

# The Geopolitical Status of Silwan & Ath Thuri Town



Prepared by



The Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem

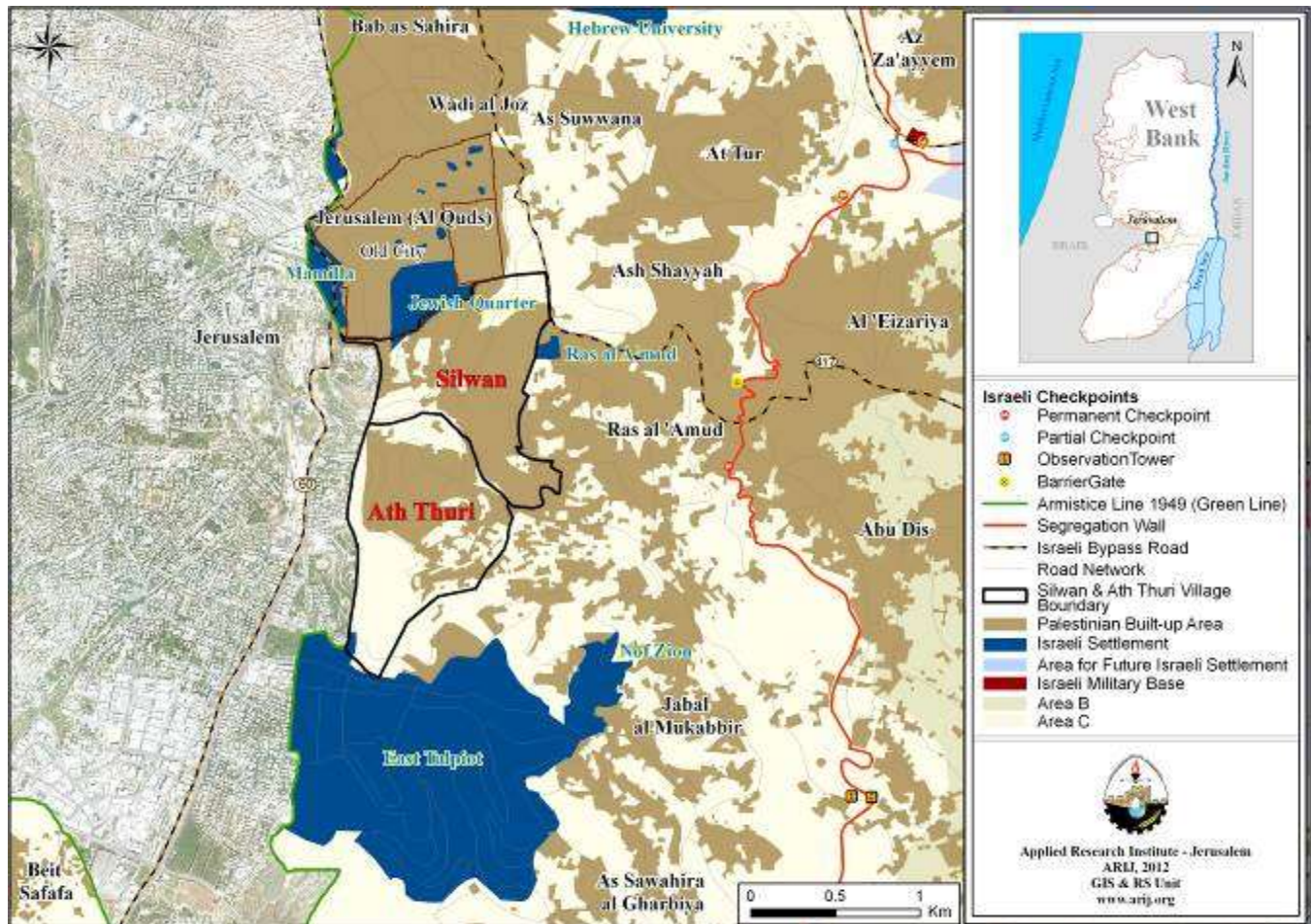
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# Silwan & Ath Thuri Town Profile

## Location and physical characteristics

Silwan & Ath Thuri are Palestinian towns in Jerusalem Governorate located, where Silwan is located 0.9km from Jerusalem City and Ath Thuri 1.55km from Jerusalem City. It is bordered by Jerusalem city and Jabal al Mukabbir to the east, Jerusalem city to the north, Western Jerusalem to the west, and Sur Bahir to the south (ARIJ-GIS Unit, 2022) (See map 1). Unfortunately, no census has been conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) to ascertain population numbers and housing statistics in Silwan & Ath Thuri town. However, **the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics indicates that the population of Silwan and Ath Thuri was approximately 32,000 in 2020** (The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2022).

