within the city. The area north of the Qalandia Wall, where over 20,000 Jerusalemite families live, is losing its inhabitants. Entire

Extracts from a book published by The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), March, 2007. <http://www.icahd.org>

families are relocating, even if only by a few hundred metres, in order not to lose their place of work, not to be cut off from schools, hospitals or family members, and especially in order to save themselves the daily humiliations involved in crossing the checkpoints. Rent in Kufr Aqab village plummeted by 50% in 2003, while at the same time, rent on the other side of the Wall rose by more than 100%.

This massive return to within the municipal boundaries has caused a demographic explosion followed by a wave of illegal construction. From that time, the Municipality has lost all control of construction in East Jerusalem, since the need for shelter is stronger than any of the 'deterrent measures' imposed by the Municipality. Faced by urgent necessity, no penalty can deter. Indeed, as Jewish scholars taught, no edict should be imposed upon the public that is more than the public can endure.

The Underlying Motive of Jerusalem's Planning and Building Policy

The ideological motive is rooted in a policy decision establishing that a demographic balance must be maintained in the city at a ratio of 70% Jews to 30% Palestinians. The ministerial committee known as the Gafni Commission laid down this policy in 1973. Underlying the policy

was concern at the rate of increase of the Palestinian population in Jerusalem and the fear that within a few years, they would succeed in changing the Jewish character of the city and would even choose the mayor! A municipal paper prepared by

the Planning Policy Division in 1977 states, "One of the cornerstones of Jerusalem's planning process is...the preservation of the demographic balance between the ethnic groups [in accordance with] the resolution of the Government of Israel."⁶



Demolition of a centre for autistic and handicapped children in Jerusalem April 2007, by C. Holtan

The Government assumed that circumscribing the building space permitted to Palestinians would put the brakes on the demographic increase, and that if they were forbidden to build they would have to abandon the city. The most



outstanding example of that trend was Master Plan-2003 of the Shuafat and Beit Hanina areas, which was supposed to permit the construction of 17,000 housing units. The Ministry of Interior slashed it to 7,500 housing units on the grounds that the original figure was incompatible with the policy of preserving the demographic balance.⁷ The same fear of demographic increase underlies the Ministry of Interior's three moves aiming to reduce the city's Palestinian population, all of which are still in force today: confiscation of identity cards from residents moving outside the city's municipal boundary, obstacles placed before the registration of infants in the Population Register, and difficulties created for those trying to bring spouses from the territories or Jordan within the municipal boundary.

There can be no doubt: the bulldozer can take its place alongside the tank as a symbol of the relations Israel conducts with the Palestinians. Both should be emblazoned on the national flag. Both are an expression of the aggression that has overtaken the Israeli national experience. One complements the work of the other. Both symbolise the dark side of the ongoing Israeli project designed to uproot the Palestinians and oust them from the State altogether.

1. The Municipality is supposed to demolish in areas zoned for construction while the Ministry of Interior is supposed to demolish in areas zoned as open green space.
2. We would draw attention to the discrepancy between the figures we cite here and the figures published in Palestinian sources, such as the report of the Al-Quds Centre, the Land Research Committee or the report published by the office of The Palestinian Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs. This discrepancy derives from different definitions of the Jerusalem jurisdiction by Palestinians and Israelis. Our figures relate to what Israel refers to as the Municipality of Jerusalem. The Palestinian authorities relate to a far wider area designated the 'Jerusalem District', which includes, in addition to the city itself, a number of villages situated on the periphery such as Anata, Hizma, Bir Nabala or A-Ram.
3. This does not include 4 homes demolished under the pretext of security in Silwan on January 15, 2003.
4. Leor, Ilan (3 October, 2003). 'Upright Man of the Neighbourhood'. Kol Hazman.
5. Haviglio, Yossi (4 April, 2006). Legal Adviser to the Municipality Activities Report for 2005.
6. Kimche, Yisrael - Policy Planning Division Head (1977). 'Population of Jerusalem and Surroundings.'
7. Jerusalem City Council (29 June 1992). Minutes of Meeting No. 52.

In the way

By **Kajsa Johansson**, Ecumenical Accompanier

Mustapha, a Palestinian Bedouin, lives on Jabal al Baba, a hill in Al Azaria (Bethany). His house, or shack, is made out of pieces of cloth and metal. Like all the other Bedouin families on the hill, Mustapha does not have a building permit for his shack, because a permit would cost many times more than a shack would cost to build. Now Mustapha's home is in the way of the wall, or what the Israeli authorities called the security fence. And Mustapha, his mother, his wife and his six children, have no right to stay in their home any longer.

Mustapha and his family are not the only ones. The hill, which was once given as a gift to the Pope by the King of Jordan, is now going to be included in the Israeli settlement Ma'ale Adummim. According to ICAHD's (Israeli Committee Against

House Demolitions) Jimmy Johnson all the Bedouins in the area will be removed as Israel does not want Bedouins on their side of the wall.

One morning in January Mustapha received a visit from an Israeli soldier.

The soldier told him that he had to dismantle his house before noon that same day. When the Ecumenical Accompaniers arrived there at ten o'clock, Mustapha said that he did not know what to do. "If they had told me three months ago, I could have done something, says Mustapha. Now I don't even know where we're going to spend the night. And I will even have to pay the Israeli army for demolishing my house."

A few meters from the house were two security guards and a yellow bulldozer waiting to demolish the house. Further on up the hill soldiers from the Israeli army watched and waited, as did the Ecumenical Accompaniers. Closer to the house

Ras al Baba Bedouins' homes with Maale Adummim Settlement in the background, February 2007, by M. Dahl





Bedouin child in front of her home, K.Johansson



House demolition in Jahalin Bedouin Camp February 2007 K.Johansson

stood other peace activists, journalists, and Mustapha's children. Five-year-old Amira looked on with her big brown eyes. Her white knitted sweater would hardly keep her warm when the sun sets, during the cold winter.

Aside from Mustapha's children, everything and everybody stood still: the soldiers watching, the bulldozer, and the journalists with their cameras. Noon came. The soldiers called Mustapha to come up to them.

When Mustapha returned he told us that the demolition was postponed. The soldiers did not say why, just that it was not going to happen that day. "They didn't have a proper order," said Jimmy Johnson. With all the watching eyes, the journalists and the cameras, there was too much attention.

The Israeli activists started to leave. The Ecumenical Accompaniers remained a little bit longer and played with the kids. Mustapha and his family looked relieved. We drank tea with them and were just about to leave when an Israeli army jeep came back. The soldiers told Mustapha once again, to dismantle his house. Confused, Mustapha did not know what to do.

We EAs started to call the journalists and activists who had left. When a few of them returned the soldiers left again.

It seems as if Mustapha and his family can stay in their home for at least a few more nights. However, already the next morning our team gets a call about another house being demolished and another family becoming homeless.

When refugee camp becomes another name for town

By **Rune Bjornsen**, Ecumenical Accompanier

The view from the roof of Ali Msimi's house might not be spectacular but it certainly is something different. On the top floor of his house and all the neighbouring buildings there is a jungle of aerials, water tanks, satellite dishes, and clothes hanging out to dry. The houses are stacked together side by side and most streets are narrower than two metres. Reinforcing iron rods are sticking up from the top floors and no house seems to be finished. Nothing looks planned or regulated. Then again, this is not a normal neighbourhood in Palestine. This neighbourhood should never have been built: these are the homes of refugees. For decades, it has been a work in progress. Though none of its inhabitants wanted to be there in the first place and nobody is happy to be building here, they have little choice.

It has been a long time since the Palestinian refugees lived in tents. Almost sixty years have passed since the first refugee camps were established because of the displacement that took place in Israel



Askar Refugee Camp, by R.Bjornsen

Palestine in 1948. More than 750,000 people were driven out of their homes. Many went to the neighbouring countries, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Jordan, but many found shelter in camps that were established in Gaza and in the West Bank. Today more than half a million still live in the refugee camps that were built by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Palestine. UNRWA rented land from local farmers for 99 years.

Looking back, that might have been a fortunate agreement: more than half way through the lease's term, there are still 28 camps. Though backed by UN resolution 194,1 refugees are no closer now than in 1948 to fulfilling their hope of returning to their town of origin or being compensated for their loss of property.

Refugee camps vary in size from just a couple of thousand people, like Azza



camp in Bethlehem, to the massive Jabalia and Rafah camps in the Gaza Strip, each with around 100,000 people. Two thirds of Gaza's 1.4 million inhabitants have refugee status. Many camps have now become such permanent structures that they are integrated as parts of various towns in Palestine. You find them in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Tulkarem, Jenin, Jericho, and other towns.

Ali Msimi lives with his family in Askar camp, on the outskirts of Nablus. It is one of the biggest refugee camps on the West Bank with 15,531 inhabitants (UNRWA June 2006). Ali is married to Khawla and they have three young children, Mohammed (6), Mo'amen (5) and Menna (17 months). They live on the top floor of a four-storey building. The whole building is collectively owned by his larger family. His mother, eight siblings, their wives/husbands and all their children live there. 33 people live in 240 square meters.

Ali's family has been in Askar from the camp's foundation in 1950.

Originally the family came from Jaffa, just south of Tel Aviv in today's Israel, but was forced to leave in 1948. First they found shelter in caves around Tulkarem and then the UN provided tents for temporary housing in the area. However, as Israel did not want a huge population just on the border of their new country, Ali's grandparents, and their children were forced to leave and settle in the heart of the West Bank. It feels quite ironic that the illegal Israeli Itamar settlement has been built just a few hundred meters away. The Israeli authorities did not want Palestinians on their land or even close to the border; however, there is no stopping Israeli settlers moving into the occupied territories.

Ali's father came to Askar when he was six years old and the place looked much different then. There were no houses, only tents and the sanitary facilities were just a few outdoor toilets on the main street. The family was poor and Ali's father would go barefoot because there was not enough money to buy shoes.

1 Article 11. Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible;



Askar Refugee Camp, by R.Bjornsen

Slowly their situation improved; after a couple of years they could afford to build a shed, and a few years later that shed was passed on to another refugee family when they had the money for a small one room house. As the years passed the hope of returning to Jaffa diminished and the family built accommodation that was more permanent. One floor at the time, as the family grew bigger and more space was needed. While Ali and his immediate family have a whole floor to themselves, Khamis (Ali's younger brother) lives with his wife and three children in just one room.

Though the reinforcing iron rods stick up from the top of Ali's house, he says there will not be another floor. He does not want his children to grow up here, and thirty-five years in Askar is enough for him as well. When he has the money, he will look for an apartment outside the camp and

Khamis can take over the old apartment. Most likely, they will move to Nablus. To do this, Ali has two jobs, one teaching in UNWRA's school of elementary education in Askar, and another for the Nablus Governorate. In addition to that, he volunteers for a youth centre in the camp and tries to finish his masters degree in Arabic at An-Najah University.

Ali's wife Khawla has not been out of the area for the last seven years. Originally a Palestinian refugee in Kuwait she had to resettle in Jordan when all the Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait following the first gulf war. Then she married Ali and moved to Askar in 1997. But she has never received a Palestinian ID-card, and they have not been issued since the start of the second Intifada. Now she is afraid of crossing any of the many checkpoints surrounding the city.

The Israeli army might deport her. She cannot go anywhere.

Ali's family still have the documents proving ownership to a house in Jaffa and land where Tel Aviv is today. That land must be worth a fortune but

Palestinian refugees

Palestine refugee: The term used by UNWRA in its registration system to refer to any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood because of the 1948 conflict.

