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East Jerusalem in the Shadow of the War: Acceleration of New Settlements Juxtaposed with a Stark Rise in Home Demolitions

Policy Brief

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Introduction

Since the outbreak of the war six months ago, there has been a major acceleration in the promotion and fast-tracking of new settlement plans in East Jerusalem and a dramatic spike in the rate of demolitions of Palestinian homes. The Israeli government is clearly exploiting the war to create more facts on the ground to predetermine the final status of Jerusalem and thwart all prospects for a negotiated political agreement, while forcibly displacing Palestinians from their homes and the city.

Measures are being taken to establish eight brand-new settlements in East Jerusalem within or adjacent to Palestinian neighborhoods with a total of over 12,000 housing units (*see map and details below*). Plans for five of these settlements have advanced since October 7, two of which were approved (Givat Shaked, Lower Aqueduct). While attention is diverted to the catastrophic war in Gaza and its regional implications, the Israeli government is busy constructing Givat Hamatos, which is slated to become the first new settlement built beyond the Green Line in Jerusalem in over two decades. Givat Hamatos was once a longstanding international redline (along with E1) due to its lethal impact on the viability of a two-state framework with two capitals in Jerusalem.

In juxtaposition to this major surge in new settlement advancements, demolitions of Palestinian homes have reached unparalleled levels since the start of the war. This constitutes a form of collective punishment and part of a series of repressive measures currently being employed by Israel against Palestinians under its control. **Between October 7, 2023—March 10, 2024, 98 homes were demolished, which marks a nearly two-fold monthly increase compared to the period preceding the war. With the end of Ramadan, there is acute alarm that the rate of demolitions will only continue to spike** (*The Israeli authorities halted demolitions during the month of Ramadan as they have done in the past*).

While several countries have recently imposed sanctions on settlers who have perpetrated violence or forced Palestinians from their lands in the West Bank, an equal if not greater magnitude of violence and displacement of Palestinians is carried out by state bodies, especially in East Jerusalem. One of the most severe expressions of this is the policy of demolitions and housing deprivation, which constitutes a form of state violence and increasingly serves as a tool of Palestinian displacement under the guise of building regulation enforcement. Such a practice is not only a violation of International Law with severe humanitarian consequences, but also breeds more enmity, radicalization, and violence among the population. The unwavering support and military aid which Israel continues to enjoy while defying international demands to cease measures, like home demolitions and settlement activity, further embolden the Israeli government and erode conditions for a just political resolution, which will secure freedom, equality, peace, and security for both peoples living in this land.

In parallel to re-charting a path towards a negotiated solution, it is critical to also address the *here and the now* - the current one-state reality of systematic oppression and unequal rights in Jerusalem that is a direct result of Israeli policies and practices on the ground. As the occupying power, the Israeli government bears the responsibility to afford East Jerusalem residents with the most fundamental rights, while refraining from measures that undermine these rights and unilaterally determine the political future of the city. In the immediate term, this must include holding Israel accountable to stop settlement building, end all processes of Palestinian displacement, and afford Palestinians with the basic right to shelter through promoting housing opportunities and residential development.

Details of each new settlement plan and corresponding map can be found below the analysis section.

Key Analysis Points on the Acceleration of New Settlements & their Ramifications

The Southern Perimeter: Many of the new settlement plans are strategically designated for areas within or adjacent to Palestinian neighborhoods situated along the southern perimeter of East Jerusalem. If constructed, they would further fracture the Palestinian space while increasing contiguity with the existing settlements in the area and create a “sealing-off” effect of East Jerusalem from Bethlehem and the southern West Bank. Such moves directly undermine conditions necessary for a viable independent Palestinian state with a contiguous capital in East Jerusalem.

Exploitation of Settlement of Land Title (SOLT) Procedures: Nearly all new settlement plans are being advanced in lockstep with formal land registration procedures, known as settlement of land title (SOLT). [As documented by Bimkom and Ir Amim](#), SOLT is being utilized as another form of land theft aimed to expand and finalize state/settler appropriation of land across East Jerusalem for the establishment of new settlements, while increasing the threat of Palestinian dispossession.

