



Culture

Israel seizes Arab land near Jerusalem

Ezzedine Said
AFP
October 9, 2007

JERUSALEM -- Israel has ordered the confiscation of Arab land outside East Jerusalem, the army and Palestinian officials said Tuesday, reviving fears that the occupied West Bank could be split in two.

Hassan Abed Rabbo at the Palestinian local government ministry said the late September order covers 110 hectares (272 acres) in four Palestinian villages between East Jerusalem and the Jewish settlement of Maale Adumim.

The land could create a bloc of settlements incorporating Maale Adumim and nearby Mishor Adumim and Kedar, he said, and "prevent Palestinian territorial continuity" between the West Bank and Jordan Valley.

The army orders given to landowners, a copy of which was seen by Agence France-Presse, justified the expropriation on "military grounds" and for "measures designed to stop terrorist acts."

The army confirmed Israel was constructing a 15.5-kilometer (10-mile) road connecting East Jerusalem with the West Bank town of Jericho on 144 hectares of state-owned land and 23 hectares of private land "which was appropriated."

Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper said the appropriated land would be used to build a new road for Palestinians only, and would also allow for the development of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

"That, in turn, would 'free up' the E-1 area between Jerusalem and Maale Adumim, through which the current Jerusalem-Jericho road runs, for a long-planned Jewish development consisting of 3,500 apartments and an industrial park," *Ha'aretz* wrote.

In 2005, Israel - under US pressure - froze plans to connect Maale Adumim to East Jerusalem, which the Palestinians want to make the capital of their promised state and which Israel has occupied since 1967.

The Palestinians heavily criticized the project because it would effectively split the West Bank and separate the territory from East Jerusalem.

Israelis and Palestinians are trying to draw up a joint document that would serve as a basis for final-status negotiations, ahead of an international meeting on the Middle East scheduled for next month in the United States.

Jewish settlement activity has been one of several stumbling blocks that have precluded an agreement in past Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

"We condemn this Israeli decision to confiscate Palestinian land at a time in which we are trying to revive the peace process," chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat said.

"Settlement expansion, especially in the Jerusalem area, will undermine and destroy these efforts. We call upon the Israeli government to revoke this decision and give peace a chance," he added.



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