

Toward a point of no return: Lifting the political restraints in East Jerusalem

In the last quarter of 2010, we witnessed a salient and significant change in Israeli government policy towards East Jerusalem. This policy is turning Jerusalem into a political battleground, rather than preserving its stability.

The change began to emerge in the last days of September 2010, when Israel's commitment to refrain from new construction in the West Bank settlements expired. Although East Jerusalem was not formally included in that commitment, a high level of restraint was evident during that time in all areas of Israeli activity in East Jerusalem: in construction, demolitions, settlement activity and police action.

This restraint was exercised over the Jerusalem Municipality, the District Planning Committee and other parties active in East Jerusalem by the Prime Minister's office. This became particularly evident after the diplomatic crisis with the US that broke out in March 2010 following the approval of a building plan for the neighborhood of Ramat Shlomo during VP Joe Biden's visit to Israel.

The visible restraint disappeared at the end of September (when the building freeze ended) and was replaced by an aggressive policy, not only concerning construction but extending to almost all aspects of policy that affect the lives of the Palestinians of East Jerusalem. Besides the proliferation of construction plans beyond the Green Line that landed on the drawing boards of the planning committees almost weekly, the loosening of restraints has also been clearly evident in the area of home demolitions and in the nature of the activity of the police and other security organizations, who are targeting the Palestinian political and community leadership in East Jerusalem.

These developments portray a clear picture: **just as the restraint in the previous period was exercised by the Prime Minister's office, so is the current recklessness the result of a political decision.**

Following is a brief overview of the main developments that characterize the current aggressive policy in East Jerusalem.

המלך ג'ורג' 27
ת.ד. 2239
ירושלים 94581

27 King George St.
P.O. Box 2239
Jerusalem 94581

טל.
+972-2-6222858
פקס.
+972-2-6233696

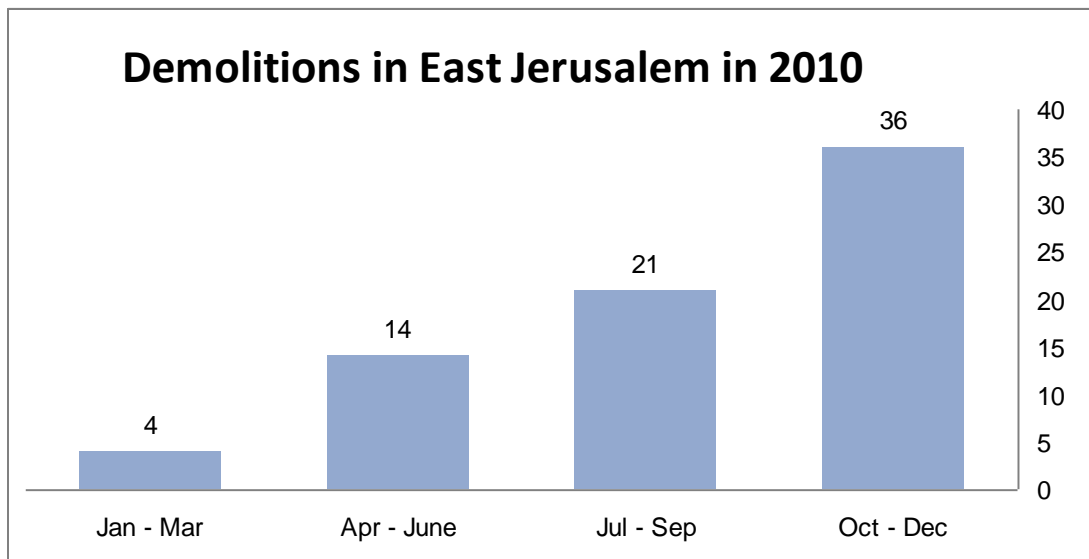
www.ir-amim.org.il
mail@ir-amim.org.il

Demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures

During the first period of 2010 there was a dramatic drop in the number of building demolitions executed either by the Jerusalem Municipality or by the home owners themselves – in the face of heavy pressure by the authorities and in order to save the expenses imposed on the home owner after a home is demolished by the city. Until mid June, only 5 Palestinian structures were demolished, including 2 homes.