Centrality of the General Custodian in the Settlement Enterprise: A significant new trend on the rise is the initiation of plans for new settlements by the Israeli General Custodian. The custodian is a department within the Ministry of Justice responsible for managing abandoned property, including assets in East Jerusalem allegedly owned by Jews prior to 1948, until “reclaimed.” The Custodian has been most associated with the facilitation of forced evictions of Palestinians and settler takeovers of their homes (i.e. in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan) through handing property rights to settler groups. However, more recently, in an unprecedented move, it has begun to initiate settlement plans on lands it administers, which appears to be a breach of its mandate and authority. Bimkom and Ir Amim have recently filed a lawsuit against the General Custodian to challenge this misconduct, demanding that the plans it is promoting be halted.

This development is not surprising given that a settler activist by the name of Hananel Gurfinkel is the head of the economic unit within the General Custodian who is also responsible for managing the properties in East Jerusalem. According to our findings, collaboration between the General Custodian and settler organizations has grown substantially since Gurfinkel was [handed the East Jerusalem portfolio in 2017](#). This is evident in the increase of eviction claims filed against Palestinian families and the initiation of new settlement plans by the Custodian in collaboration with settler groups.

Moreover, the settlement plans in which the General Custodian is involved are being advanced in parallel to SOLT procedures on the respective plots of land. This is likely in order to finalize land ownership rights ahead of the plans’ final approval and/or implementation. This overlap is not surprising considering the General Custodian’s ongoing involvement in the settlement of land title process.

Touristic Settlement/Green Space: The designation of areas as national parks and/or green spaces serves as a form of “touristic settlement” and is a common practice in East Jerusalem used to alter the character of the space, fragment the Palestinian environs, and suppress urban planning, while enabling the seizure of land for Israeli interests. As an example of this, the Mount Scopus Slopes National Park plan, which had been frozen for nearly a decade, was promoted during the war. The plan is designated for the open space behind Mount Scopus between the Palestinian neighborhoods of al-Isawiyyah and a-Tur in East Jerusalem and connects the city with the E1 corridor in the West Bank. This will severely limit proper development of both neighborhoods, including the ability to adequately expand, while increasing Israeli geographic contiguity with E1 where Israel seeks to construct a major new settlement. For more details, [see here](#).

For some, they build; For others, they demolish: Housing Deprivation and Home Demolitions

In contrast to its robust residential development for Israelis across Jerusalem, the Israeli government continues to abdicate responsibility for providing housing opportunities to Palestinians despite them constituting nearly 40% of the city’s population. This plays out in the form of systematically neglecting to advance and/or approve outline plans for Palestinian neighborhoods (or parts of neighborhoods), while selectively imposing home demolitions on the population under the pretext of lacking building permits.

Since 1967, not one new neighborhood has been constructed for Palestinians in East Jerusalem, while existing neighborhoods face major building restrictions. Many of the plans for new settlements are designated for lands either inside Palestinian neighborhoods or directly flanking them. Rather than utilizing these plans to rectify the dire housing crisis among the Palestinian population, the authorities deplete the remaining vacant land in and around Palestinian areas for Israeli settlement. This in turn contributes to deepening the housing deprivation and constricting existing Palestinian neighborhoods, which blocks their necessary expansion to accommodate for population growth. Such policies ultimately lead to an exponential rate of unpermitted building and eventual home demolitions, which serves as a major impediment for Palestinians to remain in the city and ultimately becomes a mechanism of forced displacement. The systemic neglect coupled with the threat of home demolitions deprives Palestinians of the basic right to housing and shelter.

As noted above, since October 7, home demolitions in East Jerusalem have soared, and the pace is only intensifying. While the monthly average prior to October 7 was 10 home demolitions, the rate jumped to 17 between October 7 and the end of 2023. Since the beginning of 2024 until the start of Ramadan (March 10), the monthly average surged to 22 home demolitions, which constitutes a 120% increase.

