**What is East Jerusalem?**

Until 1948 Jerusalem was a mixed city of Jews and Arabs, with Armenians, Greeks and others living alongside them - all with deep religious, cultural and collective connections to the city. The rise of the nationalist movements - Zionism and Arab Nationalism - interrupted a long history of Jews, Arabs and others living together mostly peacefully in Jerusalem. The November 1947 UN Partition Plan proposed that the land would be divided between the Jews and Arabs who struggled over it, whilst Jerusalem would remain “Corpus separatum” - a separate area under international rule. However the 1948 war raged in Jerusalem too, and the city was divided between the Jordanian army who controlled the eastern side of the city including the Old City and the historical basin surrounding it, and the Israeli army who controlled the western side. When the war ended the two sides agreed on the armistice boundary as the border between them, and it became known as the Green Line or the municipal boundary. The two sides also officially annexed the parts of Jerusalem that were under their control, and West Jerusalem was declared as the capital of the State of Israel. Nevertheless, the UN and most other countries did not recognize these actions as legtimate.

During the war that broke out in 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank including East Jerusalem. A few weeks later Israel declared the annexation of East Jerusalem and of surrounding villages and lands that were incorporated into the city, and applied Israeli law to these territories. The majority of the world’s countries continue to see this action, of unilateral annexation, as a crude violation of international law, and do not recognize it as legitimate. Moreover, the annexation included a large Palestinian population who since then live under occupation (See below: Residency Status). Since 1967, Israel considers the extended territory of East Jerusalem to be inseparable from the rest of the country. Large neighborhoods/settlements have been built in East Jerusalem, and many actions have been taken in the area that are intended to erase the Green Line, to cement Israel rule, and to weaken Palestinian presence.

Today, Jerusalem is a binational city that is both united and divided. It is based on an impossible anomaly: over a third of its population are Palestinian residents living under occupation, who suffer from deep discrimination with regards to their civic status, equality before the law, building and planning rights, access to services, resources and infrastructure, and from ceaseless efforts to push them outside of the physical and symbolic space of the city. Simultaneously, Jerusalem is a city in which these two populations live alongside each other, interdependent and sharing many domains of daily life: employment, studies, recreation, commerce and more. In both parts of the city, the demand for language studies - Israelis for Arabic classes and Palestinians for Hebrew classes - continues to rise. Collaborations between civil society activists from both sides also continue to increase. The interdependence of Palestinian and Israeli societies strengthens the routine of life in the city, as has been proven in moments of escalating political tensions, including since the 7th of October. However, since the 7th of October there has been an acceleration in the policies of dispossession, settlement expansion and house demolitions promoted by Israel’s right-wing government. A sustainable solution for Jerusalem in the framework of a political resolution to the conflict must recognize the right of both peoples to the city. Such a solution must bring about an equal society, whereby Palestinians and Israelis are able to undertake their day to day life as well as their public, religious and political affairs side by side, in a manner that is both independent and sovereign on the one hand, and based on interdepdence and cooperation on the other.

**Residency Status**

The status of permanent residency in Israel is different from the status of citizenship. In practice permanent residency is not a truly fixed status and may be revoked in several instances, including if the resident is absent from Israel for seven years, or if they acquire permanent status in another country. Additionally, permanent residents are frequently suspected of having changed their geographic “center of life”, and are subjected to repeated interrogations on this matter at the hands of Israeli officials. This is particularly true for East Jerusalem residents living in the neighborhoods that remain beyond the Separation Wall. This situation and the constant interrogations that accompany it have a significant impact on the full scope of residents’ rights - for example, their ability to pass on residency status to their children, their rights under the National Insurance Law, and their eligibility for public health insurance.

The interrogations involve harassment of the residents, invasions of their privacy, a heavy bureaucratic burden and a sense of humiliation. Permanent residents are not permitted to vote, to be elected to the Knesset or to hold official state positions. This restricts the political representation of their interests. Instead of an Israeli passport they hold a “Laissez Passer” travel document, and this makes it difficult for them to leave and re-enter Israel. In addition, their children do not automatically receive their parents’ status - only following a lengthy investigation.

In practice, Israel applies the same regulations on East Jerusalem residents as to non-Jewish immigrants from foreign countries, despite the fact that the Palestinians have been residents of East Jerusalem for many generations; they did not immigrate from a different place and their status has been forced on them due to occupation and annexation.