Palestinian refugee: Common language used to designate all those Palestinians who became (and continue to be) externally displaced (with regards to 1948 refugees, outside the area that became the state of Israel, and with to 1967 displaced persons, outside the OPT) in the context of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as their descendants.

Nakba: Arabic term meaning "catastrophe", referring to destruction of Palestinian society, mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians because of the war and the establishment of Israel in 1948. More than 500 Palestinian villages were destroyed.

nobody in the family think they are sitting on a gold mine. Ali has no hope of one day claiming what rightfully belongs to him. The right of return for the refugees to the state of Israel of today seems more unlikely now than ever.



Askar Refugee Camp, by R.Bjornsen

Right of Return: UN resolution 194 (December 1948) states: "that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for the loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law..."

UNWRA: United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the near east. The international organ established by United Nations in 1949 to assist persons displaced during the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict. The United Nations later requested the agency to assist persons displaced during the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict.

Refugee numbers:

1948 UNWRA registered: 4,283,892
1948 estimated non-registered refugees: 1,704,855
1948 Internally displaced persons (IDP): 345,217
1967 estimated refugees: 834,737
1967 estimated internally displaced persons: 57,699

Palestinian refugees in different countries:

Jordan: 2,881,604
Occupied Gaza: 940,824
Occupied West Bank: 834,043
Syria: 449,241
Lebanon: 427,517
Chile: approx. 350,000
Israel (IDP): 345,217

Saudi Arabia: 318,869
United States: approx. 230,000
Germany: approx. 140,000
Others: approx. 660,000

Registered refugees in official camps:

1953: 300,158 (34.6% of all Palestinian refugees)
1975: 551,643 (33.4 %)
1990: 697,709 (28.3%)
2005: 1,265,987 (30.0)

Area of Palestinian land confiscated:

Partition to Armistice (Nakba)
1947-49: 17,178 km²
Military rule in Israel 1950-66:
700 km²
1967 War: 849 km²
Occupation: 3,558 km²

Further information on Palestinian refugees can be found at:
<http://www.badil.org/> (Badil Center for Refugee and Residency Rights)
<http://www.shaml.org> (Shaml Palestinian Diaspora and Refugee Center)
<http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo043/>
<http://www.un.org/unrwa/index.html>

Christmas in a Tent

By **Rune Bjornson and Caroline Borden**, Ecumenical Accompaniers

We are sitting in a tent in Al Walaja, a village just outside Bethlehem. The tent is quite big but worn, and the grey canvas will not keep the rain out. Between two small wooden beds, the ground is covered with tarpaulin sheets. Some basic kitchen appliances are stacked on a table in the corner and there are a few plastic chairs to sit on. This is the new home of the Sahem family.

Their house is gone. On December 12, 2006, the bulldozers came with four jeeps and twenty soldiers from the Israeli army. The house was to be demolished and the family given 45 minutes to pack up their belongings and move out with their furniture. Then the bulldozers reduced their home to a pile of rubble.

The whole operation did not take more than half an hour. Half an hour to demolish a house. Half an hour to erase hundreds of hours of work. Half an hour to make five people homeless. Four of them are sitting

here in the tent with us. Mother, father, and two sons. They have put up the tent next to the destroyed house. This is their land.

The father, Munther, is 51 years old but could easily be ten years older. His olive skinned face is worn. Big worker's hands rest on his knees. Not much use for them these days, work is hard to find. Twelve-year-old Mohammed sits on the bed with his mothers arm around his shoulder. He smiles shyly to the strangers that are visiting but his face looks tired. His mother says he does not sleep well at night; he has nightmares about



soldiers coming to destroy his home.

I ask them what they will do now. Munther shrugs his shoulders, "What will I do now, tonight, tomorrow? What about the house, what about the future, what about this, what about that? I hate these questions; I have no answers. No money, no

House demolition in Al Walaja March 2006, by E.Torjussen



possibilities, no answers. The house was all we had; now we have nothing.”

Israel did not only destroy a house, but they also destroyed any hope of establishing a life here. The second oldest son, Al-Mo'taz, is 20 years old and goes to Bethlehem University. His hair is nicely combed, he wears a white race jacket and he smells of cologne. He shows me

Where nobody is supposed to live

By **Trond K. Botnen**, Ecumenical Accompanier

“When you destroy a house, you destroy a human!” We are at the inauguration ceremony for a rebuilt house in Al-Walaja, and Munther Abu-Mo'taz is telling how it feels to have had his house demolished twice by the Israeli army.

Forced to flee

The village Al-Walaja was originally situated in what is today Israel. During the war in 1948-49, the villagers were forced to flee, and they rebuilt their village at the other side of the valley, which is today separating them from Jerusalem. The armistice line from 1949 goes along the bottom of the valley, so Al-Walaja became a part of the West Bank.

Divided in half

When Israel occupied the West Bank in 1949, they annexed several West Bank villages to Jerusalem. They drew the border right through the middle of Al-Walaja, annexing half of it to Jerusalem and Israel. The villagers however, were not given Israeli ID cards and no permission was given for new houses or house expansions. When Munther built his house, the Israeli authorities regarded it as illegal and demolished it twice. The family was fined thousands of shekels in addition to losing their home. More than 60 houses in Al-Walaja now have demolition orders pending. Many others have already been demolished, and some of them have been rebuilt.

magazine cutouts of the Statue of Liberty. "I want to go to America," he says.

One problem is that if Al-Mo'taz leaves he may not be allowed to return. The practice of denying re-entry to Palestinians co-exists with Israel's Law of Return that allows any Jew, regardless of origin to automatically become a citizen of Israel with full rights.^{1 2} Israel does not seem to recognize that non-Jews also have the right to a home.