During the period of restraint, control on demolitions was exercised from the Office of the Prime Minister through the Israeli police. Without police protection, demolitions cannot be carried out in East Jerusalem.

Despite this restraint in the first period, the number of building demolitions in 2010 reflects a continuation of the policies of the last years). In the second half of 2010: from mid-June to December 2010, 69 demolitions were carried out, of which 26 were inhabited buildings.



When restraints were eased, demolitions were carried out with an intensity that cannot be conveyed by the numbers. In a disruptively random way, security forces and bulldozers have entered the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis in the final quarter of 2010.

From the beginning of January 2011 to this writing no less than another 14 buildings were demolished, two of which were inhabited. This intense demolition activity goes far beyond the normal exercise of municipal control over building regulations. Rather, it serves as a powerful tool of control over the Palestinian population in Jerusalem.

It is also worth noting the partial demolition of the Shepherd Hotel in Sheikh Jarrah that took place in early January for the construction of a new Israeli settlement. Although this demolition was not part of the policy of demolishing Palestinian buildings built without building permits, it is part of an equally significant trend of attempting to stifle Palestinian presence, both concrete and symbolic, in the area of Jerusalem's historic basin.

Advancing Israeli presence in Palestinian neighborhoods

With the lifting of political restraint in the last months of 2010, there has been a spree of settlement activity in the Palestinian neighborhoods in and around the Old City -- the "historic basin." Some -- notably the settlement of the Shepherd Hotel in Sheikh Jarrah, and the Beit Orot Yeshiva on the Mount of Olives -- are old plans, whose implementation has long been deterred by the Israeli political echelon -- in deference to fierce international opposition. The Israelization of the historic basin is carried out by settlement and ideological private construction, as well as by government tourist and development projects. **It serves to dilute the Palestinian character of the neighborhoods in the historic basin, and sever the Old City from them.**

Following are the activities that took place in the last quarter:

Sheikh Jarrah

- The Shepherd Hotel -- part of the building was demolished to build 20 housing units according to a building permit from March 18, 2010.
- Eviction proceedings continue against dozens of Palestinian families in the areas of Shimon Hatzadik and Um Harun in order to clear the ground for settlement plans. On March 2, 2010 TPS no. 12705 was opened for the construction of 200 housing units to replace the Palestinian families living in the Shimon Hatzadik area.
- Yeshivat Or Sameach (the Glassman Campus) -- on November 29 a plan to build an international campus for Yeshivat Or Sameach (TPS no. 2639) came up for discussion at the Local Committee and was returned to the planners for amendments.
- Construction of a commercial center and gas station – TPS no. 4811a was deposited by the Local Committee on December 31, 2010.

A-Tur (Mount of Olives)

- Beit Orot - Building permits were issued by the Local Committee on December 13, 2010 for plan no. 3092 to build 24 housing units.
- The Seven Arches Hotel -- in an exceptional move, the Custodian of Absentee Property initiated a plan to expand the Seven Arches Hotel on the Mount of Olives in TPS 14142 to add 75 rooms, two conference halls and a roofed swimming pool. The hotel, owned by the Jordanian royal family, but expropriated under Israel's Absentee Property Law, is increasingly used as a seminar center for tours carried out by settler organizations.
- Hoshen - Settlers entered another apartment following a court decision in a case of disputed ownership.

Ras al-Amud

- Maale Zeitim -- families moved into the expansion of Maale Zeitim (60 units).
- Maale David – construction of 30 housing units continues inside a building that served the West Bank Police. The project is planned for 104 units.

Silwan

- The Abu Nab house – in December it became known that a “price tag” had been attached to the evacuation of Beit Yehonatan. The Mayor threatened to couple the court-ordered evacuation with eviction of over 50 Palestinians from the neighboring Abu Nab family. Ateret Cohanim claims ownership of the building (which before 1948 served as a synagogue), and has requested eviction of the family.

