

# Jerusalem Diary

*December 2007 – March 2008*

In 1967, when Israel occupied previously Jordanian-controlled eastern Jerusalem, it took control of a city that was 26 percent Palestinian and 74 percent Jewish. Forty years later, the Palestinian population in the city has risen to 34 percent, due largely to a higher birth rate.

Israel has worked hard to maintain demographic and geographic control over the city it annexed as its capital. It expanded the city's boundaries and is putting massive investment into Jewish settlements in order to beat back inching Palestinian growth. In 2005, Jerusalem was home to 245,000 Arabs and 475,000 Jews, 184,000 of the latter living in settlements considered illegal under international law. (More recent numbers put the settlement population at 210,000.)

Since Palestinians and Israelis kicked off talks in Annapolis, Maryland in November, Israel has escalated settlement construction in Jerusalem, according to a recent report by the Ir Amim organization. Over 9,500 housing units for Jews have been constructed, 471 of them in the heart of Palestinian population centers. In addition, Israel has announced tenders for 1,550 units in four separate settlements within the redrawn Jerusalem boundaries.

These moves contradict Israel's commitments to stop settlement

construction under the road map, the basis for the US-sponsored Annapolis talks. The road map plan for peace was first endorsed in 2003 by the United States, European Union, Russia and United Nations.

Palestinian officials have protested the new building to no avail. Palestinian Authority efforts to counteract settlement by designating the city an Arab cultural capital have been broken up by Israeli police, and its organizers detained. One civil society organization canceled a conference to be held in the city after it was notified that no Palestinian events in Jerusalem were being allowed to proceed.

Meanwhile, Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem suffer from systemic neglect. Almost 90 percent of the city's sewage networks, roads and sidewalks are found in the city's western side for the use of Jewish residents, says the human rights group B'Tselem.

Since 1967, Israeli officials have planned no new Arab neighborhoods in eastern Jerusalem. Construction permits are expensive and difficult to obtain and unlicensed structures are threatened with demolition. In March alone, city officials demolished four unlicensed Palestinian structures in Jerusalem and its Arab suburbs.

Poverty in Jerusalem is growing at staggering rates, increasing by 40 percent over six years and touching 33 percent of the city's residents in 2005. Palestinians in the city had a 70 percent poverty rate, found an Israeli study – as did the city's growing ultra-orthodox community. The increase in poverty is largely due to low workforce participation by Palestinian women and ultra-orthodox men.

Approximately one quarter of the city's residents are ultra-orthodox Jews. Secular Jews often cite their numbers as reason for moving out of Jerusalem. Jerusalem's mayor and most of its city council members are ultra-orthodox. (Palestinians typically boycott the city government.) The yeshiva where a Palestinian gunman from the Jerusalem neighborhood of Jabal al-Mukabber killed eight ultra-orthodox men injuring 35 others on 6 March was a major training ground for the West Bank settlement movement.

Jerusalem police were 'caught off guard' days after the shooting when Israeli demonstrators, among them settler representatives, entered a Palestinian neighborhood and attacked homes and businesses. On 14 May, Khayri al-Qam, 51, a father of nine, was stabbed in the back about 5:30 A.M. on his way to work in the Beit Yisrael neighborhood in what was said as a revenge killing for the yeshiva deaths. Police said this was the sixth stabbing of Palestinians since the lethal stabbing of an Orthodox Jew in February.

"A cycle of bloodshed has been opened," Jerusalem police chief, Yair Yitzhaki, told the *New York Times*.

While many large Jewish settlements ring the city, newer settlements near the historic old city are set within Palestinian neighborhoods. Settlers in Silwan are actually digging under Arab homes, expanding an archeological site, despite an Israeli court order to stop.

Authorities are also considering a massive new Jerusalem settlement for ultra-orthodox Jews just meters from the Palestinian town of Ramallah. Former deputy mayor Meron Benvenisti called the proposal "complete insanity" for its potential to create friction.

In the absence of intensive efforts to reach a political compromise over the city and its related issues of settlements and borders, Jerusalem is increasingly tense. Worrying trends indicate a shift to violence between city residents along ethnic and religious lines, as Israeli authorities push hard to gain a demographic advantage also along ethnic and religious lines.