**Family Unification**

A Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem who marries a Palestinian who does not hold a status in Israel (i.e. a resident of the West Bank and Gaza), and wishes to live with their spouse within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, must submit an application for family unification through the Ministry of Interior. Until 2002, applications for family unification submitted by East Jerusalem residents for their spouses with residency of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) were examined on a case-by-case basis, like applications submitted by other foreign residents. Their cases were decided, at least in theory, according to relevant considerations as to their personal circumstances. If the applicants fulfilled all the criteria and demands of the Ministry of Interior they were permitted to begin the phased process of family unification. When this process was completed, the spouse who was previously resident of the OPT would receive the status of a permanent resident of the State of Israel.

The Citizenship and Entrance into Israel Law (Temporary Provision) was passed in 2003, following a government ruling in 2002. Since then, family unification processes for residents of East Jerusalem and their spouses resident of the OPT (similarly to the analogous processes for Israeli citizens with Palestinian non-citizen spouses) do not end with receiving a permanent status in Israel. In fact, these processes do not end at all. These couples are only able to obtain legal status to stay in Israel through temporary stay permits, and even these can only be obtained if the partner who is resident of the OPT is over 25 years old (for women) or over 35 years old (for men). A couple who receives temporary stay permits for over a decade and are over 50 years old are able to receive temporary residency, which must be renewed every two years and is subject to security and criminal background checks as well as verification by the Ministry of Interior that the family maintains its “center of life” in Israel.

A government decision from 2008 rules that residents of the Gaza Strip will no longer be able, in any circumstances, to acquire status in Israel via family unification, not even under any of the exceptions that have been added to the law in subsequent years.

**The Separation Wall and Neighborhoods Beyond the Wall**

In 2002, following the wave of violent attacks during the Second Intifida, Israel began constructing a separation barrier between Israel and the West Bank. The wall that was built is not situated along the 1949 Armistice Line (“The Green Line”), as required by international law, but rather penetrates deep into the territory of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, dissecting them even more and creating isolated enclaves of Palestinian lands and populations, cut off from the rest of the OPT. Due to the significant harm and disruption inflicted by the wall on the fabric of Palestinian daily life, in 2004 the International Court of Justice in the Hague ruled that its construction violated international law.

In the Jerusalem area, the separation wall forms a significant barrier between the West Bank and Jerusalem. Additionally, the wall separates from the city a number of Palestinian neighborhoods that are part of the territory of East Jerusalem and whose residents hold a permanent status in Israel. In order to access healthcare, education and other services that they are entitled to as residents of East Jerusalem, residents of the neighborhoods beyond the separation wall must cross checkpoints. This involves extended periods of waiting during busy hours, undergoing inspections, being held and delayed, and experiencing violations to their dignity. Two areas that have been severely harmed by this situation are Kufr Aqab-Semiramis and the area of the Shuafat Refugee Camp (which includes the camp itself, and the neighborhoods of Ras Khamis, Ras Shihade, and Dahiat a-Salam in Anata). In these areas live an estimated 150,000 people.

Residents of the neighborhoods who were cut off from Jerusalem submitted a legal petition demanding that the route of the wall be changed, but it was rejected. In the two central court rulings that dealt with the issue, the Supreme Court recognized the infingement of residents’ rights as a result of the construction of the wall, but nevertheless approved the route because of the government’s stated commitment to protect the residents’ quality of life. The government promised to ensure reasonable and accessible passage into Jerusalem and to provide municipal and governmental services within the neighborhoods, but did not fulfil this promise.

One of the striking phenomena in the neighborhoods beyond the wall since it was built is the acceleration of construction, particularly the dense construction of residential tower blocks at least ten storeys high. This occurs because unlike in the rest of East Jerusalem, in these areas there is no enforcement of construction regulations (See below: Housing Demolitions). Thus, residents are in practice pushed by the state into living in these neighborhoods, where they cannot access essential services nor options for legal housing construction. Of all the neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, Kufr Aqab has grown at the most accelerated pace. According to official estimates today over 50,000 permanent residents and Israeli citizens live in Kufr Aqab. This figure does not include the many residents who did not transfer their official address when they moved, nor residents who only hold a Palestinian ID. The infrastructure of the neighborhood is dilapidated and unsuitable. It is inadequate for the size of the population who actually live there and as a result the residents suffer from intolerable living conditions. For example, in the summer months the supply of water to the neighborhood is restricted to only one or two days per week. In 2024 the residents had to petition the Supreme Court in order to demand their basic right to water and to this day the issue has only been partially resolved.