- Museum – in January 2011, the Jerusalem Municipality's Finance Committee decided to fund, with the Ministry of Tourism, a new museum in the Spring House (the Abbasi house) in Silwan. This decision was contested by opposition city council members, and will be reconsidered next week. Total public funding: NIS 2 million.

Jabel Mukabbar

- Nof Zion - In the past weeks a group of investors including Palestinian Bashar Masri bid for the purchase of Digal Investments and Holdings, the owners of the Nof Zion settlement in Jabel Mukabbar, with building rights for an additional 395 housing units. When this came to light, Jewish groups pressured the bondholders to reject Masri's offer, and recruited Jewish investors instead – including Jerusalem city councilman and businessman, Rami Levy.
- The eviction of the Karain family (14 people) and the entry of settlers connected to Elad (23.11.2010).

The government's 2011 budget allocated more than NIS 70 million for the private security of settlers in East Jerusalem -- a 40% increase over 2010.

Arrest of political activists

In December the Israeli army, through the Commander of Homeland Security, issued a temporary restraining order against Adnan Gheith, a well-known activist against home demolitions in Silwan, preventing him from entering Jerusalem for four months. This type of restraining order, based on the Mandatory Emergency Regulations from 1946, has not been used in Jerusalem for decades. Such orders allow the government to banish a person from his town and home without filing charges against him and without presenting evidence of illegal activity. Other political leaders who were detained for questioning over the past weeks have reported that their interrogators told them the Israeli security authorities have a list of hundreds of political activists from East Jerusalem who could very shortly be in Adnan Gheith's situation.

Several other prominent activists from Silwan's local leadership have been arrested and detained over the past weeks, including Jawad Siyam, the founder of the Wadi Hilweh Information Center, and Fakhri Abu Diyab, a member of the Silwan residents' committee, who was arrested with his 19-year-old son. Siyam is currently under house arrest for an indefinite period.

This use of administrative detention and restraint – rather than the normal legal processes – raises concern that Israel is using security claims to violate the freedom of assembly of Jerusalem's Palestinian residents and to silence political dissidents – preempting opposition to the above policies.

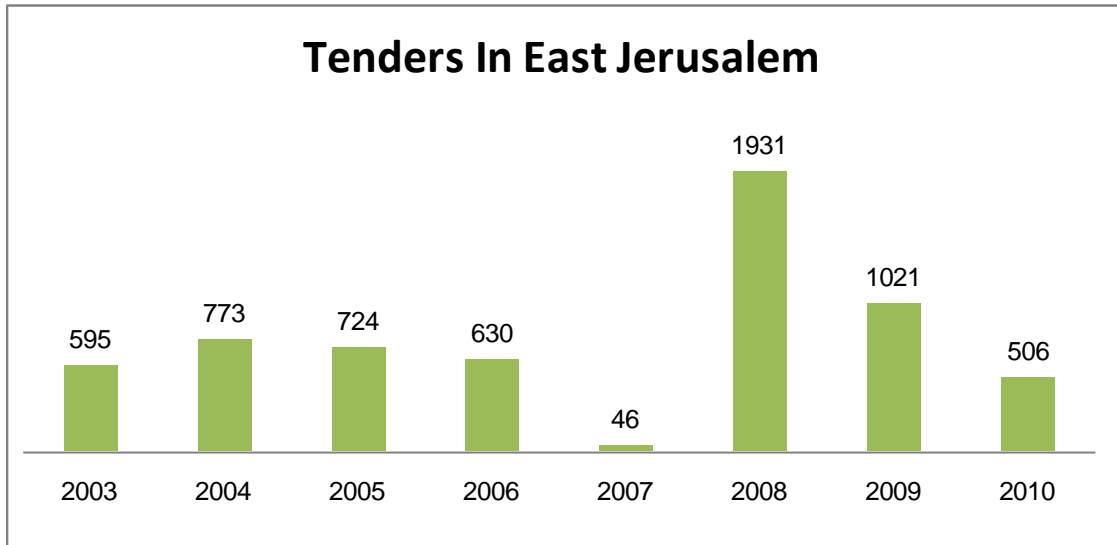
Advancing Israeli building plans in East Jerusalem

During the period of political restraint, the Israeli planning authorities almost completely refrained from promoting new building plans for Israelis in East Jerusalem:

- no new plans for Israeli construction in East Jerusalem were allowed on the agenda of the District Planning Committee; and none were submitted for public review;

- no new building tenders were offered by the Israel Lands Authority.