The government's use of home demolitions as a form of oppression was further underscored on April 7 when it approved the transfer of the National Land Enforcement Unit from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of National Security. This unit is considered the most aggressive of enforcement units and responsible for carrying out demolitions against unauthorized construction in areas including East Jerusalem. The unit’s transfer will place it under the direct

authority of ultranationalist Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, who has made numerous statements calling for the intensification of demolitions, especially in East Jerusalem and localities home to Palestinian citizens of Israel within the Green Line.

Compilation of New Settlement Plans the Israeli Government is Working to Establish (see map)

| Number on Map | Name of new Settlement | No. of Plans | No. of Housing Units | GC* | SOLT** | Promoted during the War | Promoted during 2023 |
|---------------|------------------------|--------------|----------------------|-----|--------|---|--------------------------|
| 1 | Givat Shaked | 2 | 1115 | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| 2 | Givat Hamatos | 3 | 7310 | | yes | 1 plan under construction 1 plan for HU increase | 1 of the plans - yes |
| 3 | Har Homa E | 1 | 540 | | | | Approved in 2021 |
| 4 | Lower Aqueduct | 1 | 1,483 | | | yes | yes |
| 5 | Nofey Rachel | 1 | 650 | yes | yes | | File opened in July 2023 |
| 6 | Umm Lysoon | 1 | 450 | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| 7 | Nof Zahav | 1 | 100 | | yes | | yes |
| 8 | Kidmat Zion | 1 | 384 | yes | | yes | yes |
| Total | | 11 | 12,032*** | | | | |

* GC – General Custodian

** SOLT – Settlement of land title

*** This total refers to all HU in new settlement plans that were advanced both before and after the outbreak of the war.

Details & Status of Settlement Plans

1. Givat Hamatos (SOLT) – 7310 HU

The new Givat Hamatos settlement, together with the existing Har Homa and Gilo settlements and the recently approved Lower Aqueduct plan, will create a settlement wedge along the southern flank and detach East Jerusalem from Bethlehem. The settlement of Givat Hamatos is being promoted in stages with the use of numerous plans: one currently under construction, one advanced in the beginning of April 2024, and a third that was promoted during 2023 prior to the war, which has not yet been approved.

Givat Hamatos A: As noted above, Givat Hamatos A is currently under construction. The plan, which includes 2610 housing units, was approved in 2012 but had remained frozen until 2020 due to US and international opposition. Following the Trump Administration’s release of its “peace plan” in early 2020, [Netanyahu quickly moved to announce](#) the promotion of tenders

for 1257 of these housing units as part of his re-election campaign at the time. The tenders were officially open for bidding in [November 2020](#) against the backdrop of the US election, and their winning bidders announced on [January 20, 2021](#), just hours before the inauguration of US President Biden.

Current Status: In July 2023, [building permits were approved](#) for laying the apartment buildings' foundations, while numerous building permit applications were filed for the construction of the residential units themselves. **Construction is currently underway.**

Tzamarot Plan (Givat Hamatos A Housing Unit Increase): this plan calls for increasing the building capacity in Givat Hamatos A by adding an additional 1200 housing units via building height increase to some of the plots. If the plan is approved, it will effectively enlarge the total number of housing units allocated for Givat Hamatos A from 2610 to 3810 housing units. [See our alert](#) for further details.

Current Status: The District Planning Committee (DPC), which sits within the Ministry of Interior, approved the plan for deposit for objections on April 2, 2024.

New Talpiyot Hill/Hebron Road Strip (formerly known as Givat Hamatos D): The plan calls for 3500 housing units and 1300 hotel rooms on 140 dunams along the eastern edge of Givat Hamatos. It will enlarge the planned settlement in Givat Hamatos by nearly 40% and extend it eastwards towards the settlement of Har Homa, further consolidating Israeli geographical contiguity along the southern border of East Jerusalem. For further details, [see our alert](#).

Current Status: The DPC approved the plan for deposit for objections with conditions on September 11, 2023.