Map 1: Silwan & Ath Thuri location and borders



Source: ARIJ - GIS Unit, 2022



## Geopolitical status of Silwan & Ath Thuri towns

The entirety of Silwan & Ath Thuri towns cover an area of 1,792 dunums located under the control of Jerusalem Israeli Municipality, which was declared illegally and unilaterally in 1967 after the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank including East Jerusalem, in addition to the Gaza Strip and other Arab lands. Jerusalem Governorate was divided into two main regions; J1 and J2. The J1 area, which is located inside the borders and under the control of Jerusalem Municipality, includes many Palestinian communities from the old town and Jerusalem City (Beit Al Maqdis), in addition to Silwan & Ath Thuri towns. The other region is J2, which is located outside the borders and control of Jerusalem Municipality. The eastern and western parts are under the control of Palestinian Authority whilst the central part of the Governorate remains under Israeli Occupation control.

It is noted that the Israeli Occupation Authorities have used the segregation plan which is represented by the construction of the Segregation Wall to redraw the boundaries of Jerusalem Municipality illegally and unilaterally, aiming to create a *de facto* situation in favor of the Jewish presence in the city. The Segregation Wall has separated the whole area of J1 from Jerusalem Governorate except for Kafr ‘Aqab and Shu’fat Camp towns.

According to the Oslo II Interim Agreement signed between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1995, the West Bank was classified into areas “A,” “B” and “C.” The towns of Silwan & Ath Thuri were not subjected to this classification, but remained as they were before this agreement, under the control of Jerusalem Israeli Municipality.

### Silwan & Ath Thuri towns and the Israeli Occupation practices

Silwan & Ath Thuri towns have been subjected to a number of Israeli confiscations for the benefit of various Israeli aims, represented in the construction of Israeli settlements and outposts on the towns’ territories and their surroundings, in addition to the Israeli Segregation Wall plan. That which follows presents a breakdown of Israeli confiscations on Silwan & Ath Thuri territories:

During Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territory, the Israeli government confiscated 22 dunums of land in Silwan & Ath Thuri towns to establish two Israeli settlements: the Jewish Quarter settlement which is located to the west of the Old Town and adjacent to Al-Aqsa Mosque, and East Talpiot settlement south of Silwan & Ath Thuri (see table 4).

**Table 4: Israeli settlements constructed on Silwan & Ath Thuri lands**

Settlement name	Year of construction	Area confiscated from Silwan & Ath Thuri (dunums)	Population of settlers (2020)
Jewish Quarter	1968	15	3,240
East Talpiot	1973	7	14,820
<b>Total</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>18,060</b>

Source: ARIJ-GIS Unit, 2022

Moreover, Silwan & Ath Thuri towns are subjected to Israeli colonization practices due to their strategic geographical location, adjacent to the old town of Jerusalem and to Al-Aqsa mosque on its southern side. Here, Israeli settlers, with the support of the Israeli Occupation Authorities, impose their control over Palestinian houses and transform them into Israeli outposts in order to expand Israel’s sovereignty in the area through the expansion of the Jewish Quarter settlement in the southern part of the city at the expense of Silwan town lands and properties, in order to complete the “settlement ring” that surrounds the Old Town of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa mosque. So far, around 30 Palestinian houses have been either confiscated or occupied by Israeli settlers in Silwan town and 67 dunums of Silwan and Ath Thuri town lands have been seized by Israeli settlers. This report will later highlight the Israeli settlement plan in Al Bustan neighborhood in Silwan town.

### Silwan & Ath Thuri towns and the Israeli plan for the Segregation Wall

The construction of the Segregation Wall has had a negative impact on Silwan & Ath Thuri towns. According to the last amendment of the plan published on the webpage of the Israeli Defense Ministry on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007, the Segregation Wall isolates all Silwan & Ath Thuri lands from the remaining Palestinian Territory in the West Bank and East Jerusalem towns such as Abu Dis, El ‘Eizariya and As Sawahira ash Sharqiya. All of the isolated areas have important historical relations with these towns, and include the entire Palestinian built-up area of the towns, in addition to forests, agricultural lands, open spaces and Israeli settlements built on the towns’ territories (see table 5).

**Table 5: Land classification of lands isolated west of the Segregation Wall in Silwan & Ath Thuri towns - Jerusalem Governorate**

No.	Land classification	Area (dunums)
1	Palestinian built-up areas	1,113
2	Forests	257
3	Agricultural areas	223
4	Open spaces	145
5	Israeli settlements	22
6	Cemeteries	22
7	Construction sites	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,792</b>

Source: ARIJ-GIS Unit, 2022

### The Segregation Wall causes suffering to Silwan & Ath Thuri residents

Since the outbreak of the Second Intifada in September 2000, citizens of Silwan & Ath Thuri have lost their association with Palestinian cities of the West Bank due to the isolating effect of the Segregation Wall. Citizens of Jerusalem who hold Jerusalemite identity (blue identity card) can enter the West Bank areas through Israeli terminals which often witness huge congestion, while being subjected to inspection from Israeli soldiers; thus restricting Palestinians’ freedom of movement.