Al-Mo'taz speaks to me, as we stumble on the ruins of his family's demolished house about his views of Israel, Palestine, and immigration.

I ask Al-Mo'taz if Palestine can win independence without violence. He answers with a question, "Could America have won independence from Great Britain without violence?" I ask him about his parents and his home. He says that if his parents want to stay here, then that is their choice. "Israel will kill my parents," he says. He explains there will never be peace in Palestine until Israel gives them their rights, and gives them independence, and they will never do this. "Israel only wants to take land. They take, take, take. So I will leave."

It is not the first time the Israeli army has destroyed the family's house. They came a year ago and levelled their first house to the ground. The Separation Barrier is going through Al-Walaja and their house is in its way. Twenty other houses have been demolished in the village and there are warrants to destroy eighteen more. The last time people in the village came together and rebuilt the Sahem's home.

There are plans to rebuild the house again, even though the chance is great that it will be demolished. This is one way for the community to say to Israel, "We are not giving up and we are not going to disappear."

On our way out of the village, we see new and half-built houses in the Israeli settlement Har Gilo right next to Al Walaja. Palestinian houses are being torn down and Israeli houses erected. Since 1967, more than 12,000 Palestinian homes have been smashed to rubble while new Israeli houses have been built to accommodate the more than 450,000 Israeli settlers that have moved in to the occupied Palestinian land. It is hard not to call it ethnic cleansing.



Women, home and identity

By **Anna Ljung**, Ecumenical Accompanier

From her face, one may see that her story is one of losses. A white veil frames her face and hides her black long hair. With her brown eyes she looks more towards the ground than upwards. Her thin body is cold and she seeks warmth for her hands. Her name is Seham. She is the wife of Munther and the mother of Mohammed, Al-Mo'taz and their big brother.³

A large pile of smashed stones and destroyed reinforced roads is all that is left



EA in front of a demolished house in Al Walaja, by E.Torjussen

of what used to be her family's home. A house built on land given them as a gift from her father. Their house, which had a kitchen, a living room, and bedrooms, was modern as it was equipped with electricity and water, but has now vanished. Their home has been demolished. All they once owned: the house itself and the things inside.

Some weeks later, my team and I are invited to the apartment where Siham and her family are temporarily staying. She serves us tea as we arrive. Through an old collection of photos, she then takes us back to her days as newlywed, the early childhood of her sons and beautiful places the family has visited. She is a woman with many stories to tell.

She spent most of her time yesterday cooking a big meal for us, which she now proudly serves. The meal is delicious and I can just imagine all the hard work and love she has put into the meal. As a wife and mother, she is used to caring and

Surrounded by the Wall

The last nail in the coffin for Al-Walaja is that the Separation Barriers' route has been drawn in a very special way just there. Israel will not just build the wall between the village and Jerusalem. Instead, it will encircle the village completely, and their only contact with the rest of the world will be through a small gate, which the Israeli army can close at will. One of the members of the Village Council tells us that they have discovered plans to build an Israeli settlement where Al-Walaja is today. He believes that the house demolitions and the Separation Barrier are part of a plan to make life intolerable for the villagers and force them to move away. Then Israeli will claim that they have built the new settlement on uninhabited land, he says.



After the second demolition, Siham is standing in the ruins of her house, by R.Bjornses

Determined to resist

The villagers are not giving up without resistance, however. Munther's house was rebuilt in less than 14 days with outside help. Regular demonstrations against the Separation Barrier have begun. The simple solution would be to sell their properties and move, but the Palestinians have strong ties to their land. They will stay there as long as possible, hoping that the outside world soon will discover what is going on in Palestine. Another villager shows us a 3,000 years old olive tree. It stands near the route of the Separation Barrier. It strikes me that unless their hope that the outside world will wake up comes true soon, the tree is unlikely to become 3,100 years old.

does it beautifully. As a wife and mother, she has spent a great deal of her time working in her previous home.

“Having your house demolished is worse for a wife and a mother. The home is the core of her identity”, says Angela Godfrey Goldstein from the Israeli Coalition Against Home Demolitions (ICAHD). This unique Jewish woman is struggling against Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes. Because Palestinian women spend so much time working inside of their homes, the home becomes their dominions. Losing your home

is like losing part of your identity. According to Godfrey, the loss of a home can make the children lose respect for their father as they experience that he cannot protect them from intruders. Many of the children will have a very hard time finding a sense of security again. After the tremendous lose, the whole family has to seek new shelter, which means enormous adjustment.

Many Palestinian women share the same experience as Siham. The sense of identity and the same tragedy of losing it. How can she

build up a new life when all she had was her home? How does she provide security and safety to her children without a home where they can fall asleep? How does she as a mother and wife regain her identity without a home in which she can care for her children and husband? How can her husband, the father of her children, protect their family from bulldozers, jeeps, and soldiers? How much can they as a family withstand?

Some questions have no lasting answers. Some lead forward or back to other questions. When does a planned organised displacement of an ethnic group such as the Palestinians begin? Through a meeting’s decision? Through unemployment? Through economic crises? Through religious convictions? Through demolishing their homes?

If we do not pay attention to the organised displacement of Palestinian women, men, and children from their homes and land, our children and grandchildren will ask us what we talked about, what questions we asked and what we did. If we don’t try to make a difference, who will? If we don’t try now, when will we do it? If not we, who? If not now, when?



Siham and Munther, by A.Ljung



Police guarding a house demolition, by E.Torjussen

1 Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. www.mfa.gov.il
search word: Law of Return
2 www.righttoenter.ps
3 See the article in this issue written by Rune Bjornsen and Caroline Borden, my former team companions as Ecumenical Accompaniers.

Munther and his family have now rebuilt their house twice, this time with help from Holy Land Trust and the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. They are happy to have a new home again, but at the same time afraid that the army will return and demolish their home for the third time.

