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Policy Paper on Israel’s “City Center Plan”

Executive Summary:

This paper highlights one of the occupation’s main projects for the Judaization and Israelization of East Jerusalem. This project is called the “City Center Plan”, which aims to forcibly transfer Jerusalemite Palestinians from their city. The project is linked to a number of other colonial projects aimed at Judaizing Jerusalem, displacing its Palestinian residents, and changing its geographic and demographic character. The “City Center” project also aims to cripple economic activities in the center of East Jerusalem (especially the area of the Old City and Salah Eddin Street), as well as attempting to transform the area into settler enterprises, which are planned to be created soon in the framework of the “City Center” and “Silicon Wadi” projects. For this purpose, Israel is planning to demolish the industrial area of Wadi al-Joz in Jerusalem and open Israeli Hi-Tech companies in its place, as well as completely changing the infrastructure and traffic in the area around the Old City.

Facts about the City Center Plan

The City Center Plan encompasses an area of approximately 689 dunums in the area of Bab al-Zahra and Wadi al-Joz, and it extends from Sultan Suleiman Street and the Old City Walls from the south to Uthman ibn Affan Street from the north, and from Wadi al-Joz Street from the east to the longitudinal road on the seam between East and West Jerusalem (known as “Road No. 1”). This area is among the most sensitive and economically vibrant ones in occupied East Jerusalem. It also represents the “heart” of the city and its main center, and it includes Salah Eddin, al-Zahra, Al-Rashid, and al-Masoudi streets.



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The Plan aims to Judaize the landmarks of Jerusalem, thus affecting all spheres of residential, economic and social life in the city. Therefore, it does not meet the needs of the population in any field of development, contrary to what is claimed by the Jerusalem Municipality. Rather, it only serves the strategic Israeli policies of Judaizing Jerusalem and changing its landmarks, in order to seize more lands and maintain a Jewish settler majority alongside a weakened Palestinian minority. According to this Plan, all developmental projects in Jerusalem should be at a distance of 75 meters from the Old City walls, thus reducing the opportunities of development and construction and significantly reducing the percentage of Arabs in East Jerusalem's City Center. The main concern of this Plan is to support Jewish settler presence and improve their neighborhoods. For example, it aims to expand illegal settlements at the expense of the lands and areas inhabited by indigenous Jerusalemites. The Plan gives Jerusalemite Palestinians an opportunity to build only 76 housing units in the next thirty years, which is greatly disproportionate with the natural population growth that requires more than 2,000 housing units annually in Jerusalem.

This Plan is one of the most dangerous schemes targeting Jerusalem. It is also closely linked to the "Jerusalem 2020 Master Plan" and the "Jerusalem 2050 Plan" that aim to support settlements. The Plan also comes in parallel with the "Silicon Wadi" Plan in Wadi al-Joz, whose goal is to eliminate the industrial area in Wadi al-Joz and replace it with an area designated for hotels, offices and Israeli Hi-Tech companies within a large settlement enterprise that targets the occupied city.

Objectives of this Dangerous Plan:

- Judaize Jerusalem and Israelize all components of its Palestinians residents, as well as erasing the city's Arab character.



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- Expand Israeli settlement plans in general, while aiming to encircle the city and isolate it from its Palestinian surroundings in the south, north and east.
- Fragment Jerusalemite Palestinian neighborhoods and separate them from each other with settlements and the Annexation and Expansion Wall. The Plan also seeks to practically destroy a whole neighborhood in order to build an economic settlement project on its ruins, as well as strengthening Israel's economic stranglehold on indigenous Jerusalemites.

The Negative Effects of this Plan on Jerusalemite Palestinians:

- The City Center Plan does not correspond with the natural population growth. Therefore, it will force many Palestinian residents to look for housing outside Jerusalem.
- The Plan will expand the Jerusalem Municipality's control and authority over the areas classified as "public facilities", as well as changing the city's landmarks.
- The Islamic Awqaf-owned schools are classified by the Municipality as "residential buildings". Therefore, the Municipality can technically refrain from giving them licenses, which would mean the end of Palestinian education in Jerusalem after Israel's closure of the [Palestinian] Directorate of Education in Jerusalem.
- Changing the names of Jerusalem's streets in a way that weakens the connection of Jerusalemite Palestinians to their city. This also affects the cultural identity of Jerusalem, as seen in the stairs of Damascus Gate, which are now called "Hadar and Hadas" by the occupation authorities.
- Separate the Old City of Jerusalem from its cultural surrounding.
- Israel created a settler transportation line that is linked to the Israeli infrastructure and light rail, whereas this line extends all the way to the aerial cable cars.



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- Israel restricts the development of East Jerusalem's city center.
- The occupation has not organized the Jerusalem neighborhoods for more than 50 years (i.e. since the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967).
- Israel aims to weaken the commercial center of East Jerusalem in order to force Jerusalemites to consider West Jerusalem as the main commercial center.
- The occupation categorizes 146 buildings as historical ones, thus placing them under the "historic preservation" category.
- Israel conducted changes to the historical park in the Damascus Gate area.
- Changing the historical monuments in the Old City in general and Damascus Gate area in particular, and restricting the merchants of Musrara area by closing down parking lots in order to weaken the commercial activities therein.

The Main Israeli Violations against Jerusalemites Palestinians through this Plan:

It must be emphasized that East Jerusalem is an occupied city according to international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. This Convention stipulates that the occupying power shall not conduct any changes in the occupied areas, except if that serves the occupied population. We will now list some of the Israeli violations against Jerusalemites through this Plan, which harms their interest and well-being:

- An occupying power must secure and protect education and health without trying to interfere in them.
- Israel aims to change the city's landmarks without any benefit to the local inhabitants and without any consultation with them.
- Violation of the right to housing.



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- Violation of the right to education after deeming some Awqaf and Palestinian Authority schools as “public facilities”.
- Israel makes it almost impossible to establish additional hotels in East Jerusalem.
- Constant attempts to weaken the economic movement in Salah Eddin Street and inside the Old City.
- Failure to take into account the needs and population growth of Jerusalemite Palestinians.
- Israel attempts to erase the heritage and culture of the Palestinian people, as well as changing the names of Jerusalemite streets and archaeological and historic sites.
- The occupation aims to control the largest possible land area, while minimizing the number of Palestinian residents therein.
- Crippling the Palestinian economic activities in the center of East Jerusalem and shifting the tourism sector towards Israeli settler enterprises.

Recommendations:

At the National Level:

- Raise the budget of the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs.
- Increase financial support/funding to maintain Palestinian education in Jerusalem.
- NGOs and political parties must raise societal awareness on settler-colonial plans and projects.
- Enhance support for Palestinian civil society organizations.
- Provide direct support to Jerusalemite merchants in and around the Old City of Jerusalem.
- Conduct more awareness campaigns by NGOs and legal organizations regarding the submission of objections/lawsuits against settlement plans.



At the International Level:

- Activate the role of the international community through lobbying and advocacy campaigns.
- Develop mechanisms to attract the support of international organizations.
- File lawsuits against the occupation in the international arena, especially the International Criminal Court (ICC), since the settler project aims to forcefully displace indigenous Jerusalemites.
- Call upon UNESCO to consider the Old City of Jerusalem as a world heritage center that must be protected from the dangers of the occupation.
- Resort to state parties in the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure the enforcement of this Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem.