

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. El ‘Ad continues



to expand its activities and tighten its grip on Silwan, acting as a quasi-governmental body controlling tourism in the area as well as maintaining full authority over archeological activities. In 2007, settlers began unsanctioned and illegal subterranean excavations to expose what appears to be a Herodian-era road. On 15 January 2008, 11 settler families, protected by Israeli troops, took over 11 houses in the **Wadi Al-Hilweh** area. It increased the total number of seized houses in Silwan to over 40 and the number of settler families to 70. In May 2008, the West Jerusalem municipality began to approve a plan, submitted by the El ‘Ad association, for a new housing complex (including 10 apartments, a synagogue, kindergarten, a library and underground parking) at the entrance to Silwan (known as the ‘**Givati site**’). The land in question is located 200 meters from the Old City walls in the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood and belongs to the ILA, which leased it to El ‘Ad. (See also map on p. 2).

On 30 July 2008, the Jerusalem District Court rejected a petition by right-wing settlers and ordered them to immediately evacuate a seven-story building they call “**Beit Yehonatan**” in the heart of Silwan, which was built illegally by Ateret Cohanim. However, the building has still not been demolished.



Another focus of right-wing groups is the entire **Al-Bustan neighborhood** in Silwan (called ‘Emek HaMelech,’ or ‘King’s Valley’ by the Jews), where 88 houses - home to some 1,000 Palestinians - are slated for demolition



Silwan - Al-Bustan area

on the grounds that the area had been zoned as ‘green area’ and was thus off-limits for construction purposes. On 22 February 2009, the West Jerusalem municipality handed demolition orders to the residents, asking them to evacuate within 72 hours, for having built without proper licensing. To date, two of the houses have been destroyed. The land in the Al-Bustan neighborhood is privately owned; the houses were mainly constructed in the 1980s and 1990s, but some were built even before the 1967 occupation of Jerusalem. The recent threats are part of an attempt to implement the ‘King’s Valley National Park’ plan in the area in order to return part of Silwan “to its landscape of yore,” as municipal engineer Uri Shetreet put it

(*Ha’aretz*, 31 May 2005). The plan was shelved amid international criticism four years ago, but was revived under the new mayor Nir Barkat: in February 2009, the Jerusalem District Planning Commission rejected a Town Plan Scheme put forward by the Palestinian residents for continued urban development of the area’s historic sites and green spaces.

A related settler project is the unlicensed excavation of a tunnel to lead from the Siloam Pool to the Old City, which also began in 2008, but was frozen by an interim order of the High Court after residents filed a petition. A few meters further up from Al-Bustan



Al-Abbasiyya buildings

is another case of forced removal. On 5 March 2009, the West Jerusalem municipality issued demolition orders without prior warning for two large 4- and 6-storey apartment blocs - **Al-Abbasiyya buildings**. The orders gave 34 families (over 250 people) 10 days to evacuate their homes under the pretext of illegal construction (because only the first three floors of each building are licensed). In February 2009, the Israeli army bulldozed four dunums of land belonging to the Abbasi family near Al-Aqsa Mosque-area to establish a parking lot for visitors to the ‘City of David.’ A related Judaization strategy is the “conversion” of street names into Jewish ones; an example of this is the changing of the name of ‘Wadi Hilweh Street,’ to ‘Ma’alot Ir David’ Street.

It should be mentioned that according to the so-called **Clinton Parameters**, presented during the 2000 Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Silwan was supposed to become part of the future Palestinian capital.

◆ At-Tur (Mount of Olives) and Others

The earliest Jewish effort to establish institutions and neighborhoods in eastern Jerusalem was in **Beit Orot**. Situated on the northernmost ridge of the Mount of Olives beneath the Augusta Victoria Hospital compound, it was founded as a yeshiva by Rabbi Benny Elon in the early 1990s.



Beit Orot Complex

When Elon was Minister of Tourism, he transformed the area near the yeshiva into a national park (‘Ein Tzurim’) and in 2005, the West Jerusalem municipality approved a plan, submitted by Irwin Moskowitz, providing for public buildings and housing units on a 10-dunum area. Today, over 100 yeshiva students are housed there every year; in addition, the site includes the homes of several settler families who are waiting for building to begin on the first Jewish neighborhood on the Mount of Olives in 2,000 years. The adjacent **Ein Tzurim National Park** is run by El ‘Ad. (See also map on p. 2).