Rebuilding the faith constructing homes for Christians in the Holy Land

Church housing projects help slow the flood of Christian emigration by providing housing that young families can afford. Both Jerusalem and Bethlehem have become more difficult and expensive places to live since the advent of the Wall, which now divides them.

Jerusalem

By **Paul Mukerji**, Ecumenical Accompanier

Jerusalem is one of the most important religious centres in the world. It is also a city, which is at the centre of major disputes and tensions between religious groups. The Jews, who number over 400,000, are building illegal settlements on the outskirts, and buying up property in Muslim areas in the heart of the Old City. At the same time, Muslims, who number around 200,000, are currently being restricted from going to the Al Aqsa Mosque - the third holiest site in Islam - during the month of Ramadan.

Christianity is the third religion to have an important stake in the city of Jerusalem. In 1946, Jerusalem was comprised of 99,000 Jews,

34,000 Muslims, and 31,400 Christians. Nowadays whilst the other two populations have increased dramatically, the

Christian population has dwindled to less than 10,000 and when the Separation Wall is complete, they may just be half of this number





according to Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

Although the city at times seems full of Christians, they are the transitory kind - tourists, pilgrims, students, and internationals working in organisations. Most such outsiders presume the Palestinians they encounter are Muslims and in any case are more focused on seeing the sites of religious importance to the Christians than in helping solidify the Christian character of the city.

An exception to this is the Lutheran World Federation, which has identified the shortage of affordable housing as one of the

principal reasons that Christians have been abandoning Jerusalem, and so has recently begun a housing project to build 84 new homes on the Mount of Olives for Christian families at subsidized rates¹.

According to the Lutheran World Federation, "an empowered Christian minority will play an important role in building a modern and democratic Palestinian society and state...and to promoting peace and reconciliation among Jews, Christians, and Muslims around the world" and transforming Jerusalem into the city of peace that many feel it could and should be.

The Master Site Plan for the project

1 Information for the Jerusalem section of this article from <http://www.lwfjerusalem.org/housing%20project%20jerusalem.html>

was submitted to the Jerusalem Municipality in 2007 and acquiring the final permits for building will take some time. Rev. Mark Brown of the Lutheran World Federation hopes that all the permits will be in order by 2009 and that with current efforts being made in countries such as the USA, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Denmark, Finland, and Canada, they will have sufficient funding to begin the first and second stages of the project in 2009 as well.

Although use of the land has been approved by both the Lutheran World Federation and the Kaiserin Augusta Victoria Foundation, the cost of the project is still estimated at US\$ 8,265,000. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has already raised US\$ 550,000 toward its goal of US\$ 2,000,000. Organizers of the project are hopeful that people across the world may be moved to contribute. As Bishop Munib Younan says:

“What is Jerusalem without the Palestinian Christians who have been here for 2000 years witnessing since the early church...since the early Pentecost? It’s...the responsibility of the world to allow Palestinian Christians to continue that witness which they have held dear for 2000 years”.

Bethlehem

By **Dwin Capstick**, Ecumenical Accompanier

Elias Nazi, a leading member of the Virgin Mary Syrian Orthodox Church in Bethlehem, spoke about his concern, generally felt by all the denominations in Palestine, that Christians are continuing to emigrate leaving a much weakened Christian community. The church, like many others runs creative programmes for young people and tries to encourage and strengthen the life of the community. The greatest need he insisted was housing. The growing encirclement of Bethlehem, reducing land available for expansion, the difficulty in obtaining permits for building, and lack of employment, which impoverishes so many people, is preventing young couples from acquiring a place to live. Without a place to live he said these young people have nowhere to establish some roots that might hold them in Palestine. Unlike other denominations they have not been able to acquire the necessary financial resources that would enable them to have a housing scheme that might make homes available to these needy couples.

Dr. Charlie Abou Saada, of the Greek Catholic Melkite Church in Bethlehem,

spoke about his uncle Gabriella Basada who was a bishop in Jerusalem. He died in 1965. He was responsible for the first church housing project in the Bethlehem area. Established 50 years ago, it consists of 10 housing units located in Beit Sahour. Nine years ago they completed another housing scheme also in Beit Sahour. This has 46 apartments and houses a large cross section of Christian families from doctors to labourers. The aim is for those in the units to try and purchase their apartment within a ten year period. The houses are allocated according to a family’s ability to put some money up front. Dr. Saada believes that it is jobs as much as housing that are desperately needed to ensure that more Palestinian Christians do not emigrate.

Father William Shamali, from the Catholic Seminary in Beit Jala, spoke about the churches role in housing and in particular the projects undertaken by the Catholic Church. There are three in Bethlehem, two completed in 2004 and one in 2007. An earlier projects accommodates 52 families and has involved families



by L. Styrbjorn

making a deposit on the house after which they will be making monthly mortgage payments. They should own their apartments within 15 years. The other providing accommodation for 20 families operates on a similar mortgage basis. The other project completed only in 2007 provides accommodation for 48 families as rented accommodation.

All units are assigned for newly married couples or established families. Those who have the means and are eligible for the housing project enter a draw that decides who gets the opportunity and who

does not. The housing is primarily for Christian families but some Muslim families, employed by the church have also been able to avail themselves of the opportunity. Some of the people living in the Bethlehem apartments have Jerusalem IDs and they would like to transfer to Jerusalem as they will soon lose their Jerusalem IDs and the benefits that go with them.

Sometimes families have been involved in the construction work but in all instances, the church has been responsible for the infrastructure, water, electricity, sewerage, roads, and fencing.

Financing for these projects has come from a variety of source, including income put upfront by those who will reside in the houses, grants from international organisations, though in one instance from the Palestinian Corporation, some wealthy individuals and bank loans. Father Shamali felt the job creation through these projects was significant.

