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Israel's continued policy of Judaizing East Jerusalem in order to establish facts on the ground before the future of that part of the city is decided, has left dozens of Palestinians homeless and sleeping on the streets. Hundreds more are at risk, amidst allegations of document forgery by Israeli settlers who have taken over Palestinian homes. Israeli riot police have forcibly evicted 53 Palestinian refugees including 20 children from their homes in the East Jerusalem suburb Sheikh Jarrah. Many sustained injuries during the process. The refugees are from the Hanoun and Al-Ghawi families... [57277]

## Settlers Push Palestinians to Sleep on the Street

By Mel Frykberg

EAST JERUSALEM, Aug 24, 2009 (IPS) - Israel's continued policy of Judaizing East Jerusalem in order to establish facts on the ground before the future of that part of the city is decided, has left dozens of Palestinians homeless and sleeping on the streets.

Hundreds more are at risk, amidst allegations of document forgery by Israeli settlers who have taken over Palestinian homes.

Israeli riot police have forcibly evicted 53 Palestinian refugees including 20 children from their homes in the East Jerusalem suburb Sheikh Jarrah. Many sustained injuries during the process. The refugees are from the Hanoun and Al-Ghawi families.

At the beginning of August the neighbourhood was placed under curfew and declared a closed military zone. Media crews were prevented from entering the area, and those that filmed from a distance were roughed up by soldiers and police.

The belongings of the Hanoun and Al-Ghawi families were dumped in a nearby street. Shortly afterwards the police helped Israeli settlers move into the evacuated houses.

The entire Hanoun family now sleeps on mattresses on the pavement across the road from their former home as they watch the new tenant settlers come and go.

"The settlers have thrown stones at us, and called us bad names," says Maher Hanoun, who was evicted along with his family, and the families of his two brothers.

The settlers attempted to get a court order to force the Palestinian families to move away from their street encampment, but an Israeli court said the families could remain there as long as they didn't "harass the settlers."

The Hanouns and other Palestinians in the same predicament are relying on the goodwill of neighbours for food and toilet facilities.

"It is very hard to see strangers move into your home where you have brought up three children, especially when you know the house does not belong to them," says Nadia Hanoun, 43, mother of three.

"It is humiliating and uncomfortable living on the streets. We have no privacy. I can't even take a shower or use a toilet without having to ask for permission.

"My children are due back at university and school but they have nowhere to study," Nadia tells IPS.

The homes of the Hanoun and Al-Ghawi families were built by the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) together with the Jordanian government in 1956.

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The houses, together with a number of others, were built specifically to house 28 Palestinian refugee families who had either fled Israel or were expelled during the war which followed the establishment of the state in 1948.

Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski first outlined Israel's efforts to Judaize East Jerusalem's Wadi Joz neighbourhood in a letter to the housing ministry in 2004.

"Zoning the neighbourhood for a Jewish population is likely to contribute significantly to the unification of the city. The move will strengthen the link between the Jewish neighbourhoods and public institutions in the Mount Scopus area and the eastern part of the Old City," he said.

When Israel annexed and occupied East Jerusalem following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, it started implementing a number of legal and administrative procedures to take control of land there.

In 1982 several Israeli settler groups took what they claimed to be a document dated 1875 (when the area was part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire) to the Israeli Land Registry, claiming that this proved their ownership of the Hanoun and Al-Ghawi homes.

But Israel's war on Gaza in January and a souring of relations with Turkey enabled the Hanouns' lawyer to access Ottoman archives which proved, according to Turkish authorities, that the document the settlers were citing was forged.

When the Hanoun family was given an eviction notice in February this year, their lawyer presented the Israeli High Court with the new evidence from the Turkish, Jordanian and Islamic authorities.

But the court upheld the eviction order stating that the matter had been challenged two years too late, as disputes over land ownership have to be settled within 25 years of registration.

"Had the family known about the forged document they would have taken the issue to court years ago. But it only became known this year when the Turkish authorities became more helpful," the family lawyer Hosni Al-Hussein told IPS.

However, Al-Hussein is determined to fight the issue. "We're now working on presenting new Turkish documentation to the Israeli courts, further proving the settlers used forged documentation."

The Al-Ghawis and Hanouns have been getting support from several international solidarity groups as well as sympathetic Israelis who have visited them and slept on the streets along with them.

They are not overly optimistic, however, about their chances of returning home.

"It might be too late for us to ever move into our home again, but we will fight to the end as this is not just about our family but about hundreds of other Palestinians who have been evicted and who will be evicted in the future as part of Israel's ethnic cleansing policy," Maher told IPS.

In the interim the Hanouns have been fined over 50,000 dollars by the Israeli authorities for refusing to vacate their home "voluntarily", and each day they fail to pay, interest is added.

The police are also monitoring the homeless families, with patrol cars passing periodically through the day.

According to a report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (Ocha), 475 Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood are at risk of forced eviction.

Ocha says the settlers are attempting to build 540 illegal housing units in the area. This figure does not include other areas of East Jerusalem under threat. (END/2009)

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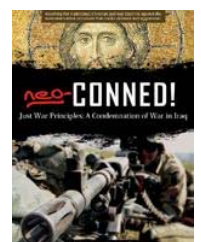
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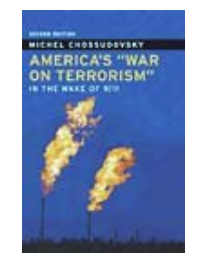
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