

on the edges of the Wadi Al-Joz Industrial Zone. The area, which is mostly cultivated with olive trees, is now threatened with losing its open and public space status and being reclassified as a residential area once plans are developed to build a Jewish neighborhood above it.

The motivation behind the recently revived plan for a new Israeli settlement at the location was clearly the desire to establish the missing link between the Israeli Government complex north of the hotel and the Shimon HaTzadik Tomb area to the south.



Part of the Israeli Government Complex

### **Shimon HaTzadik**

The tomb of **Shimon HaTzadik** ('Simon the Just') and its surrounding area is said to have been purchased by Jews who settled there until 1948 when the neighborhood was evacuated, the tomb having been declared a Jewish holy place by the UN in Nov. 1947. In 1972, the land was released to its owners, the Sephardic Ethnic Committee and the General Committee of the Jewish People. Under the Netanyahu government, Shimon HaTzadik was given 'new Jewish neighborhood status,' which entitled it to huge amounts of annual funding for private security services. In Oct. 1998, yeshiva students joined by rightwing MK Rabbi Benny Elon moved into the synagogue directly above the tomb in order to renovate it. Local Palestinians protested in vain, and since Dec. 1998, the synagogue has been used as a *kollel* (advanced Torah learning institute) that is also used for the holding of regular Shabbat prayer services. In Feb. 1999, the 'Settlers of Zion' Association, led by MK Elon, illegally acquired six homes in the area and in April of the same year, the first Jews moved in. In April 2000, Palestinians clashed with the settlers and Israeli police officers when the former attempted to take over another 5-dunum plot of land, owned by the Abu Jibna family, claiming that a cave in which Ramban/Rabbi Nahmanides used to pray is located there. The next month, the Jerusalem District Court ruled that the cave is a Jewish holy site and ordered the owners to remove fences and allow Jews to pray there. In April 2003, the Homat Shalem organization, which operates on behalf of the settlers, acquired another two apartment blocs nearby, and today at least seven settler families (around 40 people) reside there along with several dozen yeshiva students. Their presence and attempts to further expand have repeatedly resulted in clashes with local Palestinians. The actual tomb, meanwhile, is guarded by the Israeli Police.



Shimon HaTzadik: site occupied by settlers

### ◆ **At-Tur (Mount of Olives)**

In March 2006, settlers took over two large buildings in At-Tur, overlooking the Old City, marking the first time since 1967 that settlers had succeeded in acquiring property in the neighborhood. The circumstances of the takeover, which represented a new effort on the part of settlers to create outposts in East Jerusalem, as well as those of others, are of highly questionable legality and are currently the subject of legal proceedings.

### ◆ **Silwan**

Silwan is a Palestinian neighborhood stretching from the south-east corner of Jerusalem's Old City, following Wadi Al-Hilweh (referred to on Israeli maps as the Kidron Valley) as



Silwan

it runs between the densely populated hillsides of the Mt. of Olives and Mt. Zion, and sloping down through the desert along the slopes of Jabal Al-Mukabber.

Large tracts of land in the area - which Israel seized illegally after the War of 1967 - were purchased in the 1920s by Baron de Rothschild and subsequently administered by the Jewish National Fund. The latter has since assisted settler groups in their efforts to take control of the area and over 55% of the land is now in the hands of El 'Ad.

Israeli blueprints propose the development of an archaeological village in place of the existing Palestinian homes in Silwan (referred to by Israelis as the 'City of David' or 'Ir David'). The El 'Ad settler group, which occupied the first two homes to be taken over in Silwan in 1991, claims to have already seized over 55% of the 'Ir David' area. Today, there are ten buildings in 'Ir David,' housing 27 families, while another 20 El 'Ad-owned buildings (the majority of which were seized in the spring of 2004) house some 23 families, bringing the total number of settler families living in Silwan to at least 50 (or some 250 people) (Meir Margalit, "Like a Thorn in the Heart: Settlements and Settlers in East Jerusalem," ICAHD, Oct. 2005.)

In May 2005, 88 houses in the **Bustan neighborhood** (called 'Emek HaMelech,' or 'King's Valley' by the settlers) - home to approx. 1,000 Palestinians - were threatened with demolition on the grounds that the area had been zoned as 'open' or 'green space' and was thus off-limits for construction purposes and should be returned to its original state. The threats were clearly part of an attempt to implement the 'King's Valley National Park' plan in the area, and although, amidst protests, the demolition orders were eventually frozen, they were never actually lifted.

Another plan - approved by the Local Planning and Construction Committee in June 2005 and developed by the private Ma'ale Bet David Co. - involves the construction of a five-storey building on an 11.5-dunum plot at the entrance to Silwan (known as the 'Givati site') to house a banqueting hall, a commercial center, and an underground car park (Meir Margalit, "Like a Thorn in the Heart: Settlements and Settlers in East Jerusalem," ICAHD, Oct. 2005.)