

Indeed, A Double Standard

What Jerusalem needs at this time is just allocation of resources to both parts of the city and recognition of the fact that it serves as the home of the two nations that lead their lives in it

By Oren Haber, social media coordinator at Ir Amim

[Published March 5, 2017 in *Maariv*]

Nadav Haetzni wrote recently in *Maariv* that in East Jerusalem and the West Bank “A double standard of enforcement and demolition has taken root: One strict and inflexible law for Jews, and another law, lenient and lax, for Arabs” (“Laughing all the Way to Amona,” February 15, 2017). Special attention was devoted in his article to construction in Kufr Aqab, a neighborhood that has been cut off from Jerusalem by the Separation Barrier although its residents hold Israeli ID cards – a fact that was omitted by Haetzni. The claim that the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem, a population that is discriminated against in all aspects – planning and construction, enforcement, education and municipal services – enjoys far-reaching leniency relative to Jewish residents is completely groundless and even ridiculous. But the situation in the East Jerusalem neighborhoods beyond the Separation Barrier in particular requires a more in-depth look.

It is estimated that close to 100,000 people live in the neighborhoods within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem that were cut off from the city by the Separation Barrier – about one third of the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. At least half of the residents of the neighborhoods beyond the Barrier previously lived within the boundaries of the Barrier, and were pushed out over the past decade following a governmental and municipal policy that enables almost no legal construction in East Jerusalem, and as a result of mounting socioeconomic pressures. The residents of the neighborhoods beyond the Barrier have become “displaced in their own city.” As an [Ir Amim report from 2015](#) describes, the residents of these neighborhoods face almost total neglect on the part of the Municipality and the government in the areas of infrastructure, education, and services, among other essential supports. Last year it was reported that residents of Ras Khamis were compelled to pave a road for their neighborhood on their own after despairing of the possibility that the Municipality would do it for them. Last year, after more than a decade of neglect and only after intensive efforts by the neighborhood committee, together with Ir Amim, the first fire station was opened in the Kufr Aqab area – the only fire station within the neighborhoods beyond the Barrier.

Like other municipal agencies, the law enforcement agencies also stay out of these neighborhoods. The Shuafat refugee camp, for example, has no police station, opening the doors to extensive criminal activity in the camp. The residents themselves have voiced a need for a stronger response against such activities, but find themselves completely forsaken. The policies that encourage migration of Palestinian residents beyond the Barrier do not constitute a kind of preferential treatment but rather the opposite; these policies constitute abandonment of the residents without services and proper infrastructure, creating extreme crowding and unregulated, unstable construction that would likely endanger the residents in case of a natural disaster. Despite all of this, the Palestinians of East Jerusalem are willing to squeeze into these neighborhoods in order to preserve the link to the city that is the center of their life and to protect their residency status, which is often threatened by the authorities.

Looking at East Jerusalem as a whole, it is almost superfluous to say that the authorities do not turn a blind eye to unlicensed construction by Palestinian residents – indeed, quite the opposite. The year 2016 was a peak year in house demolitions in East Jerusalem, with over 120 residential units and 80 other structures demolished throughout the year. In Qalandia alone, near Kufr Aqab, 37 housing units were demolished. When it comes to building permits in Jerusalem, however, the discrimination against the Palestinians is clear: as noted in a report by the State Comptroller, only 15 percent of building permits in the city are given to East Jerusalem Palestinians, who constitute nearly 40 percent of Jerusalem's population. What Jerusalem needs at this time is not more neglect, destruction and mistreatment but rather just allocation of resources to both parts of the city and recognition of the fact that Jerusalem serves as the home of the two nations that lead their lives in it.