On the other hand, Palestinian citizens of the West Bank who hold Palestinian identity cards (green identity card) are prohibited from entering Jerusalem city and its surrounding towns due to the Segregation Wall's isolating effects. As a result, Palestinians are cut off from health, education, social and economic services, such as hospitals, schools and medical centers, as well as from their places of work in Jerusalem. Palestinians holding the green ID are unable to reach the city except if they also hold special Israeli permits which are rarely issued. These citizens must also pass through military checkpoints where they are inspected on a daily basis, causing humiliation and suffering to Palestinians in terms of restricted movement and damage to family and social bonds between West Bank and Jerusalem residents. This is a common scenario for many Palestinian families, especially in cases where one half of the couple holds Palestinian identity (green) and the other holds Jerusalemite identity (blue). The Segregation Wall has also prevented Palestinians from reaching places of worship in the Holy City and has deprived them from practicing their religious rituals in Jerusalem.

According to the Segregation Wall plan that was published on the Israeli Defense Ministry website in 2007, the lands of Silwan & Ath Thuri towns are entirely isolated from the neighboring Palestinian towns and villages in the occupied West Bank, as the existing Wall section is located east of the town and isolates it inside the Jerusalem city boundaries. Additionally, the Wall, along with the Israeli settlements belt around Jerusalem City, isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank Governorates.

Parallel to the establishment of the Segregation Wall, the Israeli Occupation Authorities constructed a settlement belt around Jerusalem city which aims to create an isolation area and prevent of urban expansion in the towns of Jerusalem. This settlement belt in the southern part of Jerusalem city is also located to the south of Beit Safafa and Sharafat and includes four main settlements: Gilo, Har Homa, Har Gilo and Giv'at Hamatos. The Israeli Occupation Authorities constructed these settlements close to urbanized areas in Jerusalemite towns, which has led to an increase in the total area confiscated from these towns and minimized the area available for future urban expansion. This move creates a new reality for the towns' residents that will be difficult to reverse. Israeli policies and plans, particularly in Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian Territory, have led to the creation of high population densities as a result of the lack of lands needed for urban expansion, thus forcing people to adopt internal and vertical expansion. This has caused Jerusalem and its surrounding towns to have some of the highest population densities in the world. The population density in Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem is approximately 13,500 people per km<sup>2</sup> compared to 9,000 people per km<sup>2</sup> in the settlements of East Jerusalem and 8,300 people per km<sup>2</sup> in West Jerusalem

### **The dilemma of land and building licenses in Silwan & Ath Thuri towns**

The issue of land and building license is considered to be one of the most difficult problems in Silwan & Ath Thuri towns and the other areas of East Jerusalem. The reason for this is two-fold; the high prices of lands and the very high cost of licenses for construction in Silwan & Ath Thuri as a result of the strategic proximity to the Old City and Al-Aqsa mosque. This has made these areas an important target for Judaization, colonization and general restrictions relating to constructing licenses imposed by the Israeli Occupation Forces.

According to citizens of Jerusalem, land prices per dunum in the East Jerusalem area and specifically land located within the borders of the Jerusalem Municipality, (which is rarely available) are relatively

higher than land located outside the borders of the Municipality, and can even double in places closer to the city center and its surrounding neighborhoods such as Silwan and Ath Thuri.

The Israeli Occupation Authorities have used their economic advantage as an effective instrument to buy Palestinian lands in Jerusalem for enormous prices and 'Judaize' these lands by housing Jewish settlers in the city. They offer Palestinians very high prices for these lands and properties, especially in the city center and its surrounding neighborhoods. Furthermore, anyone in Jerusalem who owns land and wants to build a house or additional land has to be granted authorization and permission from the Municipality of Jerusalem, which puts obstacles in the way of Palestinians who want to get a building license. One of the main obstacles that obstructs this process is that one has to prove ownership of the land. The Israeli Occupation Authorities require that Palestinians seeking to build a house must prove their ownership of the land, which is considered a political problem related to the occupation since 1967.

According to a report prepared by Bimkom Organization (Planners for Planning Rights), approximately 50% of East Jerusalem lands are unregistered in the archive of ownership, such as those in the town of Kafr 'Aqab and the area extending from Al 'Isawiya town in the north to Sur Bahir in the south. Additionally, 25% of the lands in East Jerusalem are in the process of survey and registration (such as Beit Hanina and Shu'fat towns); and only 25% of the lands in East Jerusalem are officially registered, including parts of Al Bireh, Qalandiya, Beit Hanina, Hizma and 'Anata, Ash Sheikh Jarrah and Beit Safafa (Bimkom, 2004).

