

مركز العمل المجتمعي COMMUNITY ACTION CENTER

Sheikh Jarrah situation during February 2022:

Preeminent Actors and the humanitarian impact of displacement on Palestinians.

Palestinian Sheikh Jarrah residents have been under constant threat of displacement by private settlers and the Israeli government for decades. Forced eviction is a threat that puts their safety, livelihoods, and health at risk. Displacements and disposessions always loom over the lives of the Sheikh Jarrah residents. The two preeminent antagonists that embolden and empower settler activity in Sheikh Jarrah are Itamar Ben-Gvir and Aryeh King. This problem, however, does not revolve solely around these two people, it is rooted deeply in the settler-colonial Zionist ideology that calls for “the redemption of the land of Israel”. This ideology is expressed in Israel’s institutionalized regime of oppressive and discriminatory laws that serve the Jewish hegemony, and Jewish domination in Jerusalem, including other places in Palestine. People like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Aryeh King utilize Israeli laws, which are inherently discriminatory, and their positions within the Israeli system, in order to displace Palestinians from their homes and transfer their homes to Israeli settlers.

Therefore it is significantly important to focus on private settler activity and the Garin Torani movement (Torah Seeds) while looking at the laws put in place that realize settler aspirations at the expense of the Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah. This entails a grave humanitarian impact on the Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah, and it will be highlighted below, in addition to other related mental health findings that were revealed.

"Home invasion by Israeli special forces is incredibly traumatizing to children. One of the little girls was so scared that she would involuntarily urinate herself" - Raeda Ghazi Haj Mahmoud

Sheikh Jarrah has significant importance. It is located near Wadi al-Joz on the route from the Old City as well as the route to Mount Scopus. Sheikh Jarrah links Arab neighbourhoods in the centre of eastern and southern Jerusalem throughout the northern part of the City (Yitzhak Reiter 2010, 22-25). Having a neighbourhood this prevalent in the centre of Jerusalem sparks intense settler activity in the area, which they refer to as the "Holy/Historic Basin". The "Holy Basin" encompasses the Old City and adjacent territories around it. Jewish settlers association's goal is to build a set of settler dwellings and establish parks themed after biblical places and figures around the Old City of Jerusalem (Mustafa Abu-Sneineh 2021). This plan only works with the removal of Palestinian families from their homes in the area. The two main figures that operate publicly as the driving force for Jewish settler activity in Jerusalem are Itamar Ben-Gvir and Aryeh King.



Itamar Ben-Gvir

photo: (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

Itamar Ben-Gvir is a leader in the Otzma Yehudit (far-right and anti-Arab party), as well as a lawyer and a politician. Itamar has been a constant menace towards the Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah, for he is one of the driving forces for their displacement and eviction from their homes. His actions empower settler activity and always carry his views/opinions and a message against Palestinians. Here are some examples of those actions:

- Yohavavev family's home in Sheikh Jarrah, which was taken from a Palestinian family, was set on fire. Itamar decided to set up an office in Sheikh Jarrah to guarantee safety to the illegal Jewish settlers who live there. This move was nothing but counterproductive, for it did not solve any issues but heightened them. This caused further clashes between right-wing Jewish activists and the Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah, and these types of conflicts were ongoing since his arrival (Jerusalem Post 2022).
- Following Itamar's decision to establish his office (a tent) in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, the Israeli Police got involved. The Israeli police released a statement saying "Unfortunately we are witnessing in recent days the wrongful phenomenon of public servants abusing their power of immunity, creating provocations and fanning the flames in the area". This shows that the police think Itamar's actions are a blatant abuse of power (Jerusalem Post 2022).
- Itamar Ben-Gvir does not hide his beliefs and ideology. It is apparent enough that he hangs a portrait of Baruch Goldstein in his home. Baruch Goldstein is a religious extremist and a mass murderer who perpetrated the 1984 massacre in Hebron, killing 29 and wounding 125 Palestinian Muslim worshipers.