An important part of the rationale behind these projects is to encourage Christians to stay in Palestine.

Qalqilia - A city under pressure

Manuela Broggi, Ecumenical Accompanier

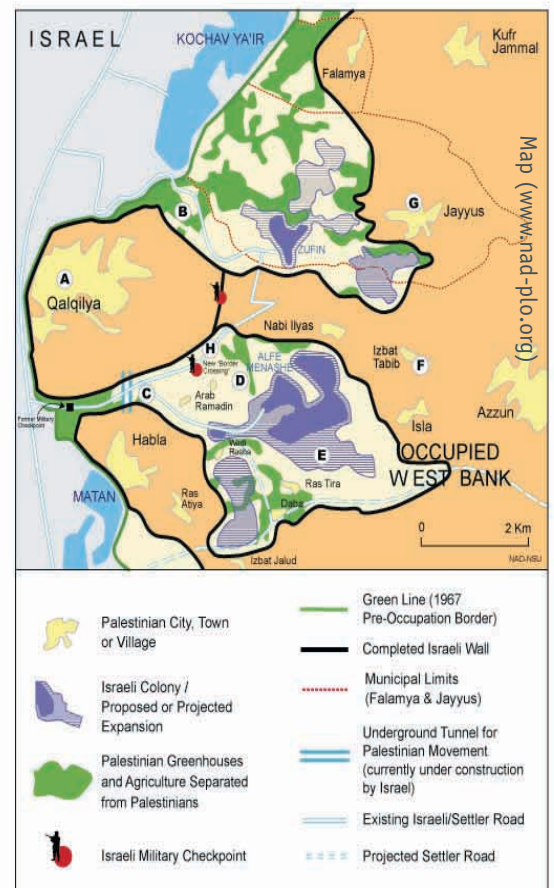
It is 5 km, as the crow flies, between the city of Qalqilia and the village of Jayyous in the West Bank. Today it is a 15 km car ride to go from one to the other, and if there are flying checkpoints or other road blocks on the way, the trip can take more than one hour or even be impossible.

The reason for this is that separating Qalqilia and Jayyous is the Israeli settlement of Zufim. The settlement was founded in 1989 and in 2003 when the Israeli authorities started to build the Separation Wall, Zufim and all the Palestinian land it sits on, was incorporated into the area where Palestinians would only be allowed to go with special permission from the Israeli military, thus cutting off Jayyous from nearby Qalqilia.

The elected mayor of Qalqilia and his deputy, both from Hamas, are in Israeli prisons. Trade and economy in Qalqilia are largely based on the cooperation with Palestinians living inside Israel. They come to the city to buy cheaper Palestinian products and supply local shops with Israeli products. Since early August the

Israeli military has denied entry to Qalqilia by cars of Israeli Arabs. Very limited trade is still taking place at the DCO-Checkpoint, the main entrance to the city. The products are being carried on foot. For Qalqilia this has resulted in economical damage of almost 60%.

On the 29th August 2007 at 4 o'clock in the morning, the Israeli military accompanied by several bulldozers entered a residential area in the West of Qalqilia, situated right next to the Separation Wall. The Army believed that fighters of the militant wings of Hamas were hiding there. At 7 o'clock the residents were ordered, via loudspeaker, to leave their houses, and to come into the street for an inspection. There was then an interrogation of all the men,





House demolition in Qalqilia August 2007, by J. Routledge

who were forced to undress, some of them even until they were naked. Male soldiers body searched the women with manual metal detectors over top of their dresses, and in every centimeter of their bodies. Thereafter, women and children were held in separate rooms from the men, while the military surrounded seven houses. Again, the soldiers went on the loudspeaker to demand that anyone in the houses should leave. Nobody came. The military then ordered the bulldozers to destroy the houses.

In the evening, with the army's action finished, all the residents were released. No fighters had been found, nobody had been arrested. Six families had lost their homes and all their belongings, two men their

shops, one garage and a taxi were destroyed. The families returned to their houses, searching for what remained of their belongings, setting up tents to arrange basic living for the coming days.

Two days later our team visits the families. The two male EAs are led around the heaps of rubble. The women take me into the least damaged house. They show me the traces of destruction in the living space. They show me the laundry on the clothesline perforated by shots, the wounds of the husband, the collected bullet casings. The women describe what they had been through, spin around their own axis to show how they and the men have been searched. I look, I listen, I take pictures.

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Living with Settlers

By **Guro Iren Wijk**, Ecumenical Accompanier



by A. Appel

“We love peace and everybody who wants peace is welcome. All people are brothers. We must learn to live together.”

On Monday 19 March, Israeli settlers accompanied by the Israeli Army took over a Palestinian-owned house uphill from the Old City of Hebron. The house carries the name “Beit Ha Shalom” (House of Peace). The purchase and the legality of the ownership are still unclear and both are currently under investigation by Israeli authorities. According to Israeli law any purchase of property in the West Bank must be approved by the Defense Minister. UNOCHA and Peace Now report that no such approval has been given; but the settlers, who are according to

international law living illegally in any part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, are given protection by the military and are allowed to stay in the house by the Israeli Government.

“Six buses with settlers and about 50 soldiers came in the evening”, says Mohammed Al-Jabaarey, the oldest son of one of the Palestinian families that has now become the closest neighbor to the settlement. It was a total surprise to him that Israeli settlers would even consider moving into the building, owned by

a Palestinian man for more than 40 years. The house has been under construction for the last 10 years. His father, Abu Hafez Al-Jabaarey, claims to know that the third party involved in the purchase was a “collaborator,” and suspected the arrival of the new neighbors.

The Al-Jabaarey family has lived in the area for almost 20 years, however with the new neighbors their lives have already started to take another turn. The family can no longer use the road leading up to their house between 7 pm and 7 am. A ladder is set up at the back of the house so the family can bypass the settlement. Hafez Al-Jabaarey was injured while climbing up the ladder and jumping down from a concrete fence to the other side.



