

JERUSALEM

MYTH: “Israel does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity or religious status. Anyone can buy land anywhere in Jerusalem.”

FACT: Since 1967, Israel has pursued a policy of trying to drive as many Palestinians as possible out of Jerusalem. It practices systematic discrimination against Palestinians. Under the false color of law, it is doing ethnic cleansing in the city it claims as its “eternal capital.”

Israel regularly makes families homeless, not for “security reasons,” but simply because they are Arab.

These are not the charges of hostile foreigners. Leading Israeli insiders attest to the facts.

After Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1967, it immediately began confiscating large amounts of land for supposedly public purposes. As one Israeli writer puts it:

These expropriations were presented as being politically neutral: for the purpose of construction, development and settlement in Jerusalem...But no one was deceived by the designation of these ‘ethnically colorblind needs’: the expropriated areas were being taken from the Arabs and handed over to Jews. This was an extraordinary interpretation of the word ‘public’: the only legitimate public was Jewish, and therefore only Jews were entitled to benefit from the expropriation. The Arabs, (considered as) a haphazard collection of individuals, were to have their private property confiscated so that Jews could settle in Jerusalem and create geopolitical facts there.

The writer of these words is Meron Benvenisti, the former deputy mayor of Jerusalem.¹

Expropriated land becomes off limits to Palestinians. In the words of Peace Now, the well-known Israeli human rights organization:

[I]n more than 1/3 of East Jerusalem, Israelis and Jews from anywhere in the world have a right to buy property in Israeli settlements, but not Palestinian residents of Jerusalem; including the very residents whose land was expropriated to build those settlements.” Most of West Jerusalem, says the same report, is similarly off limits.²

Israel has many tricks to drive Arabs out. It arbitrarily revokes the residency rights of Palestinians who spend any time outside the city, claiming that their ‘center of life’ lies elsewhere. It deliberately deprives Palestinian areas of the city of important municipal services, to pressure them to leave. It denies Palestinians building permits, so that they are forced to build illegally in order to accommodate growing families.

The buildings are then demolished, the families forced to move out. Their crime? They are Arab.

Hear the evidence from Israeli insiders Amir Cheshin and Avi Melamed, top aides to former Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, and Bill Hutman a *Jerusalem Post* reporter:

[After 1967] Israel saw the adoption of zoning plans as a way of limiting the number of new homes built in Arab neighborhoods....Allowing ‘too many’ new homes in Arab neighborhoods would mean ‘too many’ Arab residents in the city. The idea was to move as many Jews as possible into East Jerusalem, and move as many Arabs as possible out of the city entirely....

If all this sounds like a throwback to the ‘whites only’ days of segregation in the US, it should. Israel was a little more subtle than the segregationists in America—there were no signs stating ‘Jews only’ at the sales offices of the new neighborhoods being built in Jerusalem. But only Jews were eligible for the low interest loans and other incentives subsidized by the state for purchasing the homes in these neighborhoods.

Do not believe the propaganda, the rosy picture Israel tries to show the world of life in Jerusalem since the 1967 reunification. Israel has treated the Palestinians of Jerusalem terribly. As a matter of policy it has forced many of them from their homes and stripped them of their land, all the while lying to them and deceiving them and the world about its honorable intentions.³

Only last month a Palestinian family of five was made homeless in the Beit Hanina district of Jerusalem when Israeli bulldozers came to enforce a demolition order for so-called “illegal building.”⁴

What kind of a government does such a thing? Why does it deserve our tax-funded support?

The truth is that there are many brave Israelis who are dedicated to fighting the racism and sectarian exclusivism that plague their society. They deserve our support.

Do not let the Israel lobby and the right-wing, racist Netanyahu government silence these voices.

NOTES

1. Meron Benvenisti, *City of Stone: The Hidden History of Jerusalem*, University of California Press, 1996, p. 155
2. Peace Now, “Settlements in Focus: Abusing Jerusalem to Assail Peace: The Case of the Shepherd’s Hotel,” July 2009. www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pt=62&docid+4324Qpas=1
3. Amir Cheshin, Bill Hutman and Avi Melamed, *SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL: THE INSIDE STORY OF ISRAELI RULE IN EAST JERUSALEM*, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 32, 60, 251
4. “Israelis flatten Palestinian home”, BBC, 12 Oct. 2009