2. Givat Shaked – 1115 HU (SOLT, GC)

Givat Shaked I

This is the first settlement plan to be initiated in a highly unusual move by the General Custodian in lockstep with official land registration procedures (*see explanation above*).

The settlement plan calls for the construction of some 700 housing units on 40 dunams of land in the Palestinian neighborhood of Beit Safafa, including four high-rise towers. As is the case with Givat Hamatos on the other side of Beit Safafa, the Givat Shaked plan is likewise not intended for the community's development needs, but rather for a new Israeli housing project over the Green Line in Jerusalem. If realized, Givat Shaked will further exhaust the area's land reserves and envelop the neighborhood with a built-up Israeli continuum, impeding any ability for its necessary expansion. Construction of this settlement will also stand in stark contrast to the rest of Beit Safafa, dwarfing and engulfing it with high-rise apartment buildings – the likes of which Israeli authorities largely refuse to approve for Palestinian areas. Beyond the geopolitical impact of establishing a new settlement in East Jerusalem, this is yet another extreme example of the depth of housing and urban planning discrimination in the city. For further details on this plan, [see here](#).

Current Status: The DPC rejected all objections and moved to approve the plan on January 4, 2024. The community has filed an appeal with the courts.

Givat Shaked II: this plan, initiated by the DPC itself, will expand Givat Shaked territorially and includes 420 additional housing units and high-rise towers.

Current Status: On April 8, 2024, the District Planning Committee discussed the plan for deposit for objections.

3. Har Homa E – 540 HU

This plan was advanced alongside promotion of the Givat Hamatos A tenders in 2020 after being frozen for years due to international pressure. **The plan was ultimately approved in May 2021, constituting the first new settlement approval in East Jerusalem under the Biden Administration.** While portrayed as an extension of Har Homa, the plan is designated for land entirely detached from the existing settlement. This new settlement would be built just 400 meters from the area designated for the planned settlement in Givat Hamatos, further contributing to the emerging settlement strip between East Jerusalem and the Bethlehem area.

Since the land is private, a tendering stage is not required, and its owners can directly request building permits. As far as we know, permit requests have not yet been filed. While the construction's timeline is more dependent on private developers, the government can still halt it. [See alert for further details.](#)

Current Status: Fully approved in 2021.

4. Lower Aqueduct - 1483 HU

Straddling the Green Line, this plan calls for the construction of a new settlement on roughly 186 dunams of land adjacent to the Palestinian neighborhood of Umm Tuba and sandwiched between the Har Homa settlement and Givat Hamatos. If constructed, it will extend the Israeli settlement block along East Jerusalem's southern flank, further detaching it from the southern West Bank, while fracturing the Palestinian space and depleting more vacant land for Palestinian development. For further details, [see our alert.](#)

Current Status: The plan was fully approved and published in the public record on December 29, 2023, **constituting the first major new settlement plan to be approved in East Jerusalem in over a decade after Givat Hamatos in 2012.**

5. Nofey Rachel - 650 HU (SOLT, GC)

The plan calls for the construction of a new settlement on 29 dunams of land situated along the southern slopes of the Palestinian neighborhood of Umm Tuba-Sur Baher with its boundaries flanking existing Palestinian homes. The plan directly borders the Lower Aqueduct plan, which will extend the Israeli territorial continuum in the area.

The plan was submitted by Nofey Rachel Ltd whose shareholders are the same settler figures behind the settlement plan in [Umm Lysoon and the Nof Tzion settlement](#) in Jabal Mukkaber (*see below*). For several decades, the Israeli General Custodian administered the land until it was released into the

hands of the alleged Jewish landowners in 2015. The Nofey Rachel company claims to have purchased the land from the owners in 2019, and the bloc is currently undergoing settlement of land title procedures.

Current Status: The plan is in its preliminary stages. Dates have yet to be published for hearings at the respective planning committees. For further details, [see our alert](#).

