

Jerusalem Chronology

March - July 2004

25 March

Beginning on 25 March, the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA) held a series of forums on the question of the two-state solution and its alternatives. Gary Sussman of Tel Aviv University began the series, presenting his views on the viability of the two-state solution to a room of select participants. While he says that he would mourn the demise of the possibility of two states, he noted, that “A South African poll in 1986 suggested that 97 percent of whites opposed one-man-one-vote. Less than a decade later whites voted in such an election.” On 1 April, the Institute of Jerusalem Studies’ Salim Tamari spoke of the divide between political reality and one-state-prospects. While skeptical that the political realities support a one-state option, he observed that, “As Palestinians edge toward a territorial settlement that is less than satisfactory in terms of their minimal requirements for statehood, the idea of a bi-national state for Israelis and Palestinians begins to acquire a certain attractiveness.” He cited a 1999 public opinion poll that suggested that nearly 20 percent of respondents from the West Bank and Gaza and 15 percent of Jewish respondents in Israel (17 percent of Israel Arab respondents) favored a bi-national solution “if attempts at establishing two states fail.” Nasser Abu Farha of the University of Wisconsin spoke on 26 April, of prospects for a federal union. “The two separate independent states program will continue to fail because it rests on false assumptions,” he argued. “Its

proponents assume that the exclusion of Palestinians from what is now Israel has been normalized and accepted among Palestinians and that the presence of Israelis and their collective rights for cultural expression in Israel has been normalized and accepted by Palestinians and the broader Arab region.” (PASSIA)

21 April

East Jerusalem residents were shocked by impromptu Israeli police roadblocks established to collect unpaid television taxes. Those stopped were ordered to pay the tax or have their vehicles confiscated on the spot. Responding to charges that the Israel Broadcasting Authority was discriminating against the mostly Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, the IBA said that the roadblocks were being placed throughout Jerusalem. (Palestine Report)

12 May

Jerusalem has experienced a spate of settler takeovers in Silwan and Abu Dis. “I showed them our deeds, but they still kicked us out,” says Awad Rajabi, whose home was taken over by the Jewish settlement groups Ateret Cohanim, Elad, and the “society for the renovation of Yemeni settlements.” The settlers entered Rajabi’s house under police protection and promptly moved in their own furniture to indicate acquisition of the property. The two buildings taken over on that same day were comprised of 12 apartments. Earlier this month, settlers took over two apartments and a 70-dunam parcel of land in Abu Dis. Daniel Loriya, head of the Ateret Cohanim settlement movement, told *Ha’aretz*, “We have a plan, which we call the Shield of Jerusalem, which is aimed at creating Jewish settlement in every quarter of East Jerusalem to prevent any future division of the city.” (Palestine Report)

9 June

As Israel began construction of the portion of the wall that will run through the neighborhoods of al-Ram and Dahiet al-Barid, confusion ran rife as to the actual consequences for the 70,000 people located in that region of the Jerusalem municipality. “Until now, the plan is unclear. We only know that if the wall is built, our suffering will increase. I can’t imagine how our lives will be in the future,” said a resident. While construction was to begin on 6 June, no parties were provided with maps at that date. Israeli officials justified the secrecy, saying that it was intended to prevent demonstrations and incitement. Lawyers for the local councils have challenged the screen of secrecy in Israeli courts. Many residents in the area are afraid of losing access to Jerusalem and to relatives, just yards away across the divide. Further, they also fear being denied health insurance and other national benefits provided to Jerusalem identity card holders. (Palestine Report)

14 July

Drawing up contingency plans for the death of Palestinian president Yasser Arafat, Israel says it will prevent at all costs Arafat’s burial in Jerusalem. Several prominent Palestinian leaders are buried on the grounds of the al-Aqsa Mosque, including Sharif Hussein, King Abdullah and several prominent Nashashibis. Israel’s Foreign Ministry says that it will block any push by Palestinians to lay to rest the Palestinian leader in that important burial ground, and will propose instead that Arafat be buried in Abu Dis, now severed from Jerusalem by the wall that Israel has constructed in that seam between the West Bank and central Jerusalem. (AP)

3 July

Arab Israeli Knesset member Azmi Bishara began a hunger strike at a tent in the Dahiat al-Barid area to protest the wall that Israel plans to construct in that region, and throughout the West Bank. In the following days, he was joined by 14 others, among them Fatah leader Ahmad Ghneim and Palestinian Legislative Council member from Jerusalem Hatem Abdel Qader. “Our aim is that a loud strong cry is heard for the future of our country via a method that the Israeli occupation is unaccustomed to,” Bishara told a reporter. “This cry is meant to express that the effects of the separation wall in Palestine have reached the point of life and death. This is why I took this personal decision to start a hunger strike so that I can get the message out to the world about the danger we are in.” Meters away, bulldozers continued laying the groundwork for high cement barrier to run down the center of the main Jerusalem-Ramallah thoroughfare. (Palestine Report)

4 July

A thirteenth century Georgian fresco residing on the grounds of an eleventh century Greek Orthodox monastery in Jerusalem was defaced. The incident caused a diplomatic dust-up between the Georgian government and Israel. Painted on a wall of the monastery, the fresco contains what is believed to be the sole existing portrait of the legendary Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli. Portions of the portrait were obliterated, and several accompanying medieval Georgian letters were erased. In 2002, vandals defaced a different Georgian church inscription, although it was subsequently restored. In Tbilisi, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lasha Zhvaniya said Georgia sent a note of concern to UNESCO and to the Greek Foreign Ministry. (ABC)

July 9

Following the ruling of the International Court of Justice in the Hague that Israel's construction of a barrier in the West Bank was in contravention of international law, that Israel must dismantle the wall, and pay compensation to Palestinians for the damage that has been done, the 14 Palestinians and Israelis in a hunger strike in protest of the wall packed up their Dahiat al-Barid protest tent and went home. Palestinians were pleased by the ruling, which established for the first time in an international court Israel's obligations as an occupying power over the Palestinian people. While the ruling was non-binding, Palestinians plan to press the United Nations on the basis of the ruling to take measures against Israel. Israel, for its part, has dismissed the court as biased and disregarding Israeli security. (Wire reports)

12 July

Palestinian filmmaker Elie Suleiman organized a screening of French Israeli filmmaker Simone Bitton's documentary "Wall" to be projected on to a portion of the expansive cement barrier that Israel has constructed through portions of Jerusalem. "We'll screen it on a section of the wall in Abu Dis," explained "Divine Intervention" director Suleiman in an interview. Bitton's film will simultaneously screen at the Israeli Jerusalem Film Festival. (Variety)

Organizers of the Image of Abraham project, in its sixth year, brought together 400 fourth graders from two Jerusalem Jewish schools (in Ramat Moriah) and one larger Arab school (in Jabel Mukaber) to promote co-existence between the children by focusing on shared cultural heritage and shared progenitor Abraham. "Who was Abraham in the Bible and who was Ibrahim in the Koran? How were they similar? How were

they different?" posits Amanda Weiss, deputy director of the Bible Lands Museum, who initiated the project. Hadil Karain is a teacher at the Jabel Mukaber school and has worked as a guide in the program for two years. "Maybe it's good because they are still young and they don't have any prejudice," she said. (CSN news)

22 - 31 July

The annual Yabous musica festival in Jerusalem commenced with a schedule including Palestinian, Spanish, French, Turkish, Italian, British and Iranian performers. One of the local favorites will be the lyrical performance of Reem Talhami & Jamiel AlSayeh, accompanied by the Zimar Ensemble. Closing ceremonies on 31 July will feature a Palestinian choral ensemble, al-Awj. (Yabous)