According to the testimonies of Palestinians in the towns of Silwan & Ath Thuri, for any Palestinians applying to the Israeli Authorities to get a building license, the procedure is lengthy (sometimes lasting years) and carries a very high cost depending on the land area and type of building, ranging between NIS 150,000-300,000. Thus, due to the high cost imposed on Palestinians to acquire building permits and the lengthy Israeli licensing procedures, Palestinians often tend to build without waiting for the license approval in order to meet their housing needs. In these instances, the Israeli Occupation Authorities usually demolish the property and force the Palestinian owner to pay for the demolition and submit a new building application, thereby incurring additional fees and time. On top of this, the majority of Palestinians in Jerusalem are living in difficult conditions because of high poverty rates, which is a consequence of Israeli Occupation closures which restrict their movement, thus preventing them from reaching work places. These Israeli restrictions and harassments against the Palestinians in East Jerusalem, along with the problems of housing, lack of lands for construction and the high unemployment rate, force many Jerusalemites to migrate outside the borders of the Municipality towards the West Bank or even travel abroad in search of better living standards.

According to the 'Civic Coalition for Defending Palestinian Rights' in Jerusalem (CCPRJ), the Israeli Authorities adopted many policies that aim to enact pressure on Jerusalemites; for example, in the case of the demographic status and urban growth in Jerusalem, the area that is allocated for the development of Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and lies under the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem Municipality is estimated at approximately 9,200 dunums, which represents only 13% of the total area of east Jerusalem. Meanwhile the remaining area is classified as Israeli settlements, green areas (which cannot be used for Palestinian urban growth), public buildings, roads and other areas.

Furthermore, the Israeli Authorities often do not prepare the necessary Master Plans for the Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem which are required for the urban planning process. When such plans

are prepared, the Israeli Authorities usually limit the areas for Palestinian urban expansion to below that which is required for natural urban growth, which varies between 25% and 75%. If one compares these percentages with the percentage of lands used for Israeli settlements, it is found that urban growth varies between 75% and 120%. In Jabal al Mukabbir for example, which is adjacent to Silwan & Ath Thuri towns, the Israeli Authorities determined the urban growth percentage to be 25% (according to plan no.2691), whereas this percentage was set at 142.5% (according to plan no.4558) for the neighboring settlement of Nof Zion”which was illegally constructed on Jabal al Mukabbir lands (CCJ, 2009).

### **Targeting Al Bustan neighborhood: 88 Palestinian houses are threatened with demolition**

Al Bustan neighborhood is located in Silwan town. According to the British Mandate classification, all lands and properties in this neighborhood, which covers approximately 70 dunums, are owned by Palestinian residents. Since the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, the city has been subjected to a colonial attack from the Israeli government and from Jewish organizations such as Ateret Kohanim and Ela’ad, established in 1986 for the purpose of the foundation and construction of David’s City, in Silwan.

Jerusalem Municipality has classified some areas within its boundaries, including lands from Silwan & Ath Thuri, as ‘green areas’, which the Occupation Authorities have used as a way of controlling and confiscating yet more land in Jerusalem. Consequently, the Authorities have demolished houses in Jerusalem under claims that these houses were built on ‘green areas.’ The process of Al Bustan came after the Municipality announced on February 20<sup>th</sup> 2009 their plan to relocate more than 1,500 Palestinian citizens living in the 88 houses of Al Bustan neighborhood in Silwan town to alternative locations. They plan to demolish these 88 houses to establish the Jewish site, ‘King David’s Garden’ as part of the ‘Biblical Gardens’ around the Holy City.

Al Bustan neighborhood has suffered greatly from Israeli colonialist activities. In 1991, Israeli settlers occupied more than 40 Palestinian houses in the area by force. In addition, the Municipality of Jerusalem and Jewish organizations have labeled Al Bustan neighborhood on maps under the name of ‘David’s City’. In 2004, the Municipality issued an order to demolish all buildings in Al Bustan neighborhood for the purpose of ‘establishing a historical garden linked to King David City.’

At the beginning of 2005, Al Bustan started receiving demolition orders and indictments of unlicensed building. Later in the same year, Israeli Municipality bulldozers destroyed two houses in Al Bustan. By the end of 2005, the Occupation Authorities froze the order under international pressure and legal actions taken by Palestinians through the Israeli courts, who requested these orders to cease.

In August 2008, residents of Al Bustan submitted a neighborhood plan to the Municipality of Jerusalem. However, the Municipality refused to deal with this new plan and continued with its plan to build a ‘national park’ in the neighborhood, (POICA, 2009). The Municipality offered people the option to leave their houses willingly with compensation or relocate to another Jerusalem area. However, Al Bustan residents totally rejected this and the Municipality later informed them that the submitted neighborhood plan was rejected.

