

FOUNDATION FOR  
MIDDLE EAST PEACE

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## Alert: Elad settlers organization take over parking lot and access road in Hinnom Valley/Silwan

1 message

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To: Kristin McCarthy <kmccarthy@fmep.org>

Tue, Aug 2, 2022 at 1:30 PM

עמק שווה  
عمق شبيه  
Emek Shaveh

2 August 2022

### Update:

### Elad Settlers take over Parking Lot and Access Road in Wadi Rababa Neighborhood of Silwan

\* Settlers of the Elad Foundation received the right to develop the Sambuski Cemetery in the Hinnom Valley adjacent to the Wadi Rababa neighborhood in Silwan \* In the past three weeks Elad has undertaken works to block an access road that runs outside the burial area and which serves over 1000 Palestinian residents. \* Despite repeated attempts by residents, Emek Shaveh, and activists to involve the relevant authorities and persuade them to halt the works, the Jerusalem Municipality, the police, the Nature and Parks Authority and the Israel Antiquity Authority have either denied responsibility or issued empty promises \* The developments around the Sambuski cemetery are just the latest in a process of expansion into the section of the Hinnom Valley that lies east of the Green Line where the Elad Foundation together with the Nature and Parks Authority are reshaping the landscape, building tourist attractions and paving new routes, much of this on private Palestinian land.

### Recent Developments at the Sambuski Cemetery:

The Samsuski Cemetery located on the south-eastern slopes of Mount Zion served the poor Jews of Jerusalem during the late Ottoman period. Today the cemetery is no longer in use, and suffers from neglect. The cemetery is situated between the neighborhood of Silwan and the Hinnom Valley. An unpaved road that runs beneath the area of the graves but still within the declared area of the cemetery serves 150 Palestinian families living in the Wadi Rababa neighborhood of Silwan (also called "Haret el-Sumerin). Part of the cemetery, which has been neglected for decades has become a makeshift parking lot (the parking lot is not situated on the burial area). The cemetery is located within the area of the Jerusalem Walls National Park although the cemetery itself and the area of the road belong to the General Custodian who empowered the Sephardi Burial Society to manage the cemetery and who, in turn, have recently given Elad permission to rehabilitate the cemetery including the access road and parking lot used by the Palestinian residents.

For the Elad Foundation the cemetery is a strategic site as it links together two important focal points of its enterprise - the neighborhood of Silwan, home to the City of David archaeological park and specifically to the Pool of Siloam at the southern tip of the site, and the Hinnom Valley an area which Elad has been developing for the past two years (more below).



Tractor at the Samsuski Cemetery with Silwan homes in the background

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, works commenced on the lower tier of the cemetery entailing

heavy machinery. Boulders were placed to block areas used for parking. The residents were also informed that a gate will be placed at the entrance to the dirt road. The implication is that over 1000 residents will not be able to access their homes by car. On July 7<sup>th</sup>, the Palestinian residents, the municipality, the police, representatives of the INPA, the Elad Foundation and Emek Shaveh met at the site. The officials from the municipality were not familiar with the plans for the area. However, the police and representatives of the municipality reassured the residents that alternatives would be considered. It was agreed that all the parties would meet again on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July and offer alternatives. In the interim, it was said, the Elad Foundation was only allowed to conduct cleaning activities. A representative of the Elad Foundation also told us by phone that there was no need for building permits for their activity. Despite the understanding between the parties, on Sunday 10.7 (which was also Eid el-Adha), the Elad Foundation returned to the area and continued the works. Also, they did not show up to the meeting set for the 17<sup>th</sup>. Since then, there has been friction on a daily basis between the residents and Elad employees over access to the parking spaces.

In response to a query by Deputy Mayor Yosi Havilio to the INPA, Director General Raya Shuraki claimed that the authority has no jurisdiction over the area except to prevent misuse for purposes other than those allowed within a national park. The latter also claimed that inspectors from the municipality who had overseen the works said they did not require a building permit.

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### **Background:**

For twenty-five years consecutive governments in Israel have been cooperating with right-wing organizations in an effort to "recreate" a biblical landscape in Jerusalem's Historic Basin. During this period more and more land and important sites have been transferred to the Elad settlers' organization who have been contracted to operate the sites. The most renowned site is the City of David Archaeological Park in the neighborhood of Silwan. But there are also others in the Emek Tzurim national park and the Mount of Olives. Elad is also working on new projects in the Peace Forest and the Kidron Valley.

Most recently, Elad has launched several ventures in an area called the Hinnom Valley, an ancient valley which for millennia had served as the city's necropolis. From a geopolitical perspective, the valley comprises areas of diverse status. Its western section is inside sovereign Israel, a portion of the valley is known as no-man's land while its eastern part is in the Occupied Territories. On the Palestinian side to the south, it borders the neighborhood of

Abu Tor, to the northeast it abuts the neighborhoods of Wadi Hilweh and Wadi Rababa in Silwan, and meets Al-Bustan, another neighborhood in Silwan. Until two years ago the valley was a green zone that served as a recreational space for both Palestinians and Israelis for picnics, rock climbing and horseback riding. The valley is included within the Jerusalem Walls National Park (declared 1974) which has helped preserve and protect its ancient landscape from modern development. The government body responsible for the overall management of the national park is the Nature and Parks Authority (INPA).



