

A Plan for Expanding Har Gilo Creates a Major New Threat for Al-Walaja

4 messages

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Reply-To: Aviv Tatarsky - Ir Amim <aviv@ir-amim.org.il>
To: kmccarthy@fmep.org

Wed, Oct 14, 2020 at 7:20 AM

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A Plan for Expanding Har Gilo Creates a Major New Threat for Al-Walaja

October 14, 2020

The Civil Administration discussed today a plan for the expansion on the Har Gilo settlement on lands of the village Al-Walaja at the western side of the village. If actualized this settlement will complete the isolation of the village which is already surrounded on its other three sides by the Separation Barrier. Indeed, in today's discussion it was revealed that the plan for the settlement includes extending the separation barrier so it fully encircles the village.

In the past decade Israel has been gradually taking over huge parts of Al-Walaja lands and isolating it from the Palestinian space around it. In parallel home demolitions in the village have greatly intensified. Combined with these the plan for the new settlement and extension of the separation barrier pose a major threat to the future of Al-Walaja and its community.

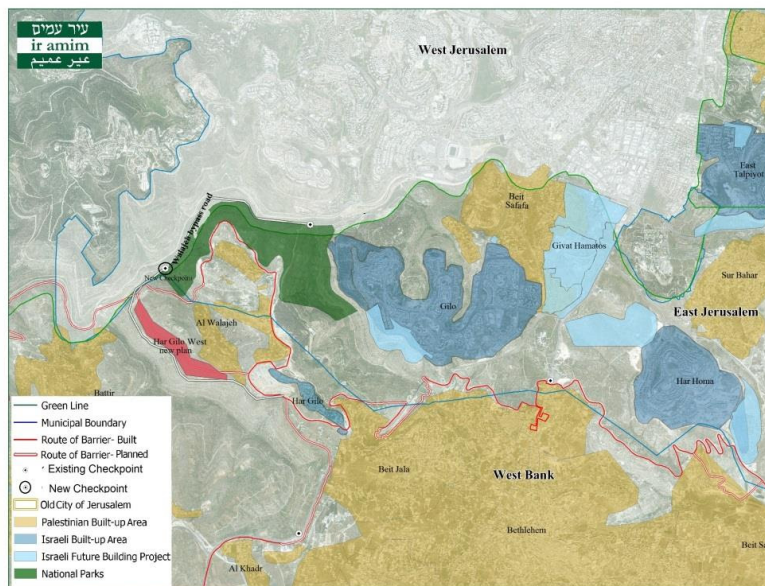
Yesterday Ir Amim reported on the [numerous outline plans for expanding settlements around Jerusalem](#), signaling that even after the signing of the normalization agreement with the United Arab Emirates, Israel is continuing to advance its de facto annexation of Greater Jerusalem.

Among these plans is **TPS 401-4-1 for the expansion of the Har Gilo settlement** on an area made up 199 dunams of Al-Walaja land where 560 housing units are to be built. The plan was discussed today at the Supreme Council of the Civil Administration beginning its approval process. The area in question is located on the western side of Al-Walaja between the built up area of the village and the Al-Walaja bypass road which connects Jerusalem to the Har Gilo settlement.

The plan is a first part of the fuller Israeli intentions to construct a total of 1,004 housing units on an area of 940 dunams that will extend all the way to the Jerusalem municipal boundary.

Not an expansion of Har Gilo but Actually a New Settlement

Although, formally speaking, this area is part of the jurisdiction area of Har Gilo, it will actually be more of a new settlement than an expansion of an existing one: The area in question is not connected to the existing settlement; the existing Har Gilo is to the south of Al-Walaja whereas the area of the new plan lies to its West and both the village and the Separation Barrier lie between the two. It should also be noted the new plan aims to more than double the 400 constructed housing units of Har Gilo.



Al-Walaja lies between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The Har Gilo settlement is adjacent to it on the south and the separation barrier goes around three sides of the village. The plan for the new settlement is roughly marked by the red patch to the west of Walaja. In today's discussion it was revealed that the separation will be extended so that it runs between the village and the new settlement thereby completing its full encirclement.

The Green patch marks the Nahal Rephaim National Park which Israel declared on Al-Walaja agricultural lands which remained on the Israeli side of the Barrier. Israel intends to relocate the checkpoint to a new location (also marked on the map) in order to fully block the access of Al-Walaja residents to this area.

The New Settlement is a Major Threat to the Community of Al-Walaja which is to be Surrounded on all sides and Cut Off from its Surroundings

If the plan is actualized, it will have a devastating effect on Al-Walaja. Israel constructed the Separation Barrier in a route which surrounds Al-Walaja on three sides and intentionally runs close to the built-up area of the village. Only the western side of Walaja has remained unblocked, but now the new plan aims to construct the settlement there. **This will result in turning Al-Walaja into an isolated enclave surrounded on all sides.**

Along with the New Settlement Israel intends to Extend the Separation Barrier Demolishing Homes and Completely Surrounding Al-Walaja 360 Degrees

In today's discussion at the Civil Administration the planners explained that in coordination with the Israeli army the plan is to include the construction of a 7 meters high concrete wall along the western edge of the built up area of Al-Walaja. When asked about homes in the village that the route of the intended wall seems to pass through the planner gave a mixed answer: At first he claimed that the route will keep away from the homes. But then he corrected himself saying that since Al-Walaja does not have an outline plan the homes are probably illegal and so would be "demolished without a problem".