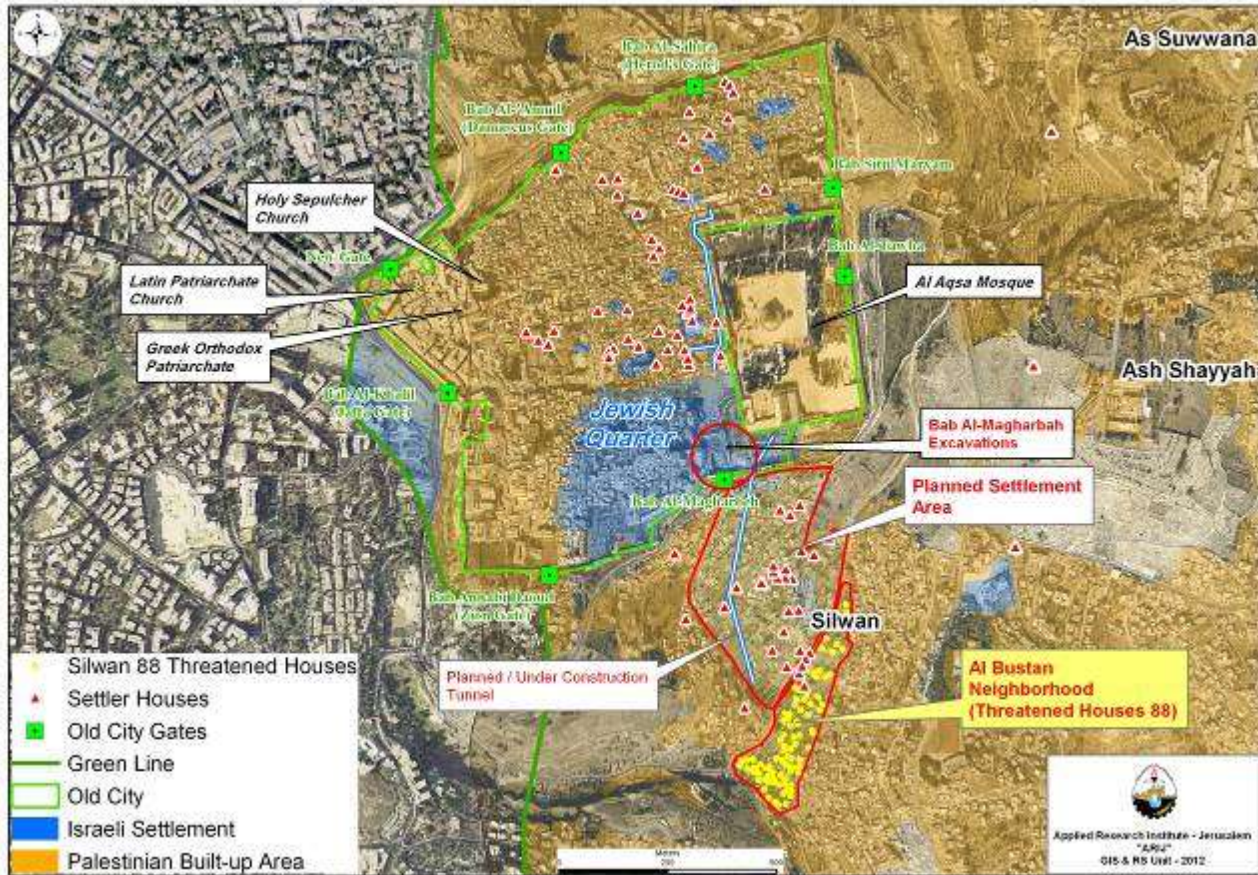
On the 21<sup>st</sup> February 2009, the Municipality of Jerusalem handed evacuation orders to 134 Jerusalemite families, including more than 1,500 people living in 88 houses in Al-Bustan neighborhood, south of Al-Aqsa mosque. These orders aimed to facilitate the establishment of ‘King David’s Park’ in this area within Al Bustan neighborhood.

In July 2009, the Israeli Occupation Authorities transferred the ownership of 14 properties in Silwan, (covering a total area of 28 dunums), to Jewish agencies without approval from the legal counsel of the Israeli government. This eviction was undertaken in order to evacuate the residents of Al Bustan neighborhood and build the ‘Biblical Gardens’ and other Jewish buildings in this location. As a result, eight Palestinian families have received demolition orders for their houses under the pretext of ‘unlicensed building’ and ‘building on public facilities’.

The demolition orders in Al Bustan neighborhood came as part of a bigger Israeli project to Judaize the ‘Holy Basin’ that surrounds the Old City of Jerusalem, an initiative started by the Israelis in the 1990s. It includes the entire Old City and parts of the surrounding suburbs and neighborhoods, including Ash Sheikh Jarrah and Wadi al Joz neighborhoods in the north, At Tur suburb in the east and Silwan suburb in the south. This project aims to establish a historical city that is identical to the biblical description of the “Holy Jerusalem” under Al-Aqsa mosque in Silwan and in some parts of the Islamic neighborhood within the Old City.

The right to adequate housing is considered one of the most prominent rights asserted in charters and international treaties and in International Humanitarian law, which have called for the respect of human dignity and the universal right to adequate housing. However, through its aggression against Palestinian human rights, it is clear that Israel classifies itself to be above such laws and standards.