So far the harassment from the settlers has been moderate, but Hafez Al-Jabaarey is afraid to go to morning prayers. He has been accosted by the settler children: "Go back to your home," shouted one of the recently arrived children, as others verbally and physically harassed him. The IDF and the Israeli police watch 24 hours a day, but do not interfere when the settlers abuse Palestinians.

In spite of the difficult situation, Abu Hafez Al-Jabaarey is as calm as this occupation is long, while he shares his thoughts about the future, with eight internationals sitting in front of his house drinking tea. He is a professor of Religion at Hebron University, and knows Islam as well as Judaism and Christianity. He does not agree with those who claim that

the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is about religion. It is rather a result of politics.

"We love peace and everybody who wants peace is welcome. All people are brothers. We must learn to live together", he says. Powerful words from a man whose family is already having trouble with the new settler neighbours next door.

The name of the settlement - The House of Peace - does imply friendliness. A browse on the website of The Jewish Community of Hebron sets another tone. It clearly spells out that the idea of acquiring the house is to make Hebron and Kiryat Arba, another settlement nearby, "Like a City Bound Together," but only for the Israelis and to cement

The newly occupied house in Hebron
March 2007, by A. Appel



by A. Appel

their presence and take over even more of Hebron (a city of 160,000 Palestinians and 500 Israelis). "Our life has become miserable," Mohammed, the son, says.

Even settler friends of the Al-Jabaarey family, from Kiryat Arba, are worried about the family's future. The settlement is well-known and both economical as well as ideological settlers live there. It seems bizarre for a foreigner that a Palestinian family in Hebron is even able to talk with Israeli settler. Abu Hafez Al-Jabaarey laughs, and his gentle eyes that are sparkling with wisdom, challenge the prejudices of the volunteers from the West.

"We have never encountered any

problems with the settlers from Kiryat Arba," he says. He explains that he has had Israeli friends from Kiryat Arba for ten years. They meet in the adjacent Palestinian market and come to the Al-Jabaarey house for coffee and a chat. The Palestinians cannot, of course, visit them in Kiryat Arba, as it is considered Israeli land and off limits to Palestinians.

Under the Professor's tranquil surface lies an anxiety for what will happen. We are "worried about the future," he says, and that fear is that the neighborhood will turn into the Hebron neighborhood of Tel Rumeida, where Palestinians are being attacked and harassed on a daily basis by settlers.

Both his son and himself lack faith in a prompt ending of the occupation. They have lost faith in the attempt of the Oslo Accord and a two-state solution. Abu Hafez Al-Jabaarey thinks the key to peace lies within both people. There is a need to establish awareness and new perceptions on how to end the occupation, as it is not yet in anyone's minds. "Palestinians and Jews must live together", the Professor says.

Update November 2007 by Danielle Vergniol, Ecumenical Accompanier: The so called "House of Peace" is four storeys high and 3,500 square metres in size. According to www.hebron.com it was bought by wealthy American Jews for \$700,000 via an office in Jordan. When it is refurbished, it is intended to house 20 to 30 settler families.

At present it is connected to electricity and is guarded by soldiers at a post next to it, but there is no glass in many of the windows. It is continuously occupied although nobody can tell how many people are living in it at the moment. The Ecumenical Accompaniers usually see a few adults and sometimes hear children during the day who are probably taken there for special events or classes. There is a slide show of pictures on www.hebron.com called 'Entering a New Building in Hebron.'



Living in the wrong place

Karin Larsson, Ecumenical Accompanier

A few kilometers from Yanoun, in a huge, barren mountain district, two shepherd families live in simple caves and tents. It is hard to believe that they would be a threat in any way. But they have received an order from the Israeli army to evacuate their homes.

The evacuation order, written in Arabic and Hebrew, is signed December 19, 2006 and was delivered in the evening of December 22, 2006. The head of the village council in Yanoun tells us about it the next day, just as two men from the UN arrive to take us for a tour around the mountains surrounding Yanoun. We go to the place where the families live. The weather is windy and cold and we have to be cautious going down the steep hill so we do not slip on the stones.

The first family we meet consists of a

widow and her six sons. The oldest seems to be about 25 years old. Their dwelling is a cave in the mountain, with an outside wall built of brick. There are also some sheds for the sheep and goats. The family is upset. They cannot understand why they should not be allowed to live in peace in the place where they, like their relatives before them, have always lived.

It is the same desperate atmosphere at the home of the other family, living just below the mountain slope. Here

Living in a Cave
December 2006, by J. Bolliger

Update November 2007: The evacuation has not been carried out yet. But the family, who is staying in reduced numbers with the animals at the moment because of the cold weather, has been attacked twice by soldiers and settlers from the nearby Itamar outposts during the past 10 days. Two settlers and two soldiers came at night into the tent of the oldest son, taking his ID, telling him and his relatives to leave this place and finally beating him. Ecumenical Accompaniers visit the family now on a daily basis to show presence and try to prevent further harassment.



by K. Larsson

lives the daughter of the woman we first met in the cave, with her husband and three small children. Their dwelling is simpler than the first family's. It is two tents, one to use as a kitchen and one as a bedroom and living room. One of the children, a little girl, stands bare footed in the cold wind, watching us curiously as we come down the mountain slope. She never takes her eyes off us.

This place is certainly both practical and good for the sort of life these families are living with their sheep, goats, donkeys and dogs. The sheep and goats have wide areas of pasture. The families' primary food is bread, cheese, olives and sometimes a little meat. They get their drinking water from Lower Yanoun, a few kilometers away. For me, as a Swede, it is impossible to say if they have a good life or not. We have such very different starting points. What I know and understand is that they will stay in

this place; they do not have somewhere to go with their animals. And their animals are their livelihood.