**The Shuafat Refugee Camp**

The Shuafat Refugee Camp was established in 1965-1966 by the Jordianian government and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) for Palestinian refugees, to settle Palestinian refugees who had been living since 1948 in the Old City of Jerusalem. The camp was built in Northeast Jerusalem, adjacent to the neighborhood of Shuafat. After the occupation of East Jerusalem the camp became part of the municipal area of Jerusalem, and it is the only refugee camp situated in the jurisdiction of an Israeli local authority. The refugee camp continues to be operated by UNWRA and since 1967 it has doubled in size. Following the new legislation (2025) which prevents the activity of UNWRA in Israel and in the territories which Israel has annexed, the future of the essential services provided by UNWRA is unclear.

Adjacent to the Shuafat Refugee Camp three new neighborhoods were established - Ras Khamis, Ras Shihada and Dahiat a-Salam. At the time of the construction of the separation wall, 20,000 residents lived in these neighborhoods. Similarly to Kufr Aqab, here too there has been a significant acceleration in residential construction since the wall was built, and the number of residents in these neighborhoods has grown by 400%. However there has not been a suitable increase in the provision of municipal or governmental infrastructure in these neighborhoods, such as water and sewage pipes, internet and electrical infrastructure, the road network, transportation, as well as the healthcare, welfare and education systems.

**Housing Demolitions**

As a result of many years of discriminatory Israeli policies in the field of construction and planning, there is a huge amount of unpermitted construction in East Jerusalem. Residents who, due to these discriminatory policies, are compelled to live in houses and apartments built without permits, face the risk that their home will be destroyed. Each year over 100 housing units are demolished in the city’s Palestinian neighborhoods. The number of demolitions is increasing each year, with a record 181 housing units destroyed in 2024. Alongside the demolition of residential homes, dozens of commercial and agricultural structures are destroyed each year.

The extent of home demolition in East Jerusalem spiked in 2019 when Amendment 116 to the Law of Planning and Construction began to be fully implemented. This amendment restricts the ability of the courts to intervene and to delay the execution of demolition orders, as well as greatly increasing the fines to be paid by those living in homes built without permits. This legislative change - which right-wing politicians openly admitted was particularly aimed at harming the Arab population - brought aboke a spike in demolitions in general and in self-demolitions in particular, whereby families concerned about the increased fine that they expect to pay “choose” to demolish their own homes.

Additionally, in 2024 the National Enforcement Unit began to work in East Jerusalem alongside the Municipal Enforcement Unit. Previously, the National Enforcement Unit had been under the authority of the Ministry of Finance but in that year it transferred to the Ministry of National Security. Therefore, East Jerusalem is subject to an exceptional situation in which, unlike any other local authority in the country, two enforcement units operate simultaneously - demonstrating the significant resources the state allocates in order to demolish homes in East Jerusalem.

Since the formation of the Netanyahu-Smotrich-Ben Gvir government in the start 2023, Smotrich and Ben Gvir set themselves the goal of increasing the scope of demolitions in Palestinian built-up areas on both sides of the Green Line. Since the 7th of October there has indeed been a significant spike in the scope of demolitions, including in East Jerusalem, as part of the program of revenge that the government is carying out against the entire Palestinian population following the massacre committed by Hamas.

**Discrimination in Planning and Housing Rights**

Israel’s policy of discrimination in the fields of planning and construction aims to create ‘facts on the ground’ as well as to demographically restrict Palestinians. Since 1967 the State of Israel has built tens of thousands of housing units in Israeli-Jewish neighborhoods/settlements on land that have been expropriated from residents of East Jerusalem. Meanwhile the zoning plans that Israel produces for Palestinian neighborhoods restrict their possibilities for development and classify large areas within and around them as areas not designated for construction. This gives rise to the present the situation, in which most landowners in Palestinian neighborhoods are unable to to receive permits to build on their lands, which are not included in the extremely limited areas which the state’s zoning plans have designated for residential homes. The supply of land on which construction is permitted does not correspond to the size of the population.