### Dangerous Israeli escalations in Jerusalem housing demolitions

During recent years, the Israeli Occupation Authorities have escalated their attacks against Palestinians living in Jerusalem by targeting them through housing and other building demolitions under the pretext of ‘unlicensed construction’. An estimation conducted by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs shows that since 1967, the Israeli Occupation has demolished approximately 2,000 houses in Jerusalem in addition to thousands of other constructions (OCHA, 2009). According to Al Maqdese Organization for Society Development, approximately 1,059 houses and constructions in East Jerusalem were demolished between 2000 and 2011, resulting in the displacement of 4,865 Palestinians from Jerusalem of whom 1,290 were women and 2,537 were children (Al Maqdese, 2012). Regarding demolitions in Silwan & Ath Thuri, Al Maqdese Organization noted that during 2011, the towns witnessed the demolition of six constructions; five were residential, which caused the displacement of 23 people (including 14 children). In addition, four of the six constructions were demolished by their owners whilst the other two were demolished by Israeli forces (Al Maqdese, 2012). These Israeli assaults against Palestinians in Jerusalem aim to force them to leave the city and its surrounding towns.

It is also important to note that dozens of houses in Silwan & Ath Thuri were threatened with demolition under the pretext of ‘non-authorization’, despite the fact that their Palestinian owners fulfilled the required procedures for construction and ownership. However the Jerusalem Municipality refuses to authorize their buildings under unjustified arguments, mostly based on a supposed failure to meet the

constantly changing building conditions set by the Israeli Authorities on Palestinians. For instance, on the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010, a force of the Israeli Occupation border guards accompanied by members of the Special Forces and a Municipality employee distributed construction halting and demolition orders in Al Bustan. The orders were based on article 212/5/65 of Israel's 'Construction and Organization law' and were served with a blank header, meaning that neither the owner's name nor the demolition reasons were specified. Six demolition orders were handed out for six houses, owned by the families of Mustafa ar Ruwaidi, Walid ar Rajabi, Abdul Karim abu Sneina, Jum'a ar Ruwaidi, Basim abu Thiyab and Salah abu Shafi'.

### **Previously issued house demolition orders in Silwan town**

In July 2009, the Israeli Occupation Authorities transferred the ownership of 14 Palestinian buildings, occupying a total area of more than 28 dunums, to Jewish settlement organizations without ratification from the Israeli Attorney General. This was conducted in order to build a Biblical Park and Jewish homes. As a result, 8 families received demolition orders under the pretext of unlicensed construction and building on public facilities.

On 27<sup>th</sup> October 2011, the Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem handed administrative orders to Palestinian citizens in 'Ein al Louza neighborhood in Silwan town. These orders related to the demolition of a number of houses owned by Palestinian families in the neighborhood. The Municipality also targeted Yasul area in Silwan and took photos of the houses, lands and properties in the area. This Israeli procedure came only one day after the Israeli High Court's decision to grant Al 'Ad settlement organization administrative control over the public utilities, Amiri lands, and the parks and gardens in Silwan.

On November 1<sup>st</sup> 2011, the Municipality of Jerusalem served five families in Silwan administrative orders to demolish their houses under the pretext of lacking building permits. The targeted houses are located in Al Bustan, 'Ein al Louza, Wad Yasoul, Wadi ar Rababa neighborhoods in Silwan and are owned by the 'Odeh, Jalajel and Al 'Abbasi families.

On 28<sup>th</sup> December 2011, the Municipality, escorted by the Israeli police, raided 'Ein al Louza neighborhood in Silwan town south of Al Aqsa mosque and distributed administrative orders demanding the demolition of a number of houses and commercial stores in the neighborhoods.

Further to these incidents, on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2012, Israeli Municipality officials escorted by the Israeli Occupation police raided 'Ein al Louza and Wadi Qaddum areas in Silwan town and distributed military orders to demolish houses and facilities in the aforementioned communities. The orders targeted the families of Froukh, Abu Sneineh, Sharaf, Az Zaben, Abu Diab, 'Abbasi, Nassar, Hajjaj and Shqairat.

On 1<sup>st</sup> February 2012, the Jerusalem Municipality, escorted by Israeli Occupation police, raided Bir 'Ayyub, Al 'Abbasiya and 'Ein al Louza areas in Silwan town and handed a number of Palestinian families orders to demolish their houses. The Israeli Occupation Police also stormed the houses, assaulted their owners and threatened them with expulsion. Additionally, they assaulted citizen Maher Abdul Razzaq and his brother Hammudah Abdul Razzaq and handed them a demolition order.

On 13<sup>th</sup> February 2012, the Jerusalem Municipality court issued a number of arbitrary orders against Palestinian families in Silwan town under the pretext of building without valid permits. The court issued an order to demolish the house of Mahmoud Hasan Ar Ruweidi and forced him to pay a penalty of 10,000 NIS for building without permit. They also issued a penalty notice for 30,000 NIS on Fatima Muhammad al 'Abbasi and gave her a period of five months to obtain a building permit for her house.

On 18<sup>th</sup> April 2012, Israeli Municipality officials escorted by the police took photos of Al Bustan, prepared field maps and monitored the surroundings of the neighborhood. These actions instilled fear in the citizens of Al Bustan neighborhood, which is under threat of demolition by the Municipality of Jerusalem for the establishment of a biblical garden.