As the following graph indicates, this curtailed the number of new housing units offered in tenders to contractors in 2010.



This policy of restraint has been abandoned over the last months, when we have witnessed a flood of building plans, whose approval has been pursued vigorously. Many of these plans concern Israeli neighborhoods on the southern side of the city and extend the boundaries of these neighborhoods closer to the nearby Palestinian neighborhoods, while preventing the development of the latter. The vigorous pursuit of these plans raises the suspicion that Israel is trying to create a new geopolitical reality on the southeast side of Jerusalem, to establish the boundaries of Jerusalem by facts on the ground along the route of the fence instead of through political negotiations.

In the last months, almost 4000 housing units have been promoted:

- 80 units in new tenders offered in Pisgat Ze'ev
- 3480 units in new building plans

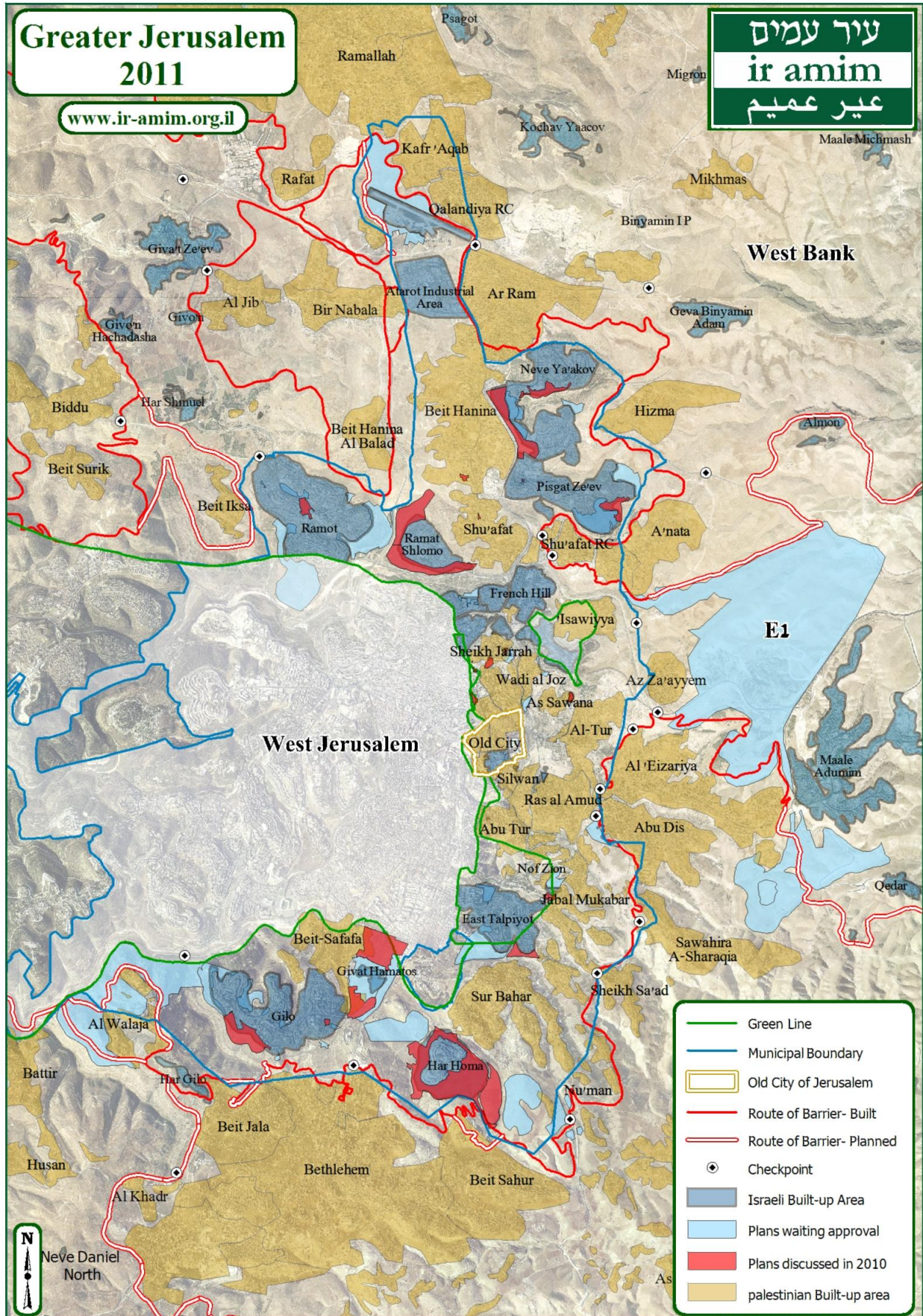
Building Plans Promoted in Fourth Quarter 2010

