

Jerusalem Diary

September – November 2005

After an internal report commissioned by the European Commission on the combined impact of Israeli settlement expansion in Jerusalem, Israel's barrier severing Palestinian communities from the city, and lack of development in East Jerusalem, the European Union is moving to shore up Palestinian presence in the city through direct funding of organizations and other political moves. Reportedly, the EU is considering encouraging Palestinian political activities in the city, which are currently curtailed through aggressive Israeli restrictions and harassment. (The Oslo accords prohibited PLO official presence in the city, but also assured political integration with Palestinian Authority offices.) The report is set to be approved by the EU's External Relations Council on 12 December, and warns of the radicalization of Jerusalemite Palestinians if the inequalities are not addressed.

Portentously, the Palestinian village of Essawiyah was the site of several days of unrest after the 10 November killing by an Israeli police officer of Samir Ribhi Dari, age 30. Dari was reportedly trying to intervene on the outskirts of the village as police detained his nephew. Israeli police officers originally claimed that Dari tried to run them over with his car, but an official autopsy determined that Dari was in fact shot in the back.

A report published by the City of Nations Foundation (Ir Amim) found that some 14,500 children in East Jerusalem are not recognized by educational authorities and may not be in school at all. The report said that of 79,000 children of school age in East Jerusalem, only 64,536 children are registered with the Jerusalem municipality as studying in the Israeli public school system or in private schools run by the Waqf, churches and private foundations. The report's authors suggest that a seven percent drop in the number of students in public school over the last four years is a sign of over-crowded or attrition.

Upcoming polls will be a prominent litmus test for international intervention supporting Palestinian activities in the city. In a 21 November statement, the European Commission called on Israel to allow free registration, campaigning and elections in East Jerusalem. Palestinians are slated to hold Legislative Council elections on 25 January, 2006. While the Jerusalem electorate participated in Palestinian legislative elections in 1995, registration and voting in the city for 2004 presidential elections was marred by Israeli closing of registration stations and the detention of election commission officials.

Meanwhile, Israeli attempts to gerrymander a Jewish majority in the city continue apace. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions is warning that Israel plans to demolish tens of homes in Anata, Silwan, and Beit Hanina before the close of 2005. The group reports that the Israeli-controlled Jerusalem municipality has a million and a half unused shekels (\$300,000)

remaining for demolitions in its annual budget. All monies budgeted but not spent will be lost; this sum usually pays for some 70 home demolitions.

While Israel initially appeared to bow to US objections to further construction in Maale Adumim (a crucial component of the massive E-1 development plan), bids were advertised by the Israel Lands Authority for construction on 13 plots of land in the Jerusalem-area settlement.

Newly-installed Greek Orthodox patriarch Patriarch Theophilos III believes that Israel is refusing to recognize his leadership as a means of pressuring him to accept his predecessor's long-term lease of church lands to Jewish groups. In an unprecedented ousting, former Patriarch Irenaios was forced out of office in May after pressure from his Palestinian parish when it became clear that he had been involved in leasing for a term of 198 years church properties inside Jaffa Gate. The lease will establish a new Israeli hold on that region of the Old City. Patriarch Theophilos III was sworn in to office on 22 November, in the presence of Palestinian and Jordanian officials as required by law. Israel must also recognize a sitting patriarch for his leadership to be valid, and the patriarch has sued Israel to gain its acknowledgement. The new patriarch has said, however, that he will not back the lease of the lands. It remains doubtful, however, that the land deal can be legally annulled.

In a bizarre case of Israel trying to have it both ways, nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu was arrested at a Jerusalem-area checkpoint on 18 November. He was charged with breaking the terms of his release after 18 years in jail, which include being banned from all airports, ports and Palestinian Authority areas. Vanunu told the court at his arraignment that he had visited al-Ram in order to see "Palestinian ghettos". The prosecutor argued that Vanunu had broken the law by crossing an Israeli checkpoint into Palestinian "areas" without seeking prior permission. Al-Ram lies within the Israeli-expanded Jerusalem municipal boundaries, and is therefore part of official "Jerusalem", but will shortly be enclosed on the West Bank side of the wall Israel is constructing to prevent Palestinian access to the city.

The French Culteral Center in Jerusalem hosted the Kan Yamam Kan art show featuring works by Bashar AlHroob, Hani Zu'rob, Inass Hamad, Monther Jawabreh, Rafat As'ad and Steve Sabella. The show presented five painted boxes with peep holes through which each artist's inspiration was visible. "I wanted to create a one to one experience where the viewer is isolated from his surroundings and starts to travel to another dimension," wrote Setve Sabella of the project. "The multidimensional box offers the viewer to look deep into its three-dimensional space where photos line up one next to the other. In their collective, they tell the story of a nation and a land."