

◆ **Muslim Quarter**

Burj Al-Laqlaq

On 25 July 2005, the West Jerusalem Municipality's Local Planning Committee approved an amended Town Planning Scheme (21 instead of 30 residential units, plus a synagogue) that will allow the construction of a new Jewish settlement ('Flower Gate' Project) on a 3.8-dunum site near Burj Al-Laqlaq in the northeastern corner of the Old City, not far from Herod's Gate (Bab As-Sahira). The Israel Land Administration owns 1.9 dunums ('absentee property') of the land in question while Himanuta Ltd., a subsidiary of the Jewish National Fund, owns 1.3 dunums, which were reportedly acquired privately from the White Russian Orthodox Church in 1982. The project is pending with the Regional Planning Committee of the Ministry of Interior.



Burj Al-Laqlaq Area

The plan was first disclosed in 1990 by then Housing Minister Ariel Sharon, who announced the planned construction of 200 housing units at the site. Another plan was ratified during the tenure of PM Netanyahu, this time envisioning the construction at the same location of a religious school, two six-floor residential buildings, parking lots, and two underground tunnels. In May 1998, settlers from Ateret Cohanim - protected by Israeli soldiers - laid the 'cornerstone' for the new settlement and moved caravans to the area. However, due to the ensuing confrontations with Palestinians, the process was halted in June 1998 by the Israeli Government, which 'compensated' the settlers by allowing excavation works at the site. Somewhat ironically, the work, carried out by the Ministries of Infrastructure and Antiquities, exposed the stone walls of buildings that made up an Arab neighborhood dating to the 7th Century Umayyad rule.

To date, more than ten structures have been demolished in the Burj Al-Laqlaq area, including housing units and a Canadian-funded center for the disabled. The current plan - the ultimate aim of which is to gain another foothold inside the Old City - includes the expansion of a nearby enclave where two Jewish families now live in red-roofed bungalows adjacent to the home of the Palestinian Qara'in family, who were repeatedly denied a permit to build a second storey in order to accommodate their extended family. In addition, it should be noted that the proposed construction represents a technical and engineering violation of Old City regulations since Burj Al-Laqlaq is not only an archeological site but also a 'green area' where building of any kind is prohibited. Worthy of mention in this regard is the fact that Israeli authorities systematically rezone such 'green areas' to accommodate settlements.

GREEN AREAS are areas zoned by Israeli municipal authorities for open space in which no construction is allowed so as to maintain a minimum of greenery in a city. However, in the case of East Jerusalem, although none of the land designated for 'open spaces' is actually planted; alleged green areas are much more used strategically, often to block Palestinian development in the vicinity of settlements, restrict Palestinian construction in the city, and later absorb the land for settlement expansion as needed. Good examples for settlement-turned-green areas are Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa) and Shu'fat (Rekhes Shufat/Ramot Shlomo). It is estimated that some 44% (including 6% assigned for infrastructure and services and remaining under municipal control) of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem is designated by planning and zoning schemes as green and open spaces (Orient House, *Jerusalem Settlement Update Report*, May 2000).

THE OLD CITY'S IMMEDIATE ENVIRONS AND THE 'HOLY BASIN' AREA

In addition to the above, there has been an increase in governmental support for the activities of the extremist settler groups in and around the Old City. The groups in question include El 'Ad (focusing on Silwan), Ateret Cohanim (focusing on the Old City), Hay VeKayam, and Amana, all of which enjoy wide public support in regard to their efforts to take over as much Palestinian property as possible.

Currently, **Jewish settler spots** in East Jerusalem established outside of the major settlements built after the War of 1967 include the following: the Old City's Muslim Quarter, the Christian Quarter (St. John's Hospice/'Neot David' and the Petra and New Imperial Hotels just inside Jaffa Gate), the 'City of David' in Silwan, Bet Orot on the Mt. of Olives, Ras Al-Amud (Ma'ale Zaytim), the Tomb of Shimon HaTzadik in Sheikh Jarrah, Musrara (between Damascus Gate and Hanevi'im Street, where Jewish settlers currently occupy two properties), and Ath-Thori (Abu Tor). Recent takeover and/or construction plans include those relating to a site at Burj Al-Laqlaq, in the northern section of the Old City near Herod's Gate, the area around the Shepherd's Hotel in Sheikh Jarrah, and the Al-Bustan area in Silwan. In the Muslim and Christian Quarters of the Old City alone, it is estimated that Jews already control some 75-80 homes or complexes, some of which house yeshivas, kollels, and Torah study centers.

Focusing their activities on these areas - the Old City and the so-called **Holy Basin area** (see textbox) - the settlers are attempting to form a string of settlements that will eventually encircle the Al-Haram Ash-Sharif area. New settlements are also being built near Walajah (Nof Yael), Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa II), Jabal Mukabber (Nof Zion), Abu Dis (Kidmat Zion), Hizma (Geva Binyamin), and south of Ramallah (Agan Ha'Ayalot - an extension of the Giv'at Ze'ev settlement), and these will form a Jewish urban belt around Palestinian East Jerusalem.

The concept of the **HOLY BASIN** (sometimes referred to as the Historical Basin) was introduced by Israel during the Camp David negotiations in July 2000 and picked up at the Taba talks in early 2001. The concept applies to the area embracing the Old City of Jerusalem and adjacent localities - the Mt. of Olives (At-Tur), Mt. Zion, the City of David (Silwan), the Kidron Valley, and the Shimon HaTzadik Tomb and mini-settlement in Sheikh Jarrah - where one finds places that are holy to Jews, Muslims, and Christians. The idea was to create a special (international) regime for the area with the task of keeping order and ensuring freedom of worship as well as open access to holy sites. The Palestinians rejected the proposal, which they viewed as yet another attempt on the part of Israel to claim sovereignty in an area that is both predominantly Palestinian and - according to International Law and UN resolutions - under occupation, and demanded Palestinian sovereignty instead.