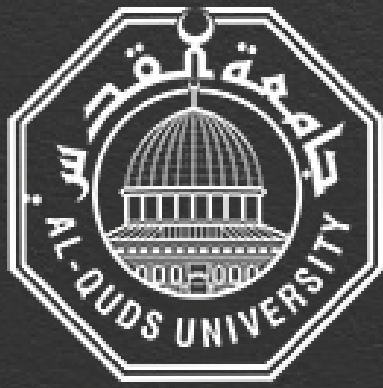
**“It’s a pity it
didn’t go in here
(the bullet)”**

- Aryeh King

photo: 972mag.com(screenshot)

Aryeh King is another Israeli right-wing activist and is the deputy mayor of Jerusalem. He mainly focuses on settler related issues and is directly connected to settler activity concerning the displacement of Palestinians. Aryeh King is the founder and former director of an Israeli settler organization known as the Israeli Land Fund (ILF). The organization supports Israel’s agenda of settler-colonization. Receiving tax-deductible donations from the Central Fund of Israel (a US-based charity) makes its discriminatory mission against Palestinians more threatening. They specifically focus on legally assisting settlers to displace Palestinians. Not only assist but facilitate takeovers of Palestinian property and further assist in the purchase of these properties. Not to mention that the Israeli Land Fund is involved in the displacement of Sheikh Jarrah residents. The ILF members are proud of their ideology, and the organization was created in response to “the danger” of “more and more Arabs and non-Jews living and owning land all over Israel” (Defund Racism 2021). It would not have been possible to obtain this information about the Israel Land Fund without the help of the website Defund Racism, because the ILF website is down. Most of the information that presents the organization as racist and discriminatory is conveniently not available for the public at the moment.

- Aryeh was filmed mocking Mohammed Abu Hummus, a Palestinian activist who was shot in the lower back. Aryeh mocked him and remarked that it is a pity that the bullet did not hit his head instead (Noy 2021).
- Personally delivering eviction notices to Palestinian families, like the Salem family in Sheikh Jarrah (Lazaroff 2022), taking advantage of his position in the municipality and demonstrating a gross display of power and domination over the Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah.
- During a campaign launched by Aryeh King, the latter disseminated fliers in Palestinian neighbourhoods, directed toward Muslims, urging them to leave and go reside in Arab countries. In the fliers he wrote, “You have many large countries that you can live in. Understand that we returned to Israel to fulfil what is written in the Torah” and then continued by proposing "It isn't easy for millions of people to abandon their homes without any monetary help. Therefore we propose that you negotiate with the state of Israel to receive economic aid to move and live elsewhere” (Yashar 2014).
- Aryeh King was one of the Israeli officials who incited violence during the brutal assassination of the Palestinian kid Mohammad Abu-Khdeir. Ayelet Shaked, a member of the Israeli parliament, published a post on Facebook, explicitly saying “The entire Palestinian people is the enemy” even further exclaiming to include women and the elderly. This call for genocide did not stop with Ayelet, because Aryeh King hours before the death of Mohammad issued a similar message during an assembly. He said, “I am calling out to all the Pinchases that are here ... Moses didn’t act, Pinchas acted ... The Rebbe, who is here with us, expects us to commit acts of Pinchas.”(Sheen 2014). His message was hidden behind religious words, that when first heard would not be understood ordinarily but to the crowd, he was addressing the message it was clear. He was using religious references that correlate to the mutilation of non-Jews.



مركز العمل المجتمعي COMMUNITY ACTION CENTER

The CAC field researchers interviewed Mahmoud Ramadan Al-Sau, Palestinian residents that encountered and experienced Aryeh King's methods of provocation and intimidation. "I was surprised by a visit from Aryeh King, he informed me that he bought the house and presented the deed. He then offered me money to move and vacate the house, starting with a million going up to six million. I refused all the offers." After the offer was denied, Aryeh raised a case against Mahmoud's family with the help of a settler organization, to forcefully displace and evict them. Mahmoud is one of many Palestinian residents that face strong and well-funded settler organizations that aim to take over their homes, Mahmoud exclaims "my family right now is under distress, and vulnerable to eviction at any moment."