Over the years residents of East Jerusalem have themselves, at great financial expense, initiated countless zoning plans that were aimed at updating and improving the old and restrictive state zoning plans. However the planning committees, under the control of the Jerusalem municipality and the Ministry of Interior, have blocked the vast majority of these plans, even though they met the professional planning criteria.

As a result, a significat proportion of the residents of East Jerusalem are unable to obtain construction permits from the municipality to build on their own land, nor can they buy an apartment that was built with a permit. This discrimination has, over the years, forced tens of thousands of East Jerusalemites to be displaced from the city, moving to areas of the West Bank, or in the ‘best case scenario’ to the East Jerusalem neighborhoods beyond the separation wall. In these neighborhoods the state turns a blind eye to extensive anauthorized construction, in order to encourage people to move to them. Those who do not want to be displaced from their families and communities live with the constant threat that their home will be destroyed, and this threat grows more severe with each passing year.

**Home Evictions and Discriminatory Laws**

Israeli legislation includes several laws which create severe discrimination between Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem in matters of land ownership, housing, and the ability to retain a home.

The law which enables the expropriation of land and property for public needs is not in itself a discriminatory statute. However, the government makes use of this law in order to expropriate land from residents of East Jerusalem and to build on these lands housing units for the Israeli-Jewish residents of the city. Since 1967, 35% of the lands of East Jerusalem have been expropriated in this manner and upon them 55,000 housing units have been built in Israeli neighborhoods/settlements beyond the Green Line.

The Absentee Propertee Law was passed in 1950 in order to give the ּState of Israel ownership of the properties of Palestinian refugees who were displaced in 1948. Several neighborhoods in West Jerusalem - for example Har Nof and Kiryat Hayovel - are built on the lands of Palestinian villages (Deir Yassin and Beit Mazmil) that were displaced in 1948. Other neighborhoods such as Ein Kerem, Talbiya and Baka are largely comprised of houses which were owned by Palestinians before 1948. After 1967 and the application of Israeli law in East Jerusalem, the Absentee Propety Law was also implemented there. Over the years the Israeli courts and the Attorney General have criticized the use of the Absentee Property Law in East Jerusalem, and the Supreme Court even ruled several restrictions to this practice. Nevertheless, the government continues to make use of this law in order to sieze Palestinian property, which is often transferred to settler organizations. Furthermore, in East Jerusalem this law is implemented manipulatively in order to enable the state to evict from their homes families who have lived there for generations, under the pretext that another family member, who allegedly shares the rights to the property with the other family members, is considered an absentee.

While the Absentee Property Law strips Palestinians of ownership over homes they were forcibly displaced from in 1948, a 1970 amendment to the Law and Administration Ordinance allows Jews to reclaim property they lost in 1948 - regardless of the property's current condition or the Palestinian families now living there. This gives rise to blatant discrimination between Jews, who retain their ownership rights to land and property that they lost in 1948, and Palestinians, who are unable to reclaim homes and land within the Green Line which they lost in the same war. Palestinian also risk losing their homes once more if a family member is “found” who can be defined as an “absentee”.

In recent years the state is undertaking a Land Registration Process in East Jerusalem, whereby home and land ownership is formally recorded in the Land Registry. As with expropriations for public needs, the laws for regulating land registration are not in themselves discriminatory. However, the state places on Palestinians demands to prove ownership, and these often lead to the loss of the property and its registration as state property or its transfer to a settler organization. Key examples are the use of the Absentee Property Law and the Law and Administration Ordinance, described above, as well as the demand to present historical property tax documents which often cannot be found or are difficult to obtain. In this way supposedly unproblematic procedures become discriminatory by means of the use of auxiliary laws whose entire purpose is to evict and dispossess and whose scope has widened over the years, rather than diminished or disappeared.

**Archeology and Politicized Heritage**

Archeology is a scientific research field which examines the charecteristics of past cultures by means of studying their material cultures. The State of Israel and the West Bank are full of archeological sites which bear witness to the many cultures which populated the area over hundreds of thousands of years. In cities such as Jerusalem, which have been populated for thousands of years, the archeological digs which have taken place over the past two hundred years teach us not only about the peoples and cultures who have lived here for many generations but also about the mutual influences between the different groups and the cultural continuity which has characterized this historical space.

