

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. It applies to the area embracing the Old City of Jerusalem and the adjacent vicinity - the Mount of Olives (At-Tur), Mount Zion, Silwan/’City of David’, Wadi Al-Hilweh/Kidron Valley, and the Shimon HaTzadik Tomb area in Sheikh Jarrah – where one finds places that are holy to Jews, Muslims, and Christians. The idea was to create a special (international) administration 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. The Palestinians demanded sovereignty of the area instead.

THE OLD CITY’S ENVIRONS AND THE “HOLY BASIN” AREA

The **Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, Wadi Al-Joz, and Mount Scopus** area has been targeted by Israeli settlement activity since the pre-1948 years when Zionist groups began building the Hebrew University complex on Mount Scopus. Apart from the settlement activities associated with the area, a number of official Israeli sponsored projects have been established over the years. These include the construction of the Israeli government buildings, the Police Headquarters, the Hebrew University complex, and the adjacent French Hill settlement. According to data from the Ir Amim organization, about 2,500 Israelis now live in the “Holy Basin” and the Old City (outside the Jewish Quarter), about 400 of them in the ‘City of David’ and a similar number in Ras Al-Amud.

◆ Sheikh Jarrah

Shepherd’s Hotel / Karm Al-Mufti:

Plans are now underway to expand Town Planning Scheme 2591 of 1984 (construction of 20 housing units) and establish



Shepherds Hotel

a new Jewish settlement in Sheikh Jarrah, including 90 apartments, a synagogue and kindergarten (Town Plan Scheme 11536), on land belonging to the **Shepherd’s Hotel**. A construction request to this end was submitted to the West Jerusalem municipality in late October 2005. The area is known to Palestinians as **Karm Al-Mufti** due to its having belonged to Grand Mufti Haj Amin Al-Husseini before it was seized by the Israelis in 1967 (despite the fact that the heirs of the rightful

owner were still alive and long-standing legal residents of Jerusalem and the building had functioned as a hotel from 1945). The land was apparently acquired by Jewish millionaire Irving Moskowitz from the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property in



Karm Al-Mufti land and part of the Interior Ministry complex in the foreground

1985 (*Ha’aretz*, 3 Nov. 2005). It was subsequently rented to the Israeli Border Police and is now administered by Moskowitz, Ateret Cohanim and C&M Properties. In November 2006, the Israeli Committee for the Preservation of Historic Sites recommended the demolition of the hotel on the grounds that it had no special architectural value.

