

Jerusalem Diary

October 2005

Without fanfare or revolt, Jerusalem's Old City and eastern environs have been the site of a cultural transformation in recent months. **New municipal roadwork related to the construction of Israel's cement barrier slicing through Jerusalem's eastern neighborhoods** has narrowed the broad Beit Hanina and Shufat thoroughfare into a two-lane road. There are signs that swathes of landscaping will take over the once-narrow median. The arrival of long-awaited flowers will mask the death of these commercial districts and their reversion into a sleepy residential cul-de-sac.

Further towards the city's heart, a strip of Jewish settler homes has altered the once-upscale **Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood**. The Israeli flag flies across from a Nashashibi family mansion; a lookout tower and armed guard command the wadi below. Ultra-orthodox Jewish women walk their children in strollers down the street and into the Old City. Their pace is slow and at home. Even secular Israelis have rediscovered the Old City, it seems, venturing into the few Palestinian shops remaining in the Christian and Muslim Quarters since the death blow of economic stagnation.

After the closure imposed before the Jewish New Year on October 1, Israeli police reported the arrests of 1,200 **Palestinians found in Jerusalem illegally** - holders of the green West Bank

ID for which Jerusalem has become a distant and forbidden Mecca.

United Nations Rapporteur and South African law professor Johan Dugard reported to the General Assembly on 26 September at the opening of the new session that, as plans stand, **the wall that Israel is constructing will transfer 50,000 Palestinians from Jerusalem and expel another 50,000 Jerusalemites into villages** because they are unable to find housing in the city, where large swathes of East Jerusalem land have been zoned for Israeli settlements and Palestinians are nearly always barred from construction permits. Thus, the alterations to Jerusalem will directly impact 40 percent of the 250,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites - not to speak of the half a million Palestinians living in the northern and southern suburbs and towns surrounding the city who are now barred completely from the city.

While Israel in August evacuated its settlements in the Gaza Strip, added settlement construction in Jerusalem and the West Bank has shown the government's hand to be a two-fold strategy: to give the impression of Palestinian statehood in Gaza, while annihilating any possibility of such in the West Bank, including Jerusalem.

Of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's clear intentions, **Palestinian Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Qidwa** said, "I do not believe he is doing this with the blessings of the US Administration. We, on the contrary, frankly see an improvement in the US stands on the wall and the settlements and the statement of the Quartet in this field is clear. I believe there is an increasing understanding

by the US and European side of the threat of maintaining the wall and the settlements, particularly in and around Jerusalem, especially the issue of the new **E-1 settlement that seeks to link Jerusalem to Ma'ale Adumim**. There is an increasing awareness that allowing this to continue means the destruction of the two-state solution." Qidwa blamed his own government and the Arab states for not following up on and securing compliance to the International Court of Justice's opinion concerning Israel's construction of the wall.

On 16 September, the **Israeli Committee against House Demolitions** announced its intent to file criminal complaints in Britain against Micha Ben-Nun, the head of the Jerusalem municipality's licensing department, and Zvi Schneider, who oversees construction in the Jerusalem District for the Interior Ministry, as well as lower-ranking Israeli officials.

"We've been planning this move for half a year now," said Meir Margalit of ICAHD in a press release. "We approached British solicitor Daniel Machover, whose office specializes in human rights. Our main charge is that the demolition of the homes of an innocent civilian population is a violation of international law, specifically of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits an occupying state from harming the civilian population except in the course of a military operation," Margalit said. "We believe that in a few more years, all of the European Union member states will be closed to those people [who participated in the demolitions]," Margalit said. The move mirrors complaints against former and current Israeli military officials, which

have resulted in arrest warrants in certain instances.

Jerusalem came to New York in June, when the Palestinian National Theater was invited to bring its paper puppet production "**Jerusalem and the Little Prince**" to the **International Toy Theater Festival**. Prior to its New York debut, the show toured the West Bank, bringing the vivid colors and music of the city to those who cannot get there. As director Abd el-Salam Abdo sees it, "Far away from the story that our lives are all about gunshots and stone throwing, we show the life that is possible in Jerusalem, the Jerusalem we love." The 50-minute show for adults and children tells the story of a boy prince and the great efforts he makes to arrive to the glorious city. Al-Hakawati, the Palestine National Theater, also recently showed Mahmoud Darwish' "Al-Jadariya" ["The Mural"] about the poet's struggle with the eve of life, and "Pigeon's Flew", a play with a 17-member cast that relates the struggles of life in Jerusalem today.

The **Dar Isaaf al-Nashashibi in Sheikh Jarrah** (a cultural centre named after the noted writer from the Mandate period) held an exhibition of the works of 20 Palestinian artists entitled "Orange Segments" from 19 - 28 May. The show was sponsored in part by the Palestinian Art Court Al-Hosh, which was established by Mazen and Yvonne Bishara Qupty in December 2004, and is dedicated to advancing art and culture in Jerusalem.