Settler activity is one of the main issues in the Sheikh Jarrah affair and Palestinians deal with it daily. This activity is emboldened by Israeli officials and the Israeli government. Settler activity can be expressed in many ways, from standing outside a Palestinian family's house supporting their displacement and eviction to a well-funded eviction lawsuits campaign that takes place within the Israeli court, all in blatant violation of International law. Settler activity can be violent. When illegal Jewish settlers move to Palestinian neighbourhoods, the Israeli Police get involved, and a cycle of violence starts. Ratib Nasir Qanibi a Palestinian resident of Sheikh Jarrah told CAC's field researchers "I was assaulted by settlers with a stone that injured my chest and damaged my phone. They continued their assault by spraying my face with tear gas including my neighbour Fatima Salem, who also lives under the threat of displacement. I lost consciousness as a result of the gas, and I was then taken by the Palestinian Red Crescent paramedics. The pain continued and my vision was affected due to the attack. My family constantly suffers from anxiety, the children are always afraid. This is all due to the settlers' attacks, and the establishment of barriers and barricades around our house." Another Palestinian resident, Raeda Ghazi Haj Mahmoud, said "People from the neighbourhood usually join the Salem family in solidarity, by setting up tables, coffee, tea and other necessary utensils.

At the same time, a big group of settlers numbering 80 came over and took over those tables and utensils. They would play very loud music, dance and act victorious in front of the Salem family." These provocations lead to violent clashes, and that's where the Israeli police step in. Police presence in Sheikh Jarrah is not like police presence in other places around the globe. In Palestinian Neighbourhoods, in Eastern Jerusalem, the Israeli Police mainly protect the Israeli settlers and intimidate the Palestinian residents, who become captured in a cycle of violence and mental and economic warfare. A Palestinian resident pointed out that the police would block entrances around and inside the neighbourhood, violating the Palestinian resident's right to movement. On the other hand, settlers that reside in Sheikh Jarrah in violation of international law can walk through some of these blockades without a problem. The issue becomes more apparent when settler activity continues to be more active and dangerous. The settlers that reside illegally in Palestinian neighbourhoods in Jerusalem enjoy the support of the Israeli police and the Israeli ministry of housing, which hires and subsidize the services of private security companies to protect and guard them (Ir Amim 2016).

**Palestinian Sheikh
Jarrah residents suffer
human right violations
every day**



Raeda Ghazi Haj Mahmoud retold an event she experienced in her own house related to how the Israeli police forces treated Palestinians and journalists in her home. The event happened on 2/3/2022, there was a closure to deny entry and empty the neighbourhood of Palestinian youth and journalists who are present on a daily basis in solidarity with the Salem family, who are being threatened with eviction. She said: “That same day Israeli Knesset member Itamar Ben-Gvir invited settlers to the neighbourhood. Usually, there would be around 20 people outside my house consisting of journalists, Palestinian youth and activists. During that time I would see a large number of soldiers, police cars, and an even larger number of special forces outside my house. One of the officers approached my house and addressed the group of 20 people outside my house, he told them that they are not allowed to sit outside and instead they can move inside.” She then explained what happened after they were told to go inside the house. “An hour later after we grouped up inside my home, 20 more settlers arrived with Itamar Ben-Gvir. Fifteen minutes later the soldiers started approaching my house, they managed to forcefully go through my closed door and enter my home. They continued assaulting people by beating them and evicting them from my home in an effort to group them. The soldiers' behaviour was brutal and their methods were intimidating and terrifying. I also witnessed an assault on a female journalist, her name is Lena Kamela. She was in my house, they took her phone away even though she stated that she was a journalist and she had the right to take photos. Despite her showing them her press card, they still took away her phone and kicked her out of the house.” The Israeli forces' brutal and terrifying way of handling Palestinians does not stop with adults, they invade homes that have children in them.