However, in Israel - as in many other countries - focus on only one element of the material culture or of the archeological heritage often serves as a justification for overt political and ideological agendas. In such situations, archeology ceases to be a scientific research tool, and becomes a mechanism for shaping urban space and promoting political planning policies. For example, the City of David archeological site has been developed over the past thirty years in a way that is completely disconnected from the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan in which it is located, and the narrative of the site is used to justify ideological viewpoints which present Palestinians as lacking historical connections to the area. Thus, archeology is used as a central tool in the processes of exclusion and dispossession of Palestinians from their land, their homes and their historical heritage.

**National Parks**

Around 25% of the territory of the State of Israel has been classified as National Parks. In theory, this designation is meant to protect sites of historical or natural importance, to save them from overdevelopment and to allow public access. However, often the designation of an area as a National Park serves as a political tool which aims to restrict minority groups’ rights to their lands. The National Parks in East Jerusalem are a striking example of this phenomenon. These National Parks were established in areas which were annexed to Israel after the end of the 1967 War, and they are used to further the exclusion of residents of East Jerusalem from their heritage and lands.

Israeli law gives the Nature and Parks Authority, which is responsible for the management of National Parks, the highest authority with regards to the development of a National Park, even superseding the power of the Local Authority in whose jurisdiction the National Park is located. Considering this, right-wing groups identified the Nature and Parks Authority as an agency which could be used to take over Palestinian lands in order to advance their political interests. In this way, in the past twenty years a number of National Parks have been established in East Jerusalem which have taken over local open spaces.

In most cases, the designation of lands as National Parks in East Jerusalem is not motivated by a desire to advance a broad public interest and to develop the area for the benefit of all of the local populations. Rather, it stems from a desire to prevent Palestinians from being able to expand and develop their neighborhoods or cultivate their lands. In places where there are historical or heritage sites, the National Parks are often used to reinforce a narrow Jewish-nationalist narrative and to erase the site’s multicultural history. Many of the National Parks in the Old City Basin (the area encompassing the Old City and its surroundings) have been given over to settler organizations who use them in order to realize a political-messianic agenda of Judaizing East Jerusalem, while excluding the Palestinian population and ignoring the true cultural diversity of the area, its heritage and natural assets. Several times ancient terraces have been destroyed or access routes that serve local people have been blocked, and people have been evicted from lands which have been cultivated by their families for generations.

**‎The Status Quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif**

The “status quo” has been established and maintained for hundreds of years. According to the status quo, the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif is an area for Muslim prayer and the Western Wall is intended for Jewish prayer. Israel adhered to this after 1967 and it was used to justify the Israeli decision to destroy the Mughrabi Neighborhood during the 1967 war. This neighborhood was adjacent to the Western Wall, and on its ruins Israel built the large plaza which is used for prayer and gatherings to this day. For years, East Jerusalem residents have not been allowed to enter this area, apart from a small number of residents who live next to the Western Wall compound and require a police permit to enter.

For decades, the status quo had been steadily adhered to by the various governments of Israel. The 1994 peace agreement with Jordan includes Israel’s recognition of “Jordan’s special role in the holy places”, according to which Israel will not take actions in the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif without coordination and approval from Jordan. However, these understandings have been systematically breached in recent years.

In the past two decades we have seen a rise in the number and influence of organizations which promote “temple consciousness” and work for the modern re-establishment of a Jewish temple. Previously, these organizations were on the extreme fringe of the political and religious map. However, since the year 2000 they have achieved a position of respectability in the mainstream of the religious and political right. These organizations enjoy close ties with government ministers, members of parliament and state authorities. In recent years the Israeli government has worked with the Temple Movement and the Israeli police force to fundementally change the status quo. Jewish group prayers take place on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif overtly and on a daily basis, with police protection. Alongside this, Muslims endure severe restrictions on their entrance to the area. These restrictions include: prevention of entry (especially for young men) according to the arbitrary decisions of police officers stationed at the entrances to the area; official police decisions to restrict the entry of tens of thousands of worshippers according to their age; widespread issuance of restraining orders against activists from East Jerusalem.

