

Al-Bustan Residents Sever Ties with Municipality Amid Kings' Garden Project Demolition Drive, Seek Global Intervention

Photo taken by Rebecca Manski

1 Progress is being made on Israel's implementation of the historic Kings' Garden project below the Old City, in the Al-Bustan section of the Shilo'ach (Silwan) neighborhood. Though the location has been a public "green area," off-limits to construction, ever since the Ottoman period, and despite the Israeli ban on building there, some 100 illegal Arab houses now stand there – and within the past month, at least seven of them have been razed. The objective is to restore the area to something close to the status it had in Biblical times, that of the royal garden mentioned in Jeremiah 52 and Nechemiah 3. Residents of Al-Bustan, unhappy with the stepped-up pace of law enforcement and razing of the illegal structures – and despite a past offer by the city to allow them to remain in 50% of the area slated for the Kings' Garden project – announced in an official letter, which they also distributed via the public media, that they are "stopping" all negotiations on the matter with the Jerusalem Municipality. Their previous court appeals having been rejected, they are now turning to the international public to intervene and help them fight the legal and long-delayed measures taken by the State of Israel.

2 Over the past week, the Jerusalem Police Department has arrested 292 illegal Arab aliens in the city, together with 36 Israeli ID-card holders who hosted them in their homes or drove them from place to place. The Al-Busawla website claims that since the war began in Gaza, the police have stepped up their efforts to enforce the law against the illegals, and have arrested "thousands" of them.

3 Al-Busawla was also up in arms against the "Maccabees March" that had been planned for the Chanukah holiday in Jerusalem. However, the site later reported that the march was called off "because the organizers failed to gather the 200 participants that were necessary for it to be held." In fact, however, 200 was the maximum number allowed, not the minimum, and the police called off the march because they determined that it would disturb the peace. The march was organized by Jewish activists in favor of a Jewish presence on the Temple Mount and against the Waqf.

4 A photographic exhibition produced jointly by hareidi and Arab women of Jerusalem is being held in the Jaffa port. The exhibit is under the auspices of the "Jerusalem Women" project of the O202 Facebook site, which brings together women from the two sectors for joint activities.



4 Something known as the Jerusalem Agricultural Cooperative Association has begun an initiative to distribute 70,000 olive tree saplings, to be planted by Arab farmers in eastern Jerusalem. The goal is to plant them in areas under PA control, particularly alongside the partition fence.

It is not clear if this organization, relatively little-known to the general public, has ties with agricultural committees in the city that are connected with the PFLP terrorist organization. An internet search for this organization turns up nothing, whereas other more well-known organizations with similar names do appear. It could very well be that this name is simply an ad-hoc title covering up for activity by another group that does not want to be identified.

5 The Al-Busawla website reports on "Palestinians" from the city of Tel Sheva in the "occupied Negev" who visited Jerusalem in an organized bus tour, sponsored by the "Convoys to Al-Aqsa" project. Other buses came from the Galilee in the same framework.

As reported here in the past, "Convoys to Al-Aqsa" is one of several projects carried out by the Islamic Movement in Israel, also known as the Muslim Brotherhood. Its funding comes from Turkey, and probably also Qatar.

7 This year, just like last year, the Christmas holiday was celebrated in a more down-key manner than in previous years, both in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. This is due to the pressures exerted on the churches by both the Palestinian Authority and extremist Islamic elements.

8 During the eight-day holiday of Chanukah, the Arab market stores in the Old City were open more expansively than had been the case during the past months of war.

It could be that because of the decrease in Christian tourists compared to other years (though the numbers this year and last were the same), the Arab shopkeepers were relying on Jewish tourists, who have been visiting the Old City in significantly higher numbers during Chanukah. If this is in fact the case, this further reinforces, even in times of crisis, the inevitable integration between a significant part of the Arab economy in Jerusalem and the Israeli economy.



An Arab sign protesting the "Maccabees March."