

Beneath the actual 30-dunum hotel compound, the Karm Al-Mufti land (also known as 'Mufti's grove' or, in Hebrew, as 'Kerem HaMufti') stretches for an additional 110 dunums downhill, mostly cultivated with olive trees, towards the site of the Israeli Ministry of Interior complex (initially earmarked to house a Palestinian girls' school) on the edges of the Wadi Al-Joz Industrial Zone. The ILA is working together with Ateret Cohanim to gain control of the land and to transfer it to the association without a tender, as outlined in a petition submitted in August 2007 to the High Court by the Palestinian landowners, the Arab Hotels Company. The ILA has signed a contract with Ateret Cohanim for "the agricultural cultivation" of the land, even though the association has no experience in such work, the land that the ILA leased apparently does not belong to it, and the Interior Ministry recognizes that the Palestinian landowners "have an interest" in it. In March 2007, 40 years after declaring its intentions to do so, the state formally expropriated the land, at the request of the ILA. Former Finance Minister Abraham Hirschson signed on the plan to expropriate the property under the rubric of "acquisition for public needs" (*Ha'aretz* 20 Aug. 2007), thus reclassifying its "green area" status (see textbox) to make way for the planned Jewish neighborhood. A few months later the government leased the land to Ateret Cohanim. In December 2007, responding to a petition submitted in August by the Arab Hotels Company contesting ownership of the land, the High Court of Justice set a September 2008 hearing date, which was subsequently delayed and has not yet taken place.

The plan is motivated by the desire to establish the missing link between the Israeli government complex north of the Shepherd's Hotel and the Shimon HaTzadik Tomb area to the south.

GREEN AREA 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; "green areas" are used strategically, often to block Palestinian development in the vicinity of settlements. The move restricts Palestinian construction in the city, and enables land to be absorbed later for settlement expansion if needed. Good examples of settlement-turned-green areas are Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa) and Shu'fat (Ramat Shlomo). It is estimated that some 44% (including 6% assigned for infrastructure and services that remain 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).

Shimon HaTzadik

The tomb of **Shimon HaTzadik** ('Simon the Just', a High Priest during the time of the Second Temple) and its surrounding area is said to have been purchased by Jews who settled there until 1948 when the neighborhood was evacuated. The tomb was declared a Jewish holy place by the UN in November 1947. In 1956, the UN and Jordanian government began to house 28 Palestinian refugee families from the 1948 War in the area. Following the 1967 War, settlers began claiming ownership of the land and in 1972, two Jewish foundations, a Sephardi Jews Association (Vaad Sephardi Haredit) and the Knesset Yisrael Association, were successful in falsely claiming ownership and registering the land in their names with the Israeli land registrar (the two organizations later sold their claim to the Nahalat Shimon settler group).

In 1982, the alleged owners filed suits, claiming the property rights, against the 28 Palestinian families, whose appointed lawyer, Tosya Cohen, agreed with the settlers to recognize their ownership of the land in return for granting the families the status of protected residents (requiring them to pay rent to the owners). The Sheikh Jarrah families refused to accept the deal and refused to pay rent, which triggered the issuing of the first eviction orders. A newly hired lawyer, Husni Abu Hussein, soon revealed that the settlers' associations did not own the land and asked the Land Registration Department to revoke the settlers' 1972 registration (which they agreed to do in 2006) and to issue an order to restate the rightful owner of the land (which they refused).



Shimon HaTzadik: site occupied by settlers

Under the 1996 Netanyahu government, Shimon HaTzadik was given 'new Jewish neighborhood status,' which entitled it to huge amounts of annual funding for private security services. In October 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 December 1998, the synagogue has been used as a *kollel* (advanced Torah learning institute) and for regular Shabbat prayer services. In February 1999, the 'Settlers of Zion' Association, led by MK Elon, illegally acquired six homes in the area and two months later, the first Jews moved in. This was part of Elon and Ariel Sharon's plan to plant settler spots in between Palestinian neighborhoods to make Jerusalem indivisible. In 1999, settlers seized part of the home of the Al-Kurd family, living there since 1956. Since then settlers "shared" the house, which they claimed was, along with 27 other nearby homes, Jewish property. The Palestinian families concerned say the land belongs to the Suleiman Darwish Hijazi family.

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. In May 2000, 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 2001, settlers began occupying an extension of the Al-Kurd home, which had been declared built illegally by Israeli authorities. The Al-Kurd family went to court and an eviction order was issued against the settlers. Another court hearing in 2001 ordered several Palestinian families out of their homes, but did not allow Nahalat Shimon to take over. A 2006 High Court ruling determined that neither the Va'ad Sephardi nor the Darwish family could prove either ownership, that the settlers' claim was void and based on false documents, and that the expelled families thus should be allowed to return to their homes, but the struggle continued.

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Sheikh Jarrah - threatened area

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