On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2012, the Jerusalem Municipality handed out 88 further orders issued by the Israeli Municipality court to residents of Silwan, ordering the demolition of the houses. The Municipality also took photos of a number of houses in the neighborhood and wrote down an estimations of their size.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2012, the Israeli Municipality court stated that it does not intend to extend the time limit set for the demolition of Palestinian houses in Al Bustan neighborhood in Silwan and Ath Thuri towns. The court set September 2012 as an irrevocable date for the demolition of the 27 houses and 2 other houses comprising Al Bustan neighborhood, which are all targeted for demolition by the Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem. It is noteworthy that this date (September 2012) coincides with the Israeli upcoming elections which were scheduled to take place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2013.

### **The Municipal tax (Arnona) has a negative impact on the living status and economic situation of Palestinians in Jerusalem**

The Municipal tax, ('Arnona' in Hebrew) which is imposed by the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality on the owners of buildings and lands in Jerusalem. This tax is considered to be one of the greatest burdens faced by Palestinian residents of the city, including the residents of Silwan and Ath Thuri towns. The Israeli Authorities use this tax as an instrument to put pressure on Palestinians and force them to leave the city.

The 'Arnona' tax is calculated based on certain criteria, which take in to consideration the classification of the area and the land use classification of the Jerusalem master plan (residential areas, commercial, industrial, agricultural, public buildings, parking etc.). They also take in to consideration the zone type, the type of use and the area of building or land (Jerusalem Municipality, 2012). Regarding the residential areas they classify these into four categories (A, B, C and D), and based on this zoning, along with the area of building, they determine and calculate the amount of tax that must be paid to the Municipality. For example, the tax rate in the residential areas varies in the four zones between 35 and 98 NIS per m<sup>2</sup> which is equivalent to approximately 10-25 US\$ per m<sup>2</sup>. This means that a small house (or apartment) with an area of 100-150 m<sup>2</sup> will cost the owner 3,000-10,000 NIS a year in tax. This is equivalent to approximately 800-3,000 US\$. For commercial shops, the tax imposed by the Municipality is folded, which affects the economic activity as these taxes force the merchants to increase their prices. The tax rate for the commercial shops varies between 309 and 319 NIS per m<sup>2</sup> depending on the area of the shop, which is equivalent to approximately 80 US\$ per m<sup>2</sup>. In addition to the taxation of residential

and commercial areas, the Municipality also imposes taxes on places of worship, agricultural areas, schools, kindergartens, elderly homes and other facilities.

The segregation plan has had a significant negative impact on the economic situation of Palestinians living in Jerusalem in general and on the commercial sector in particular, as it has also suffered from the global recession. Much of the trade in Jerusalem is largely dependent on the Palestinian visitors to the Holy City from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Palestinians from the occupied lands of 1948, but Israeli closure of the city has negatively affected this trade and the economic situation of the city and its residents. Despite these difficulties, the Occupation Authorities continue to impose taxes without taking into consideration the situation of the Jerusalemites, who represent the poorest social group in the Holy City. In fact, just last year (2012), the Municipality decided to increase the 'Arnona' by approximately 3%, increasing still further the burden on the Palestinians of Jerusalem.

It is also important to note that in the case of Jerusalem, Palestinians are forced to pay this tax just to maintain their presence in the city, without even receiving a decent level of Municipal services in return. The planning process in the Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem focuses more on the political-demographic dimension that aims to Judaize the city rather than planning for the purposes of prosperity and well-being of its citizens. For instance, the Municipality rarely carried out the necessary maintenance for the infrastructure of Arab neighborhoods, including roads, water and waste water networks, solid waste and others. This is seen clearly in the many roads in Palestinian neighborhoods that have not been rehabilitated as they are not a priority of the Municipality, whilst the West Jerusalem roads are in a good condition. The major problem suffered by the people of Jerusalem is the lack of a cleaning service and the accumulation of solid wastes, despite their commitment to paying their taxes to the Municipality. This injustice can be clearly seen if we compare the living situation of Palestinians in East Jerusalem with that of the illegal settlers living in the city who have all of their facilities and services provided for them in order to encourage them to stay in the Holy City.

### **Israeli settlement activities against Silwan town and Ath Thuri neighborhood**

On January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012, the Israeli Occupation and Intelligence police placed 320 CCTV cameras in Silwan town, south of Al Aqsa mosque and directed them towards Palestinian houses in a way that compromised their privacy. Although the Israeli Occupation Authorities used to place such cameras around settlement outposts and gatherings, on this occasion the cameras were placed in settlers-free areas, targeting Palestinian neighborhoods and communities. The cameras were attached to poles in the streets, with each pole holding 10 cameras. Two poles were directed towards the street whilst the other 8 were directed towards Palestinian homes<sup>1</sup>.