We continue to visit the families. They are as generous and hospitable as all Palestinian families we have met so far, and they offer us sweet tea every time. We talk a little and we can understand each other quite well despite the different languages.

One day, a little more than one week after the first visit, we notice new car tracks near the cave. The family tells us that the day before a car from the nearby settlement had come and driven around in circles. Nobody got out of the car and they drove away after a while. It was nevertheless enough to cause anxiety and fear.

The evacuation order says that they are staying in a Closed Military Area and that they do not have any valid documents for the land they live in and use. The land is owned by a family

living in Nablus, who has permitted the shepherds to stay in the caves. To declare an area a "Closed Military Area" and expel its inhabitant, shepherds or farmers, is one way for the Israeli authorities to seize land from Palestinians. As the law of land dates back to the Ottoman Empire, land goes into the ownership of the state if nobody has lived on it or cultivated it for three years.

We have reported these events to several organizations, and one representative from the Israeli Rabbis for Human Rights has visited the families. The families also got names of lawyers they can talk to for help. However, the men from the UN caution that there is often not much anyone can do to help other than to monitor and report what is happening. The forced evacuation is certain to take place, only the timing is left uncertain; the families live with that uncertainty daily.

Rehabilitating old Hebron

By **John Friend-Pereira**,
Ecumenical Accompanier

Hebron's Old City, far less known than the one in Jerusalem, is ancient and possesses some wonderful old houses with thick stone walls and vaulted ceilings, most of which date back to the 18th century.

The Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) was set up initially to restore the Old City centre of Hebron. Since then, however, its role has become far more important.

One main objective of the HRC is to preserve the city's cultural heritage in an extensive sense, by safeguarding the constitutive elements of its old buildings and ultimately save its entire architectural and social identity. This would not be unlike the focus of many preservation societies back in the home countries of Ecumenical Accompaniers in Europe.

However, Walid Al Halaweh, an HRC staff member, explains that the organisation also aims to revive the Old City, by consolidating its bond with its inhabitants, reclaiming abandoned buildings, rehabilitating the infrastructure, providing social services to the population and connecting it to other City neighbourhoods.¹

This second point grabs my attention, especially the part about providing infrastructure and social services. Surely, this should be the duty of the



municipality. The Palestinian-run municipality however has limited power, in that everything it does must be approved by the Israelis, even new streetlights.

Walid says that since the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee was established in 1996, their work has been focused in the Old City area of Hebron trying to make that area habitable for Palestinians. The rehabilitation includes not only the restoration of the old houses but also running water, sewage, and drainage services. This area is under Israeli control and has four Israeli settlements dotted throughout.

Old City of Hebron, by D.Vergniol

1 Hebron Rehabilitation Committee: <http://www.hebronrc.org/>

The presence of about five hundred Israeli settlers here amongst a Palestinian population of 30,000 has meant that the daily lives of the Palestinians living near these settlements are greatly affected. Palestinians are prohibited from walking on certain streets in the Old City and taking their cars through other streets. According to the Settlement Watch unit of the Israeli organisation Peace Now 1,500 Palestinian shops are closed and almost 900 housing units are empty in this area of Hebron. Many families cannot use the front doors to their homes as is the case with the Palestinian residents of Shuhada Street, who are prohibited due to 'security considerations' - a phrase often used by the Israeli army to justify such measures.

However, not just individual families have been affected by these closures. The Israeli army has closed the main passage into the neighbourhood of Banidar in the heart of the Old City. Walid explains that the only way people living here can come and go now is through unpaved, unlit, and longer paths under some buildings. Indeed as we enter Banidar through its new route, I cannot imagine where Walid is bringing us, down this dark tunnel with virtually no light, until a few minutes later we emerge in the sunlight into the neighbourhood that the HRC have restored beautifully.

Walid explains that when Shuhada St was closed to Palestinians in 1994, the 850 shops that lined it were also closed by military order. Many more shops in



Before



After

the Old City centre have closed since, because they simply are not doing enough business due to the checkpoints and closures imposed by the Israeli authorities. This is strikingly clear when one walks from the Ibrahim Mosque checkpoint along Al-Haram St through the various souqs (Arabic for market). Many shops are closed, but a few determined ones remain open and their owners greet us with hearty welcomes. The Israeli army often patrol this street as three of the four Israeli settlements, Beit Hadassah, Beit Romano, and Avraham Avinu back onto it. Sometimes they order shops that are open to close. From their apartments, which overlook the streets, the settlers often throw rubbish, including bottles of urine onto the streets below. This has meant that chicken wire now runs along the top of the street to prevent the rubbish from landing on pedestrians below.

While many Palestinian families have left because of these horrendous circumstances, many more have remained and are determined to make a living. To date the HRC with funding from many donors including the Irish Government has made a difference to people's lives in the Old City making it possible for them to continue to live there and call it home. Walid says, 'To breathe life back into the Old City, it

takes more than the restoration of buildings. We need to care for the people who dwell there by providing public services thus encouraging them to return and remain in the Old City.'

Since it started, the HRC has restored and returned families to 640 houses. They have tackled the high rate of unemployment in the areas by generating hundreds of direct and indirect job opportunities for Palestinians. The jewel in the HRC crown is the Friendship public garden that besides being an entertainment resource in itself, is used by local and international NGOs to organize different cultural activities for Hebron Old City residents. In 1998, the HRC received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, an award granted every two years to the best architectural projects in Muslim countries. The award's jury commented on "the skills, competence, and courage of the community, as well as the architectural relevance of the work."

Completing our circle of the Old City by walking down Shuhada Street I am struck by the silence on this street that stretches for over one kilometre. This is the result of policies of the Israeli occupation and 'security considerations' made on account of the illegal Israeli settlements.