6. Umm Lysoon – 450 HU (SOLT, GC)

The plan calls for the construction of a new settlement on an area of 12.5 dunams in the middle of Umm Lysoon—a small Palestinian neighborhood tucked between two larger Palestinian neighborhoods of Sur Baher and Jabal Mukabber. As with other East Jerusalem neighborhoods, Umm Lysoon continues to suffer from a severe shortage in housing, public buildings, and basic infrastructure. Instead of promoting residential development to meet the community's needs, the state is rather supporting a plan to establish a new Jewish settler enclave inside a Palestinian neighborhood.

The plan is being advanced in tandem with completion of SOLT procedures to finalize land rights ahead of its implementation. The Umm Lysoon settlement plan was submitted by the General Custodian together with a settler-owned company by the name of Topodia LTD. The company's shareholders and board of directors are the same settler figures behind the Nof Zion settlement plan in Jabal Mukabber and the new [Nofey Rahel settlement plan](#) in Umm Tuba. For further details, [see our alert](#).

Current Status: The DPC discussed the plan for deposit on February 12, 2024 and decided that it be rediscussed within 30 days.

7. Nof Zahav - 100 HU (SOLT)

The plan calls for a total of 100 housing units and 275 hotel rooms in the heart of Jabal Mukabber. While characterized as an expansion of the existing settlement of Nof Zion, it will be territorially disconnected and therefore constitutes another settlement in the Palestinian neighborhood.

Beyond its geopolitical impact, this is another example of the severe discrimination in urban planning and housing in East Jerusalem. Years ago, the land was expropriated and designated for so-called public use. Yet, despite the plot's location at the entrance to Jabal Mukabber, it is not intended for the community's needs, but rather for the establishment of a new Jewish settlement in the middle of a Palestinian neighborhood. For further details, [see our alert](#).

The company initiating the plan is affiliated with the same settler actors involved in the existing Nof Zion settlement and the new settlement plans for Umm Lysoon and Nofey Rachel.

Current Status: The DPC approved the plan for deposit for objections in August 2023.

8. Kidmat Zion - 384 HU (GC)

The Kidmat Zion plan calls for a fortified, gated settler compound on 79 dunams of land in the heart of a Palestinian area known as Ras al-Amud/a-Sawahrah, which is located along the eastern-most edge

of East Jerusalem. It is slated for land directly adjacent to the Israeli side of the Separation Barrier and the West Bank town of Abu Dis on the Palestinian side of the barrier. Establishment of a settlement in this location will not only sever Palestinian spatial continuity, but also block access to some 20 Palestinian homes in the area.

The plan was formally initiated and submitted by a settler-owned company by the name of Bahorim Ltd., which was founded by members of the Ateret Cohanim settler organization. During the planning committee hearing on the plan, the General Custodian stated that it would formally join the company in submitting the plan. Ateret Cohanim is behind the mass [eviction lawsuits in Batan al-Hawa, Silwan](#), attempts to seize the iconic Christian hotels near Jaffa Gate, and likely involved in the bid to take-over [land in the Armenian Quarter](#).

The DPC approved this plan for deposit on October 9, 2023—just two days after October 7 when most government agencies were shuttered, and the public at large was sheltering at home. For further details, [see our alert](#).

Current Status: The DPC approved it for deposit for public review on October 9, 2023.

