
Shamasneh family's eviction represents bold new settler thrust in heart of East Jerusalem

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Tue, Sep 5, 2017 at 8:10 AM



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Earlier this morning, the Shamasneh family was evicted from its home in Sheikh Jarrah – the site of recently reactivated plans to settle this key area in the band of Palestinian neighborhoods surrounding the Old City. Settlers assumed a presence in the home soon after the Shamasnehs were removed. The family remains outside with a number of community activists, international representatives, and local and international press, maintaining the call for an international presence outside its home.

The Shamasneh family's personal struggle has political import for East Jerusalem as a whole. Their home sits on a parcel of land in the Um Haroun section of Sheikh Jarrah in which four master plans for settler compounds – several entailing eviction of Palestinian families – are now being promoted. Sheikh Jarrah itself is a hotspot within the historically rich belt of land around the Old City known to settlers as the “Holy [or Historic] Basin.” On August 25, in an [article for the *Jerusalem Post*](#), Jerusalem City Councilman and Director of the Israel Land Fund, Arie King, declared that in 10 years' time, Sheikh Jarrah will be home to 400 Jewish families.

The Shamasneh family's eviction testifies to the rapid pace with which these threats are now being carried out. Just two months ago, on July 3, Ir Amim announced that the “Historic Basin” was being targeted in [plans for 1,700 housing units around East Jerusalem advancing to the District Committee](#):

The most problematic of the plans involve those being advanced in Sheikh Jarrah, long a hotbed of radical private settlement activity within the Historic Basin. In addition to putting new facts on the ground in the most contested area of East Jerusalem, several of these plans call for demolition of Palestinian homes and displacement of Palestinian residents, some of whom enjoy protected tenancy status. Two plans are being promoted by City Councilman Arie King, also the founder and director of the Israel Land Fund. Of key importance is the Glassman Campus ([see map](#)), which has been dormant in the planning system for several years. The plan (TPS 68858) calls for a new 7-story building at the entrance of Sheikh Jarrah designed to serve as a yeshiva and dormitories. Despite the fact that the master plan for the area designates the plot for public buildings to benefit the local population, the Municipality has demonstrated strenuous support for the plan. In the version now moving forward, space on the first floor has been allocated for services in an apparent effort to resolve this planning dilemma.

The significance of the Glassman project cannot be underestimated. Creation of a residential compound housing dozens of young religious men at the entrance to Sheikh Jarrah will exacerbate

simmering tensions in the neighborhood while strengthening settlers' hold on this Palestinian neighborhood. Together with King's projects, as well as plans for a new Bituach Leumi building and office building, these plans will form a block of settlement from the entrance to Sheikh Jarrah deep into the neighborhood.

Less than two weeks later, on July 16, the District Planning and Building Committee fast tracked all of the plans in Sheikh Jarrah by approving them for deposit for objections.

The Shamasneh family has been fighting a protracted court battle to remain in the home it has inhabited since 1964. [Since the final Supreme Court decision in 2013](#), they have been living under indefinite threat of eviction. Today's execution of their long delayed displacement not only represents the urgency of the situation in Sheikh Jarrah but the overall speed and severity with which plans in and around the entire perimeter of the Old City are being promoted. In addition to Sheikh Jarrah, the neighborhood of Silwan – just south of the Old City – is site of multiple interrelated trends including the wholesale private settler takeover of the entire [Batan al-Hawa](#) neighborhood, an uptick in house demolitions, and ongoing privatization of major tourist sites to radical settler groups.

During Prime Minister Netanyahu's two most recent terms, there has been a dramatic uptick in private settlement activities within the Old City and surrounding Palestinian neighborhoods – activities that are both openly and covertly supported by the Israeli government. (See [October 2016 data](#) here). These settlers serve as human facts on the ground, helping to consolidate Israeli control of the highly contested "Historic Basin" – the eye of the core of the conflict – in advance of any prospective process to revive negotiations. Today, there are [roughly 2,500 radical settlers](#) living in these highly flammable neighborhoods.

Today's eviction of the Shamasneh family symbolizes the boldness with which these settlement activities in the most sensitive part of East Jerusalem are now being executed – with the full backing of the state – and the pressing need to halt this escalation of events in order to preserve the waning viability of the two state solution.

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