Construction of the settlement will take over Al-Walaja land reserves. Surrounded in a complete circle by the separation barrier Al-Walaja will be completely isolated from nearby Beit Jalla, Bethlehem and the Palestinian space around it. The fact the existing settlement and the new one exist on two sides of Al-Walaja with the village separating them will greatly increase the Israeli motivation to demolish homes in the village as well as take other steps against the Al-Walaja community.

As will be explained below the threat of the new settlement is part of a series of Israeli moves in the last decade. Israel has been consistently taking over Al-Walaja land, isolating

it and demolishing homes in the village.

Committee's Decision on the Plan

During the discussion committee members pointed to several areas where information was lacking: There was no data on the need for more than doubling the population of Har Gilo. Data and also some infrastructure and environmental issues. The open part of the discussion ended without deciding whether to approve the plan for deposit or wait until the needed information was supplied. This decision was made in the part of the discussion not open to the public and as of yet has not been announced.

While Advancing Settlements on Al-Walaja Lands, Israel Refuses to Allow Any Construction in Al-Walaja. Dozens of Homes are Under Threat of Immediate Demolition

In 1967 Israel drew the annexation line of East Jerusalem through Al-Walaja annexing its northern part while its southern part remained under the Civil Administration. This southern part is today mainly in Area C and only a tiny area of Al-Walaja is in Area B. This means that planning and building decisions in nearly all the village are in the hands of Israeli authorities.

Since 1967, Israel has never approved an outline plan for the northern part of the village which was annexed to Jerusalem and has therefore for 53 residents are denied the possibility to obtain building permits. Nowadays the Jerusalem District is refusing to advance an outline plan initiated by the village residents. Likewise an outline plan for the Area C part of the village is not being advanced on instructions from the government.

Over the decades many dozens of homes were demolished in the village. Since 2016 Israeli demolitions intensified in the part of the village annexed to Jerusalem and currently more than half the homes there are under threat of demolition.

The combined effect of turning Al-Walaja into a small enclave isolated on all sides by both the Separation Barrier, the existing Har Gilo settlement and the planned new settlement along with the aggressive home demolitions which have intensified since 2016 will put the existence of Al-Walaja at real risk.

The formal reason given for denying Al-Walaja an outline plan is that the area should be an open area because of its environmental value. Now the Israeli authorities are advancing the new settlement on Al-Walaja land -- with the same environmental value.

A Big Part of Al-Walaja Land was already Seized for a National Park as part of the "Greater Jerusalem" Vision

In 2010, hundreds of dunams were seized for the construction of the Separation Barrier around the village. Since the barrier was built very close to the built-up area of the village, it disconnected the village from 1,000 dunams of their agricultural lands which are now on the Israeli side of the Barrier. In parallel to the construction of the Barrier, Israel has declared the area disconnected from the village as a national park by the name of "Nahal Rephaim".

Currently, residents can still access their lands on the Israeli side of the Barrier through a long detour where the Separation Barrier ends. In 2018, Israel began to relocate the checkpoint from its current location to a location closer to the village with the aim of completely blocking Palestinian access to the area. Israeli authorities declared that this was needed in order to begin operating the national park.

The relocation of the checkpoint has not yet been completed due to legal and other obstacles and as of now, Al-Walaja residents are still able to reach their lands. However, residents are facing increasing harassment from Israeli soldiers as well as municipal and park inspectors.

Conclusion

In the past decade a series of Israeli moves have taken over more and more of Al-Walaja land and gradually isolating it. These are now culminating with the intention to construct the new settlement on the land reserves on the western side of Al-Walaja and to extend the separation barrier so as to complete the encircling of the village.

As Al-Walaja will turn into an isolated enclave which lacks an outline plan its residents will be especially vulnerable to increasing home demolitions and other Israeli sanctions. Since the village will separate the new settlement from the existing Har Gilo we are likely to see

increasing Israeli actions against Al-Walaja and its residents which will put their future existence at risk.

Please address all inquiries to:

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**Please note that Amy Cohen, Ir Amim's Director of International Relations and Advocacy, is currently on maternity leave.*



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Kristin McCarthy <kmccarthy@fmep.org>
To: Aviv Tatarsky <aviv@ir-amim.org.il>

Thu, Oct 15, 2020 at 4:36 PM

Question: Peace Now reported that the Har Gilo West plan was approved for deposit. Your report says the decision is unknown. Checking if anything has changed on your end - - and if you can confirm that the plan was approved for deposit.

Thanks Aviv!

Kristin

[Quoted text hidden]

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Aviv Tatarsky <aviv@ir-amim.org.il>
To: Kristin McCarthy <kmccarthy@fmep.org>

Thu, Oct 15, 2020 at 11:25 PM

Hi

After we sent our alert, media reported that the plan was approved for deposit. I prefer to wait for official decisions published and that has not happened yet. Perhaps Peace Now did get something more official than media reports - you should check with them too.

Aviv

From: Kristin McCarthy <kmccarthy@fmep.org>

Sent: Friday, October 16, 2020 12:36 AM

To: Aviv Tatarsky <aviv@ir-amim.org.il>

Subject: Fwd: A Plan for Expanding Har Gilo Creates a Major New Threat for Al-Walaja

[Quoted text hidden]

Kristin McCarthy <kmccarthy@fmep.org>

To: Aviv Tatarsky <aviv@ir-amim.org.il>

Fri, Oct 16, 2020 at 7:47 AM

Thanks Aviv. Hagit says unequivocally that it was approved for deposit. Thanks again!

Kristin

[Quoted text hidden]