

Briefing: Act now to stop a new Israeli settlement in Hebron

The Israeli settlers of Hebron are known for their use of violence and intimidation against their Palestinian neighbours. They already occupy four settlements in the heart of Hebron and two in Wadi al Hussein, the valley behind the Old City of Hebron. The settlements are illegal under international law but a dispute is currently underway as to whether they will be able to establish a new settlement in Wadi al Hussein. This would have serious human rights implications for the Palestinian families living around the site; would give the settlers a new strategic location to link with and expand existing settlements; would constitute a further breach of international law; and is especially significant given the current talks about peace negotiations.

*The Israeli Supreme Court will make a judgement in the next 1-6 months but Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon will make the final decision. **Please apply immediate and severe pressure to him, and to the Government of Israel as a whole to reject the new settlement at the Al Rajabi building in Hebron.***

Background

- On Monday 2 September 2013 the Israeli Supreme Court held the final hearing into a dispute regarding ownership of the Al Rajabi building in Wadi al Hussein, in the Ras neighbourhood of H2, Hebron. They have stated that they will issue a final decision in 1-6 months.
- The dispute centres around the attempt of Israeli settlers to purchase the building to establish a new settlement in Hebron. The Al Rajabi building is ironically called Beit Shalom (House of Peace) by the settlers and, more recently, the House of Contention.
- Settlers occupied the building between 19 March 2007 – 4 December 2008 before being removed due to the court dispute. During this time they violently harassed Palestinian neighbours. When evicted in 2008, the settlers set fire to some of their neighbours' homes and even shot and injured two men.
- The building can house 40 families and is surrounded by Palestinian family homes which house around 1000 people in total. It is strategically located between two existing settlements of Kiryat Arba and Givat Ha'avot, and the Ibrahim Mosque. Possession of the building would help settlers to expand and link these settlements with the four that already exist by the Old City, with serious human rights implications for Palestinians who live in the surrounding areas.
- All of the settlements are illegal under international law. That the Israeli authorities are even considering permitting a new settlement in such a controversial place as Hebron at the time of international talks about peace negotiations is extremely concerning.
- Further to the forthcoming Supreme Court result, the final decision will rest with Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon. It is essential that he feels severe international pressure to block it.

“Settlement expansion is a very dangerous policy that destroys peace...what is happening in Hebron is a block to international efforts on the peace process.”

Governor of Hebron, 1 September 2013



The Al Rajabi building can house 40 families and is in the middle of a Palestinian neighborhood.

Human rights and humanitarian implications

This is, at its heart, a human rights and humanitarian issue. By looking at the restrictions applied by the Israeli authorities around other Hebron settlements, we can see the kinds of consequences that a new settlement in the Al Rajabi building would be likely to have for the surrounding Palestinian population:

1. SAFETY, SECURITY AND PROTECTION

- The 15 families/ 95 Palestinians living in the closest proximity to the Al Rajabi building bore the largest number of settler attacks in 2007-08. These included physical violence, graffiti, property damage, house raids and arrests. Slashing of car tyres and breaking windows of parked cars, as well as defacing burial sites, was a further problem. A new settlement there would leave Palestinians 'sandwiched' in the valley between the Al Rajabi building and Kiryat Arba particularly vulnerable.

2. SETTLEMENT EXPANSION AND LINKAGES

- The strategic location of a new settlement in the Al Rajabi building would complete the circle on other current moves to expand existing settlements. These include an outpost and a new path linking Kiryat Arba and Givat Ha'vot, both on Palestinian land. The settlers aim to link them together, and with the settlements in the Old City. They are currently building a new road across Palestinian land from Kiryat Arba towards the road to the Ibrahim Mosque/ Tomb of the Patriarchs at the centre of H2.

“If settlers come back to the Al Rajabi house, I am worried that there will be nothing called Wadi Al Hussein anymore. It will be only Israelis and no Palestinians.”

Palestinian resident of Wadi Al Hussein, 3 September 2013

3. ACCESS

- **Access to Education:** education in the area is mainly provided by the Al Muntanabi School for Boys and the Abdel Khaleq Yaghmour School for Girls. UN figures suggest that some 200 students of all ages cross a gated checkpoint beside the building every day. This would be expected to cease if the settlement were to be established. An alternative route (the main Kiryat Arba Road) would add an additional 10 minutes to the daily journey of the students, while placing them at risk of attack by the settlers of the Al Rajabi building. Given the conservative nature of the community, this would give an added reason for older girls not to attend school, leading to increased cases of early marriage.
- **Vehicular access:** although most Palestinians are banned by the Israeli authorities from driving on the road in front of the Al Rajabi building, at least 40 Palestinian vehicles are known to hold permits to do so. It is expected that these would be revoked if the settlers took the house, providing further restrictions to freedom of movement in the area.
- **Access to religious sites:** Al Ras Mosque is 20 metres from the Al Rajabi building. When settlers previously occupied the building, it was targeted with racist graffiti, garbage being placed at the front doors, and eggs and tomatoes being thrown at attendees on a number of occasions. Physical attacks would be expected to resume if the settlers return, along with the denial of the call to prayer.
- **Access to burial places:** a large cemetery is located in the immediate vicinity of the Al Rajabi building. At least 30 Hebronite families have this as the final resting place for the bodies of their loved ones, accompanied by large funeral attendances. Such numbers of Palestinians at gatherings next to a settlement would be targets for settler attacks and movement restrictions by the Israeli army.

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Palestinians families are also prevented from building additional floors on their homes, and UN figures suggest this has led to the displacement of some 30 families. For example, Bassam Al Jabari has been prevented at least six times this year from finishing the second floor of his house.

Please act now. For more information contact eappi.communications@gmail.com or +972 (0)54 737 9766.

