

Jerusalem Chronology

(September - January 2003)

September 21

East Jerusalem shops boarded up in solidarity with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat as he sat besieged by the Israeli army in his headquarters in Ramallah. After two suicide bombings in as many days, the Israeli army on September 19 encircled Arafat and tens of other advisors and guards. After ongoing demolitions work chipping away at the headquarters' structures, Palestinians demonstrated by the thousands on September 21, wielding photos of "Abu Ammar," hoisting Palestinian flags, and even banging on pots and pans in noisy defiance of Israeli-imposed curfews. The demolition work subsided the same afternoon, after late-night Palestinian protests and invigorated diplomacy (News Agencies).

September 22

Elbit Systems, an Israeli company, announced a \$5 million agreement with the Israeli Ministry of Defense to build a 25-kilometer "smart" electric fence around Jerusalem, similar to the border fences separating Israel from Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. The fence will be built in cooperation with American and Israeli companies. Elbit Systems ambitiously claimed that the fence may extend to include areas beyond Jerusalem (Al-Ayyam).

September 27

Israeli border police cordoned off Jerusalem with a ring of horses and obliged worshippers under the age of 40 to perform their Friday prayers in the middle of the street just outside Damascus Gate. It was the day before the Intifada's two-year anniversary and Israeli

Jerusalem was on "high alert" for renewed armed attacks (Palestine Report).

September 28

Israel is claiming that damage to the southern wall of Al Aqsa Mosque may jeopardize the safety of Ramadan worshippers at the end of this year. In a September 28 meeting, Israeli officials described the consequences of the wall's collapse as a "third world war." Adnan Husseini, director of the Jerusalem Waqf, charges that it was the Israeli municipality that halted the Waqf renovation of the wall in the first place. He accused Israel of interfering to change the status quo at the mosques (Al-Ayyam, Al-Quds).

The heads of Christian churches in Jerusalem protested new legislation recently signed by the United States Congress that requires the official US government acceptance of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The leaders said in a letter to US President George W. Bush that they felt angered that the United States Congress was inflaming the political situation, particularly at a time when contacts were underway to instill calm. The church leaders said that the city is holy to Christians, Muslims and Jews and that free access should be maintained for all worshippers (Al-Quds).

The Israeli Knesset has allocated an additional NIS 5 million for the protection of Israeli settlers in the Muslim quarter of Jerusalem's Old City and the Ras Amud neighborhood of East Jerusalem. The bonus brings the total cost of guarding 3,000 settlers in East Jerusalem to nearly \$4 million per year. The money is paid to private security companies (Al-Quds).

September 29

Security personnel at Jerusalem's Hebrew University have adopted new security procedures restricting access to the

university. These new rules are preventing Palestinians living in the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Essawiyeh and Jebel Tor that have been using the Israeli Mercantile Discount Bank and the university post office bank. Palestinians report being turned back from the university gate and told to get a special permit from campus security to enter the grounds. The bank is protesting the new rules (Palestine Report).

October 6

In response to the US congressional bill calling for recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat signed into law a nearly two-year-old draft bill naming Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital. Arafat called the US signing a "catastrophe" (BBC).

October 15

Israeli police released Jerusalem Mufti Sheikh Ikrima Sabri after interrogating him on charges of incitement. The mufti said that he was detained for voicing criticism of the Israeli army in his Friday sermon at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. That same day, Israeli troops banned worshippers under the age of 40 from entering the Al-Aqsa compound. "In general, any person who expresses a position that contradicts the occupation authority is considered a terrorist and is accused of rioting; this is the general guideline," said Sabri (Al-Quds).

Within the space of 24 hours, Israeli authorities arrested 1,290 Palestinians in Jerusalem on the charge that they were not carrying the permits needed to travel in the city. A number of Jerusalemite drivers were also arrested for transporting these Palestinians, and their vehicles impounded for a month. Drivers of minivans, a form of local public transit, are now asking passengers whether they carry a West Bank or Jerusalem ID card in order to avoid the

stringent Israeli fines if they are caught transporting "illegal" passengers (Al-Hayat Al-Jadida).

October 29

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat named a new cabinet, which includes Palestinian Popular Struggle Front leader Samir Ghosheh as Minister of Jerusalem Affairs. Ghosheh is to head Jerusalem's Orient House. On October 30, the new cabinet met solely on the issue of the city of Jerusalem, Ghosheh said. "There are several problems facing Palestinians in the Holy City, including confronting settlement, forced migration of Jerusalemites and the need to alleviate the economic and social suffering of Jerusalemites," he said. Ghosheh himself suffers from the division of Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank; he is a Palestinian living in Ramallah and does not carry a Jerusalem ID, which means he will have to apply for a permit from the Israeli authorities to travel to the city. "We will find the suitable means to connect with our people, either from inside Jerusalem or from the closest point to them," he said (Al-Quds).

November 13

The Sanduqa family has been charged for over a century with firing the Ramadan cannon in the city of Jerusalem. But for Israeli authorities concerned about security, the tradition is an easily foregone event. The cannon, usually fired from a cemetery near Herod's Gate, has been limited from the usual three shots a day marking the pre-dawn, dawn and evening prayers to only the shot marking the breaking of the fast. The Israeli authorities refuse to provide the family with enough ammunition to maintain the tradition. But, "the greatest obstacle my brothers and I have faced is obtaining the permits to fire the cannon shells," says Sanduqa. "Sometimes we need seven permits, starting with the municipality and ending with Israeli

intelligence" (Palestine Report).

November 20

An Israeli court in Jerusalem has given permission to the extremist Temple Mount Faithful, the Mimad movement, and three religious schools to set up headquarters in the Old City of Jerusalem and to demonstrate at the gates of the Al-Aqsa Mosque upon coordination with the Israeli police. The attorney general demanded that the Israeli settlement groups be kept 50 meters from the gates, but the court did not agree (Al-Quds).

November 22

Eleven Israelis were killed when a Palestinian blew himself just inside a bus in a West Jerusalem neighborhood. Issadine al-Qassam, the military wing of the Hamas movement, claimed responsibility for this operation. The group said that the bombing was in retaliation for the killing of Gaza military wing leader Salah Shehadah.

December 16

The Jerusalem Chorus, a group of Palestinian and international singers, performed their annual Christmas Concert at an Israeli checkpoint near Ramallah. Many members of the choir were not given permission to travel to Bethlehem, where their annual concert is traditionally performed. Dozens of Palestinians came to the checkpoint to listen to the group sing Christmas carols in the rain, in the midst of Israeli soldiers and armored vehicles. "We refuse to acknowledge these roadblocks. We refuse the humiliation. We just want peace and instead we are locked up like animals," said one of the choir's members (Palestine Chronicle).

January 8

The Israeli army has begun the initial planning stages for another wall to be constructed between the Dead Sea and Jerusalem. The

fence will begin 200 meters from the Dead Sea, stretch to Jerusalem and then continue on to El Kana settlement near Salfit to be a total of 200 kilometers long. Its first 148 kilometers are expected to be completed by July 2003 (Al-Quds).

January 15

Jerusalem Waqf officials are casting doubt on Israeli claims that a stone tablet has been discovered that refers to renovations to be made on the 9th century BC Jewish temple. Israeli officials have charged that the stone was discovered in Waqf renovations 30 years ago and has only now come to light. The tablet would effectively silence those who argue that no evidence exists proving the presence of an ancient Jewish temple on the site of the modern-day Dome of the Rock (Al-Ayyam, Ha'aretz).