

Jerusalem Diary

March – August 2007

Jerusalem was brought alive once again this summer by the annual Jerusalem Festival, hosted by Yabous productions and featuring live music and film from 19-27 July. On opening night, pink and purple lights brightened the rock face of the Tomb of the Kings, an outdoor amphitheatre where most of the events were held. Palestine's own Le Trio Jubran played to a full audience, kicking off events that included international guests Ladysmith Black Mombazo from South Africa and the Nigel Kennedy Quintet from Great Britain and Poland. Kennedy wowed the crowd with both his playing, and his political sensibilities, as he spoke of his support for the Palestinian cause.

Otherwise, Jerusalem's eastern regions where most Palestinians live are increasingly choked by the construction of the wall and fence system that Israel is building through its neighborhoods. The additional construction of a light-rail system has meant the confiscation of land and a further emphasis on services for Israeli Jews, rather than the Arab inhabitants of the city.

A new road to connect the southern and northern sections of the West Bank is nearly completed. The road will have separate routes for Israelis and Palestinians, with the Palestinian "lane" closed to Jerusalem. "The Americans

demanded from Sharon contiguity for a Palestinian state," Shaul Arieli, a reserve colonel in the army and cartographer told the New York Times. "This road was Sharon's answer, to build a road for Palestinians between Ramallah and Bethlehem but not to Jerusalem. This was how to connect the West Bank while keeping Jerusalem united and not giving Palestinians any blanket permission to enter East Jerusalem."

Sharon spoke before his illness of "transportational contiguity" for Palestinians, and the idea appeared to acquiescence from Washington, if not total agreement.

In a separate, but related checkpoint issue, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel petitioned the High Court of Justice to stop the collection of debts from east Jerusalem residents using "tax roadblocks". According to the petition filed by attorney Tali Nir on behalf of four east Jerusalem residents, "these roadblocks are being operated without any legal authority and are harming human rights."

A Ynet article quoted JQ author Adel Manna describing how he was stopped on his way to work, informed that he had a property tax debt of NIS 7,400 (about \$1,733). Manna was ordered to pay half of the debt in cash within 30 minutes, or

have his car confiscated and towed. He withdrew the sum from a nearby bank and returned to the roadblock, where he paid his debts and was then returned his vehicle. Police set up these roadblocks as often as two or three times a week in the small Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem.

Protesters gathered to protest the 8 August announcement that Israeli police were closing the investigation into the border police killing of 10-year-old Abir Aramin for “lack of sufficient evidence. The Anata resident was critically wounded on January 16 during a clash between Palestinian school students and Israeli Border Guard officers. She lay clinically dead at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem for three days before being taken off life support.

On 11 August, an Israeli security guard shot dead Ahmad Khatib, from Manda village in the Galilee in Jerusalem’s Old City after he allegedly stole another guard’s gun and wounded him in the shoulder. At least eight Palestinians were injured in what witnesses said was an exchange of fire.