Neighborhood	TPS #	Status	Number of Units
Gilo (abutting Sharafat/Beit Safafa)	13290	Approved for public review by District Comm. Dec. 14, 2010	130 – in 3 towers
Gilo (southern slopes)	13261	File opened November 2010	1380
Har Homa C	10310	Submitted for public review November 5, 2010	983
Har Homa B	12825	Submitted for public review November 2010	42
Pisgat Zeev (extending neighborhood to Beit Hanina)	11647	Submitted for public review November 25, 2010	625
Ramot	4820	Submitted for public review Nov. 5	320
Total Units			3480

Greater Jerusalem 2011

www.ir-amim.org.il

עיר עמים
ir amim
عير عميم



Among the most noteworthy building plans being pursued in this area are those along the the southern boundary of East Jerusalem: the expansion of Har Homa, by building 1000 housing units that will abut the route of the separation fence; the plan to build 130 housing units in the neighborhood of Gilo (on the line that separates it from Beit Safafa); and the plan (currently in the District Committee) to build the new neighborhood of Givat Hamatos on the southern boundary of Beit Safafa. These plans isolate Beit Safafa, and **line the route of the Separation Barrier with Israeli construction, with the aim of turning the Barrier into a settled border.**

A similar strategy is being employed, although with less intensity, in the north: at the end of November a plan to build 625 housing units in Pisgat Ze'ev was deposited for objections; their construction will extend Pisgat Ze'ev up to the boundary of Beit Hanina.

See the map above for all building plans promoted in 2010.

Where do these policies lead?

Although each development does not represent new policy in East Jerusalem, taken together, they indicate a qualitative change. **Israeli national and municipal authorities are operating in sync with settlement organizations in pursuit of an aggressive agenda that aims to repress, cognitively and concretely, the Palestinian character of East Jerusalem.**

The processes described above are turning Jerusalem into a political battleground, rather than preserving its stability. They threaten to create a reality in Jerusalem in which the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem are isolated slums within a vast Israeli metropolis reaching far into the West Bank. This undermines a political settlement based on two capitals in Jerusalem, and denies Israel what it most seeks: security and world recognition of its capital.

Therefore, Ir Amim calls on Israeli authorities to halt the provocative settlement activity in the heart of East Jerusalem, and to re-establish the political restraints exercised earlier in 2010 by the office of the Prime Minister.

In addition, Ir Amim calls on Israeli authorities to halt the harassment and obstruction of Palestinian civil society leadership and institutions, and to allow them to operate freely and legally, in coordination with Palestinian national leadership – in order to preserve the community and to help serve its needs.

Finally, it is important to restore the political terms of debate in Jerusalem to the understanding that Jerusalem is, essentially, a city of two nations and three world religions.