“When they broke into my house, there were a number of children and their ages ranged from three years old to ten years old. Their mother was preparing them for sleep. The children were frightened and terrified as a result of watching the masked soldiers enter the home forcefully with their weapons. For the children, it was incredibly traumatizing. One of the little girls was so scared and affected by the situation that she would involuntarily urinate herself.” Children that experience dispossession and these moments or fears affect their physical and more importantly their mental health. Children that had their homes demolished are more withdrawn and prefer to stay quiet in the presence of others. They complain of pain and problems breathing without any known cause. They are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression, violent behaviour, and delinquency. The children's relationship with their parents is also affected. Examples such as more demanding behaviour. Parents with a demolished home are more likely to suffer from depression and even health problems (Palestinian Counseling Centre 2009, 27-33).

Torah Seeds (Garin Torani)

- Torah Seeds (Garin Torani) is another form of settler activity. The Garin Torani is a group of religious Jewish settlers who move to a specific city with a specific agenda. That agenda is tightly connected to the idea of empowering the national-religious Jewish presence in areas with non-religious populations (Boxerman 2021). These types of settler activities are careful in their actions and the way they present themselves. Their public goal is to seek and support communities with lower social and economic activity. However, Judaizing Palestinian neighbourhoods and “liberating” the land from its Palestinian owners and transferring it to Jewish settlers are settlers’ highest priorities. The Judaizing of neighbourhoods is a part of the settler ideology known as “settling in the hearts”. It is an ideology of settler movements that means to settle in the hearts of predominantly Palestinian neighborhoods.



Photo by Ahmed Abu Hameeda on
eyesplash

Sheikh Jarrah residents have to deal with a few specific laws concerning their land ownership, and that is how the Israeli government managed to take possession of these lands. These laws are inherently discriminatory, are part of Israel's apartheid machinery, and were designed to dispossess Palestinians from their properties and transfer them to the state of Israel or to its Jewish population.

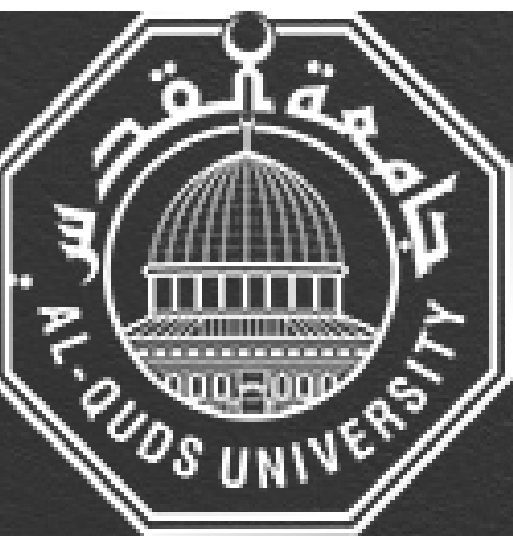
- **Absentees' Property Law:** This law defines the people who were expelled, fled or left the country after 29th November 1947 and marks them as an absentee. Property belonging to the absentees was placed under the control of the state of Israel with the Custodian for Absentees' property (Adalah 2022). This was used by Israel as an instrument to take possession of land originally belonging to Palestinians. The sweeping definition of an "Absentee" included almost all Palestinian refugees and the Palestinians who reside in the West Bank and Gaza who own property within the green line (the area that became Israel)
- **Legal and Administrative Matter Law:** This law was designed and implemented by Israel to allow Jews, and only Jews, to pursue claims to property allegedly owned by them in East Jerusalem before 1948 (UN General Assembly 2021). This law allowed Jews to sell land that was secured with unclear legal instruments to settler organizations. These organizations then submit evictions for further settlement expansions, leading to more lawsuits against the Palestinian residents, with the Israeli General Custodian, an organ of the Israeli Justice Ministry, playing a major role in the transfer of properties.

The creation of these laws was particularly intended to take over Palestinian properties and further displace Palestinians. Palestinians continue to deal with these laws and their representatives. Karim Daoud Edkeedik's family experienced the acts of deceit these representatives practice. Karim, in a statement given to the CAC field researchers, explained his family's interaction with one of those representatives. "My mother continued to pay the rent on a regular basis to a representative from the Custodian of Absentee Property. The representative was also in charge of inspecting the house regularly. About 18 years ago, the representative, who was in possession of a rental contract, called my mother and presented her with the paper as proof of protection. This is how he took advantage of my mother's lack of reading and writing knowledge in Hebrew and Arabic. We later found out that she actually signed a new lease that also takes away her rights over the house." Karim's family encountered these laws and how they use lies and deceit to acquire Palestinian property to further the Israeli settler colonialism mission.