Over the years, Palestinians from East Jerusalem have responded to these breaches of the status quo with mass protests. The police have often taken forcible action against these protests, in particular by forcibly restricting the entrance of Muslims to the area. This police violence has led to confrontations which occasionaly escalate to violence in other areas of the country. The Israeli government has a responsibility to preserve the status quo, to prevent the attempts to breach it, and to prevent incitement and damage to Muslim holy sites - not just out of concern about outbreaks of violence, but primarily because it is the government’s duty to protect them. To do so, the government must improve its coordination with the government of Jordan, with the Waqf (the Jordanian-appointed Islamic organization entrusted with the management of the al-Aqsa compound), and with the Palestinian Authority.

**Damascus Gate**

Damascus Gate is one of the central entrances to the Old City of Jerusalem. Archeological digs show that it was originally built during the Roman period, in the second century CE. Damascus Gate appears in the Byzantine Madaba Map which shows central cities across the world - this speaks to its historical importance. The gate has various names in Hebrew, Arabic and English, which reflect its symbolic status in the eyes of the different groups and religions. Its names in English (Damascus Gate) and Hebrew (Sha’ar Shkhem - “Nablus Gate”) relate to the highway that begins there and continues northwards - on to Nablus and Damascus. Its name in Arabic (Bab al-’Amud - “The Gate of the Pillar”) relates to the tradition according to which during the Roman period there stood a victory pillar in the center of the gate, and upon it a statue of the emperor Hadrian.

Today Damascus Gate is the central entrance to the Old City for Palestinians from East Jerusalem and the northern West Bank. It takes on the role of the city square of East Jerusalem and is of great importance to Palestinian culture and identity, beyond its functional importance. Damascus Gate is also an important commercial center. Historical evidence shows that in the past too much commercial activity took place within the gate and in its environs. The central market of the Old City begins at Damascus Gate and continues along al-Wad Street, which crosses the Old City from north to south.

In recent years Damascus Gate has been at the heart of struggles for control of the urban space. The Israeli authorities banned the selling of goods in the plaza in front of the gate, and around it were set up fixed security posts. The constant presence of border police makes it hard for Palestinians to live their daily lives in the area. Additionally, in 2019 the steps leading down to Damascus Gate were named after Hadar Cohen and Hadas Malka, two border officers who were killed in attacks there. This was seen in the eyes of the Palestinian public as an attempt to symbolically entrench Israeli sovereignty over the area.

**Police Violence**

The policing policy enacted on the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem is oppressive and violent. This policy includes incidents of racial profiling, collective punishment and discriminatory enforcement, sometimes including excessive use of force and violence. Often, the police use extreme measures to break up non-violent gatherings and protests in East Jerusalem - usually this includes the use of stun grenades, tear gas, “skunk” liquid (an extremely foul-smelling liquid which is sprayed from a police vehicle), and rubber bullets. Border police and police officers also deploy excessive force against minors: human rights organizations have documented hundreds of incidents of minors who were beaten and violently arrested, with their basic rights denied. In one of these incidents, a ten year old child lost his eye and his jaw was broken when he was injured by a rubber bullet fired by a border police officer.

As well as the physical violence, the state applies systematic collective punishment and selective enforcement which is deployed almost entirely against Palestinians. Following a violent attack or a security incident, entire neighborhoods such as Jabal Mukaber or Isawiya face collective punishment: roads blocked, checkpoints closed, daily raids on businesses and public institutions, arbitrary fines and mass arrests. For example, in Isawiya there have been dozens of violent raids, mass arrests, and severe injuries sustained by residents - including the killing of a young man who was shot by a soldier. The Israeli authorities deploy increased enforcement against Palestinians: the municipality uses checks on building permits, municipal property taxes, and city regulations as a means of punishment. This has created a discriminatory regime, whereby hundreds of thousands of residents are subject to heightened security measures, have their human rights constantly revoked, and are treated with hostility.

**Education**

Approximately 125,000 Palestinian school students, who make up 36% of the school students of the city, study in educational institutions in East Jerusalem, in the recognized state educational system and in the unofficial (but still recognized by the state) educational system. Additionally, thousands of minors are enrolled in private education (the municipality lacks data with regards to many of them). There is a severe shortage of classrooms for this population. Despite long-running legal proceedings and court rulings which ordered the Jerusalem municipality to build new classrooms, the city currently has a shortage of 3,036 classrooms. In 2024 the municipality announced that 1,200 classrooms are in the process of being built; this number falls far short of what is needed to solve the shortage.