Hinnom Valley and Silwan in July

Over the last few years, the settlers together with governmental authorities have been advancing plans for the development of the section of the valley beyond the Green Line. The land in this stretch of the valley consists of land considered "absentee property", and private plots owned by residents of Silwan which in 2018 were appropriated through **gardening orders**, a legal mechanism used by local authorities to develop uncultivated private land for the public benefit. The projects advanced in the area over the past few years include the **Jerusalem cable car** (recently given the green light by the High Court of Justice) a **suspension** bridge and a "House in the Valley", a café and events facility built by the Elad Foundation. Last summer the Elad Foundation launched yet another tourism site called "**The Center for Ancient Agriculture**", an educational farm aimed at teaching biblical farming methods to high-school students at the center of the valley. Much of the farm is built on private land belonging to Palestinian families from Silwan.

The Elad Foundation and the Nature and Parks Authority are also cultivating land and building terraces on the slopes of Mount Zion (including the Sambusky Cemetery), also on private Palestinian land or land governed by the General Custodian or the Custodian for Absentee properties. **The landowners who have worked their land for decades** (although have not been able to develop it since it was declared part of the national park) have petitioned against the gardening orders that have enabled the Nature and Parks Authority and Elad to carry out landscaping work including the construction of terraces, planting and the creation of footpaths while prohibiting the Palestinian landowners from any kind of intervention on their land apart from olive picking.



Members of the families who own land in the Hinnom Valley (source: Ohad Zeugenberg, [Haaretz](#))

Over the past few months the Elad Foundation who have been given a ten year lease from the Nature and Parks Authority to run activities at the agricultural center and the surrounding area have been hosting groups of school children as part of their **educational curriculum**. All these activities have introduced significant tensions into the area and have led to altercations between the Palestinian landowners and employees of the Elad Foundation and the INPA, including a **violent incident** at the end of May where a member of the Sumrin family, one of the families who own land in the Hinnom Valley, was seriously injured by a rock to his face. As of writing, despite the fact that there is a video recording of the event there have been no arrests made of the Jewish-Israeli workers involved in the violence.



School Children in a ministry of education youth program (Shelach) working at the Center for Ancient Agriculture which consists of land belonging to Palestinian families in Silwan.

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### **Elad and the Nature and Parks Authority:**

The Nature and Parks Authority was mandated in 1998 to oversee all the national parks and nature reserves in Israel and in East Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the declaration of the national park over a large residential area has created an anomaly whereby thousands of residents are constrained by severe conservation demands. This was exacerbated twenty years ago when the Nature and Parks Authority subcontracted the Elad Foundation, an organization devoted to settling Jews in Silwan, to develop and operate the City of David archaeological park. Since then, the relationship between the authority and the Elad Foundation has only grown stronger. Workers wearing t-shirts with both organization's logos attest to seamless cooperation on the ground. A recent article (in [Local Call](#), Hebrew) reported that two months before he completed his term as director general of the INPA, Shaul Goldstein had signed a lease with the Elad Foundation extending their contract enabling them to operate the City of David site for ten years, rather than three which is the standard duration of a contract of this kind. It was further disclosed that the reason for the unusual length of the contract was that Goldstein had procured a major donor for the Elad Foundation who conditioned his grant to Elad on a longer lease with the INPA.

The contract between the Elad Foundation and the INPA for the Hinnom Valley, signed in 2020 for five years and extended for another five years in October 2021 is just the latest in a series of partnerships between the two bodies. This particular contract was processed without a tender in accordance with clause (30)3 of the regulations governing tenders, which allows government authorities to enter into a contractual relationship with a private body so long as it is either a scientific, cultural or educational initiative. According to the [contract](#), the INPA will invest 100,000 NIS whereas the Elad Foundation will invest 5 million NIS over a year.

The agreement between Elad and the INPA for the valley included a map which delineates the area where works are permitted (see map no.1 ). Interestingly, sections of the valley which are not included within the current area of the national park were also handed over to Elad in the framework of the contract. The mystery was resolved last February when a plan (no. 674788) for expanding the boundaries of the national park by 25% was slated to be discussed by the District Planning Committee in February 2022. The areas slated for expansion included the [Mount of Olives](#) and areas within the Hinnom Valley-Abu Tor area. A comparison between the map of the expansion plan and the map of the agreement between Elad and the INPA clarified that the areas promised to Elad which are **not currently** under the auspices of the INPA, will come under its auspices if the expansion plan is approved. A [letter](#) of condemnation by the Churches over the plan to expand the National Park into the Mount of Olives resulted in the plan being taken off the agenda, but it is once again on the planning committee's agenda for December 2022 (see map #2 and 3).

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### מיזם משותף גיא בן הינום



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Map of the area of Hinnom Valley delineating (in red) the area for the joint initiative of Elad and the INPA from the contract between Elad and the INPA for the Hinnom Valley



Map # 2 National Park with planned expansion area in dark green



Map 3. Same as map no. 1 but with expansion area of the National Park marked in blue.

**Emek Shaveh:** The events in the Hinnom Valley/Wadi Rababa should be understood in the context of an overall strategy promoted by the settlers and all the relevant authorities to change the identity and demographic composition of the area surrounding the Historic Basin. To this end, all the bureaucratic mechanisms (National Park, Absentee Property Law, Gardening Orders) are being recruited. As the series of events in the Hinnom Valley/Wadi Rababa area vividly illustrate, the expansion of Elad's touristic ventures entail incremental displacement of Palestinians from their lands and the erosion of Jerusalem as a multicultural historic city. While the settlers of the Elad Foundation are clearly driving this process, it would not be possible without the full cooperation of the Nature and Parks Authority, the municipality and the police.

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