### **Israeli excavations in Silwan town and Ath Thuri neighborhood**

At the beginning of 2007, an Israeli archeological dig started within Silwan town and Ath Thuri neighborhood, close to the historic walls of the Old City of Jerusalem. This plan continues unabated, despite the ageing of various houses and roads at the site of the dig. The dig is financed by "El 'Ad," a Jewish Israeli association aiming to settle Jews in East Jerusalem. The organization enjoys Government

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<sup>1</sup> The Occupation Authorities implanted phony graves and installed 320 cameras in Silwan.

backing and funding from the Israeli Tourism Ministry, the Israeli Nature and Parks Protection Authority, and the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality.

Excavation works are ongoing day and night in Wadi Hilwa in Silwan, in the area known by Israelis as David's City, and in Al 'Ein area near 'Ein Silwan Mosque. There is no doubt that these excavations will have catastrophic effects on the area and will drastically damage the archeological, religious, and urban surroundings.

### **Phony graves and talmudic parks**

On the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2012, the Israeli Authorities placed 50 fake graves<sup>2</sup> in a 20 dunum plot in the northern part of Silwan town between Al Aqsa mosque and Ras al 'Amud neighborhood in an attempt to capture more Palestinian land in the area for Israeli interests.

It is further noted that the graves were placed to isolate the area (the northern part of Silwan town) from the walls of Al Aqsa mosque to establish Talmudic parks and a museum on 3,000 square meters (3 dunums) of land. This plan will link the Jewish cemetery in Ras al Amoud neighborhood with At Tur neighborhood and the two settlements in Ras al Amoud Ma'ale HaZeitim and Ma'ale David, which in turn will form a colonial ring around the old city of Jerusalem and Al Aqsa mosque. The Israeli machinery commenced work in the area several months ago and they have already leveled the land and prepared the infrastructure at a very rapid pace.

Additionally, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2012, the Israeli Authorities revealed plan no.3085 which shows the installation of fake graves on lands of Silwan to create a de-facto situation in the town that will be difficult to change in the future. The plan targets Ash Shayyah neighborhood to the east of Al Aqsa mosque and extends towards the Israeli Segregation Wall which surrounds the city of Jerusalem. The plan further classifies the lands of Ash Shayyah neighborhood into 'Talmudic gardens' and 'cemetery areas,' under the name 'white zone'. It aims to link the fake graves and Talmudic Gardens in the Mount of Olives area with the Israeli settlements in Ras al 'Amud and with the fake graves and Talmudic gardens in Silwan town and David city settlement, in addition to the Talmudic gardens and fake graves in Wadi ar Rababa in the southern part of Silwan town and with Jabal al Mukabbir neighborhood, to finally surround Al Aqsa Mosque with a belt of Jewish Talmudic gardens to serve the Israeli interests in Jerusalem.

### **A new colonial road revealed between the Talmudic Gardens and the Umayyad Palaces in Jerusalem**

The Israeli Occupation Authorities started constructing a new road and paths to the Talmudic gardens in the northern area of Silwan town, up to the Umayyad Palaces which are near the southern walls of Al Aqsa mosque. It is worth mentioning that the Talmudic gardens and the road which are under construction will prevent natural urban Palestinian expansion in the area adjacent to Al Aqsa mosque and will deny access for Palestinians to the mosque. This in turn, will result in the confiscation of more Palestinian lands in the area for the road and the nearby Talmudic gardens. The road is intended to serve Jewish tourism in the town and around Al-Aqsa mosque.

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<sup>2</sup> The Occupation implanted phony graves and installed 320 cameras in Silwan.



### **The Israeli Occupation Authorities break into Silwan and remove Arabic signs in the town**

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, Israeli Occupation police raided Silwan town south of Al Aqsa mosque from the Wadi Hilwa area. They closed streets and alleys and started removing Arabic signs and flags while retaining the Hebrew signs placed recently by Israeli settlers in the town, in an attempt to Judaize the Silwan area.

### **Israeli settlement plans in Silwan town and Ath Thuri neighborhood<sup>3</sup>**

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2012, the Jerusalem District Planning and Construction Committee approved the construction of a tourism project submitted by the association of El Ad in Silwan town, south of Jerusalem city. The project, which will be called the Mercaz Kedem (Kedem Center), will be constructed on 8,400m<sup>2</sup> of land from the Wadi Hilwa neighborhood in Silwan town, a few meters away from the southern walls of Al Aqsa mosque and above the Giv'ati parking lot (as known to the Israelis). The center will be built on stilts and will include a museum, classrooms, meeting halls, and parking facilities, as well as archaeological sites. Beneath it will be an area where visitors can view the recently discovered archeological findings<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the project will be linked with a crossroad and tunnels; the first will start at the south eastern site of the City of David, while the second will connect the project to Al Aqsa mosque. This project will facilitate tourist access to the Old City of Jerusalem. Another project with an area of 3000m<sup>2</sup> has been submitted by El Ad organization to be implemented in the 'Ein al Fauqa area in Silwan town in an attempt to resurrect Israeli Heritage sites and to empower their presence in the area.

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<sup>3</sup> A new plan for two colonial projects in Silwan.

<sup>4</sup> As stated by Israeli officials and architects