The great majority of East Jerusalem school students study the Tawjihi, the Palestinian Authority’s school curriculum. The recent governmental five-year plans have set a target of increasing the number of school students who study according to the Israeli national curriculum, and there has indeed been a gradual increase. One of the factors in this trend is the continued neglect of schools which teach the Palestinian curriculum while investing in schools who teach the Israeli curriculum. Still, only a small minority of East Jerusalem school students follow the Israeli curriculum. Imposing the Israeli curriculum compromises East Jerusalem school students’ right to be educated according to their own curriculum, and their right to education in general.

The campaign against the Palestinian curriculum has reached new peaks with the current government. In November 2024, the law “Prohibition on Employing Teaching Staff and Withholding Funding from Educational Institutions Due to Expressed Affiliation with Terrorist Acts or Organizations (Amendment)” (5785/2024) was enacted. Under cover of the war on terror, the law gives sweeping authority to the Minister of Education and to the CEO of the Ministry of Education to quickly fire teachers who have allegedly identified with or supported terrorism, and to withdraw funding from their schools. The explanation accompanying the law’s proposal states that the law aims to deal with “a phenomenon that mostly occurs in East Jerusalem”, in which “teaching staff and occasionally even school management are allowed to express identification with acts of terror”. The law passed despite the fact that the Minister of Education and the CEO of the Ministry of Education are politicians who lack the qualifications to make appropriate interpretations of such expressions, particularly those said or written in Arabic. Furthermore, existing legislation - counter-terrorism law and the penal code - are sufficient for the needs of counter-terrorism. Similar legislative proposals, which deal with academia, are being debated in the Knesset’s educational committee.

**Political Solution**

Jerusalem is the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but it can also be the heart of the solution. In Jerusalem we see played out most of the core issues of the conflict and of its populations. The friction and intensity of Jerusalem’s daily reality accelerate the processes that are bound up in the conflict but also create the possiblities for a solution. Thus, Jerusalem is a model for the future that awaits us, and a test case for any future policy.

The project to “unify Jerusalem” proves that annexing a large Palestinian population leads to an oppressive binational reality, which puts the basic tenets of Israeli democracy in increasing contradiction with one another. Jerusalem, like the whole country, cannot be a democracy if 40% of its binational population lives under occupation and deep inequality. This reality has severely worsened since the new regime and the events of the 7th of October.

The solution is to be found in equal rights for the two nations which share the city and the land - not only human and civil rights, but also the right to national self-determination. Such a resolution could be realised by the classic two-state solution model, or in various confederate models. Every sustainable solution demands that Jerusalem will constitute the capital of the two nations who reside here. There is more than one way to create such a reality, from rigid separation of Jerusalem to two separate entities to a model of an open city with an overarching municipality and free movement between two sovereign areas, Palestinian and Israeli, with cooperation in a range of spheres of life.

Since 1967, extensive ties have been formed and mutual dependency has developed between the two sides of the city - even under the reality of occupation and severe discrimination. Israeli construction beyond the Green Line has minimized the physical distance between Israeli neighborhoods/settlements to Palestinian neigborhoods, and boundary areas have become very thin. A rigid division of the city is not only undesirable in terms of the urban fabric; in many senses it is no longer possible. Plans that have been proposed in recent years try to protect the fabric of life and freedom of movement through an open city, in which each collective can have an independent and sovereign life, while there exist close and mutual associations between them. Any political resolution in the city will be complex, and will be accompanied by many difficulties and obstacles - but unlike the current situation, a political resolution brings with it the hope for a better reality for both peoples.

Without a political resolution on the horizon, the current situation must be immediately improved and the possibilities for a political solution opened up. The conditions of life and personal security of all city residents should be equalized, and the factors that cause tension between them be reduced as far as possible. The urban development of East Jerusalem must be enabled, and residents allowed to preserve the integrity of their communities and physical surroundings, and to manage their affairs in the city with their own institutions. The conditions of life in West Jerusalem should also be improved, and a positive horizon for dialogue opened up and fostered. The experience of living together can and must be the starting point for an equal and sustainable resolution in Jerusalem and beyond, with the understanding that no matter what the political constellation will be, two peoples will live here side by side, in Jerusalem and throughout the area.