



Jerusalem Land Grab Schemes and the Democratic Credentials of Natan Sharansky

A man waves the Palestinian flag at a demonstration next to the wall that severs the West Bank community of Abu Dis from the economic centre of East Jerusalem.
Source: stopthewall.org/PENGON

The decision by Israel's government to overturn its earlier policy of seizing the Jerusalem land of Palestinians who live in the West Bank (the so-called 'absentee-presents'), was a significant symbolic victory for activism combined with diplomacy. The decision was ostensibly taken by the government in response to a memorandum by Attorney General Menachem Mazuz who termed the plan "contrary to Israel's obligations according to the rules of customary international law", but was in fact the result of combined pressures from the hundreds of affected farmers and landowners in the Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah area; interventions made by the new Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas (after meeting with US emissary William Burns at the end of January); as well as Israeli and Palestinian civil rights associations.

The plan, termed by those groups as a 'land grab' and 'legalized robbery' was initiated by Minister of Jerusalem Affairs Natan Sharansky on 22 June, 2004 and approved by the Israeli cabinet on 8 July. Its objective