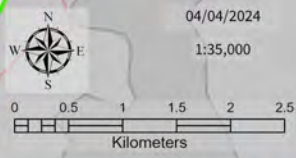
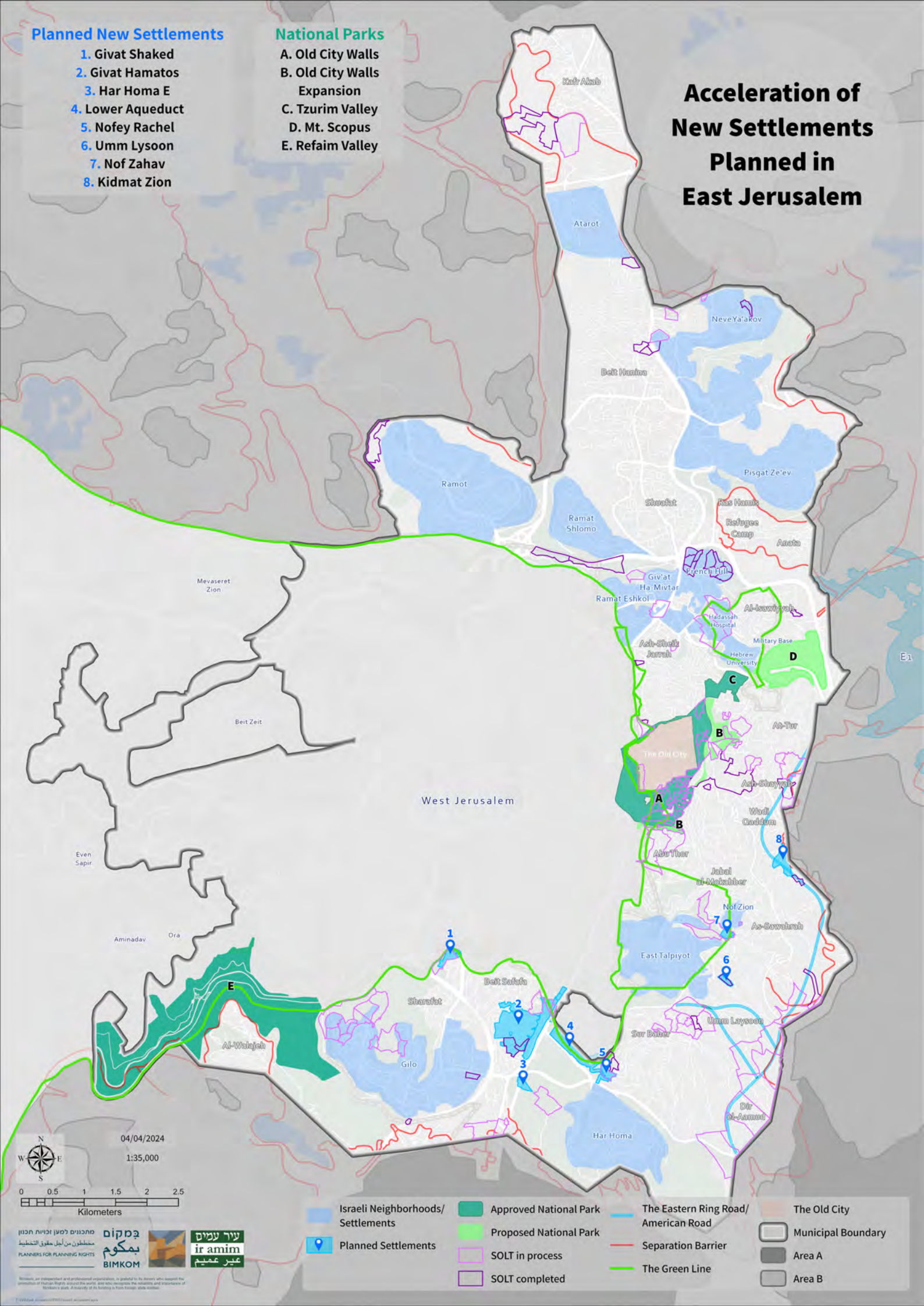
Planned New Settlements

1. Givat Shaked
2. Givat Hamatos
3. Har Homa E
4. Lower Aqueduct
5. Nofey Rachel
6. Umm Lysoon
7. Nof Zahav
8. Kidmat Zion

National Parks

- A. Old City Walls
- B. Old City Walls Expansion
- C. Tzurim Valley
- D. Mt. Scopus
- E. Refaim Valley

Acceleration of New Settlements Planned in East Jerusalem



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- Israeli Neighborhoods/Settlements
- Approved National Park
- The Eastern Ring Road/American Road
- The Old City
- Planned Settlements
- Proposed National Park
- Separation Barrier
- Municipal Boundary
- SOLT in process
- SOLT completed
- Area A
- Area B