Another case documented by the CAC field researchers was provided by Ratib Nasir Qanibi, a Palestinian resident of Sheikh Jarrah. He says: "We were informed by the Custodian that the property had Jewish owners. The owners consist of five heirs. We then started paying them the rent. After five years of paying the rent, the heirs raised an eviction case against us. This case lasted several years in court. A decision was issued by the Central Court to evacuate the house." This example demonstrates the way Israeli laws enable settlers to take over Palestinian land and property.

Settler activity in predominantly Palestinian neighbourhoods leads to a grave humanitarian impact on Palestinian's lives. Displacement affects families socially, physically, economically, and physiologically. It directly hinders the family's livelihoods and results in a lack of security, economically and physically. This leads to poverty and restrictions on access to essential resources. These issues extend to violations related to forced evictions, expansion of settlements, restrictions on movement, and harassment (by settlers). These issues heavily weigh on every family with eviction threats.

Residents of Sheikh Jarrah experience human rights violations every day. Their basic human rights are taken away from them. When examining the Sheikh Jarrah displacement situation, it is important to understand the legal apparatus Israel had created and it's direct, and behind the scene, involvement to enable the displacement. The Israeli officials operating to enable and facilitate this such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Aryeh King are there to force conflicts and incite them. The way settlers choose to expand and achieve their goals can be presented in many ways, that is why groups like Garin Torani should not be dismissed, their motives should be exposed, and they should be held accountable for their actions along with Israeli officials complicit in their illegal activity.



مركز العمل المجتمعي
COMMUNITY ACTION CENTER

Bibliography

Abu-Sneineh, Mustafa. 2021. Sheikh Jarrah explained: The past and present of East Jerusalem neighbourhood. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-sheikh-jarrah-jerusalem-neighbourhood-eviction-explained>

Adalah. Absentees' Property Law. <https://www.adalah.org/en/law/view/538>

Boxerman, Aaron. 2021. In Lod unrest, Arab fury against 'settler' Jewish newcomers boils to the surface. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-lod-unrest-arab-fury-against-settler-jewish-newcomers-boils-to-surface/>

Defund Racism. 2021. The Israeli Land Fund. <https://defundracism.org/israel-land-fund>

Ir Amim. Broken Trust: State Involvement in Private Settlement in Batan al-Hawa, Silwan. <https://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/1899>

Lazaroff, Tovah. 2022. Local court froze eviction of Salem family from Sheikh Jarrah. <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-698264>

Noy, Orly. 2021. J'lem deputy mayor to Palestinian activist: It's a 'pity' you weren't shot in the head. <https://www.972mag.com/aryeh-king-jerusalem-sheikh-jarrah/>

Palestinian Counselling Centre. 2009. Broken Homes. Addressing the Impact of House Demolitions on Palestinian Children & Families, 27-33.

Reiter, Yitzhak. Lehrs, Lior. 2010. The Sheikh Jarrah Affair: The Strategic Implications of Jewish Settlement in an Arab Neighborhood in East Jerusalem. 22-25.

Sheen, David. 2014. Israeli Calls for Palestinian Blood Ring at Fever Pitch. <https://electronicintifada.net/content/israeli-calls-palestinian-blood-ring-fever-pitch/13578>

The Jerusalem Post. Sheik Jarrah: Politicians abusing their immunity. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/article-697056>

The Jerusalem Post. 2022. Itamar Ben-Gvir is Provocation Personified. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-69648>

United Nations General Assembly. Annual Report 2021. https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/AHRC46NGO130_230221.pdf

Yashar, Ari. 2014. Jerusalem Councilman Urges Muslims: 'Leave Israel'. www.israelnationalnews.com/news/176321