

THE OLD CITY

Successive Israeli governments since 1967 have consistently carried out the policy of surrounding the inner core of Jerusalem with areas of Jewish settlement. The Old City and its immediate environs has seen a significant increase in governmental support for the activities of extremist settler groups such as **EI 'Ad** (focusing on Silwan), **Ateret Cohanim** (focusing on the Old City and seeking to rebuild the Temple on the site of Al-Aqsa Mosque), **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 settlers either hold sites that they have recently taken over or plan to occupy in the following areas: the Old City's **Muslim Quarter**, including the **Burj Al-Laqlaq** area near Herod's Gate, the **Christian Quarter** (St. John's Hospice/'Neot David' and the Petra and New Imperial Hotels on Omar Ibn Khattab Square just inside Jaffa Gate), the 'City of David' and the **Al-Bustan** area in **Silwan**, **Beit Orot** on the Mount of Olives, **Musrara** (between Damascus Gate and Hanevi'im Street, where Jewish settlers currently occupy two properties). In the Muslim and Christian Quarters of the Old City alone, it is estimated that some 900 settlers (more than half of them yeshiva students) already control some 75-80 homes or complexes. Some of these house yeshivas, kollels, and Torah study centers (Peace Now, May 2009).

According to the Israel Construction and Housing Ministry, there are currently approximately 75 families and 600 yeshiva students in settler enclaves in the Old City (outside of the Jewish Quarter), and plans are underway to build a large new settlement (35 housing units) within the Muslim Quarter (EU heads of mission report on East Jerusalem, March 2009).

The Israeli government has handed *de facto* control of the large **national park** that surrounds the Old City from the south and the east, including its religious and historic sites, to EI 'Ad (in 2002 via the Israel Nature and Parks Authority). There are plans for another national park, northeast of the Old City, to be placed under the control of Jewish extremists. In 2006, Ateret Cohanim was handed a project, co-funded by the Israeli Ministry of Infrastructure from monies set aside for the rehabilitation of quarries. The project was meant to 'restore' a 3,000-year-old **quarry** running 280 m under the Old City, from Herod's Gate toward Al-Haram Ash-Sharif, and transform it into a tourist site (Americans for Peace Now, "The Battle for Jerusalem's Old City and Holy Basin," *Settlements in Focus*, Vol. 2, No. 8, May 2006).

In this context the fact that EI 'Ad's Evyatar Cohen, the director of the visitors' center, is also the director of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority's Jerusalem district speaks volumes. In May 2009, Ir Amim revealed a secret government plan - through the Jerusalem Development Authority and in conjunction with settler organizations - to surround the Old City with nine parks, tourist sites and pathways in a bid to consolidate its occupation of the area. The plan is part of Decision

