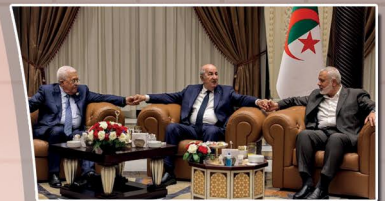


# The Palestine Strategic Report 2022 – 2023



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# **Chapter Three**

*The Land and the Holy Sites*



# The Land and the Holy Sites

## *Introduction*

The policy of Judaization, settlement and displacement in WB, including Jerusalem, the attempt to control the management of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the Judaization of Islamic and Christian holy sites have become a fixed strategy that most political components and policy makers in Israel are competing to achieve.

With the rise of Temple groups and the consolidation of their position in the Israeli political system and decision-making institutions, the attack on land and holy sites has intensified, threatening Palestinian existence and depriving Palestinians of sovereignty even over part of their land.

In this chapter, we address Israeli practices and measures pursued in 2022 and 2023 to Judaize Jerusalem and impose control over the management of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, digging and bulldozing operations in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa*, demolition of old Arab neighborhoods and expelling their residents, revoking Jerusalem IDs as well as targeting education in Jerusalem. We also highlight settlement projects and plans in Jerusalem and the rest of WB, and attacks on Islamic and Christian holy sites across the occupied Palestinian territories.

## *First: Islamic and Christian Holy Sites*

### **1. *Al-Aqsa Mosque***

The years 2022–2023 have been among the most perilous for *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This was particularly evident during the Jewish holidays which were used to carry out various plans to raid the Mosque. These plans involved Knesset members, Temple groups, senior rabbis, Israeli officers and police, aiming to impose a policy of temporal and spatial division of *al-Aqsa*, in addition to raising Israeli flags in the Mosque courtyards, blowing the horn (*Shofar*), allowing access to *al-Aqsa* Mosque through Lion's Gate and bringing the "Four Species" to the Mosque. During the month of Ramadan, *al-Aqsa* became an arena of confrontation, with Israeli forces arresting hundreds of Palestinians and drones fired tear gas canisters.



Israel is attempting to impose a new fait accompli at *al-Aqsa* Mosque that aligns with its vision for the Mosque. In coordination with Temple groups, Israeli authorities are employing various methods to potentially remove *al-Aqsa* Mosque and establish the Temple in its place. To achieve this, the Israeli authorities and groups have adopted numerous plans and Judaization projects, some of which have already been implemented. They have continued excavation projects under and around *al-Aqsa* Mosque, while preventing the restoration and maintenance of the Mosque. In response, Jerusalemites, supported by resistance factions in WB and GS, are opposing these plans with determination and resilience. They emphasize that any aggression against their city and Mosque is akin to playing with fire, and they are committed to resisting Israel's efforts. Operation al-Aqsa Flood on 7/10/2023 highlighted the central role of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in the ongoing conflict with the occupation, which continues to seize land and holy sites.

The following sections will discuss the projects, plans, measures and actions undertaken by the Israeli authorities, supported by Temple groups and settlers, aimed at controlling *al-Aqsa* Mosque and imposing a new reality in preparation for the establishment of the alleged Temple in its place.

#### **a. Control of the Mosque's Administration**

##### **Strengthening the Political Ascent of Temple Groups**

Since 1967, Temple groups have gradually risen in influence, marked by an increase in their number, organization and ability to mobilize funding. This growth has been accompanied by significant success in parliamentary and governmental role, allowing these groups to become actively engaged in political life. Over time, they have become highly influential within official institutions and have gained a growing presence in the Knesset, contributing to numerous achievements. In recent years, Temple groups have secured several ministerial portfolios and become major players in Israeli politics. During Knesset election cycles, they have consistently formed a stable bloc of 17 to 18 Knesset members, representing about 15% of the seats.<sup>1</sup> In the 25th Knesset elections, held on 1/11/2022, the coalition of Likud, Religious Zionism and Haredi parties won 64 out of 120 seats.<sup>2</sup>

According to estimates, 16 of the 31 ministers in Benjamin Netanyahu's government, formed on 29/12/2022, are affiliated with Temple groups. These ministers not only support the construction of a temple in place of *al-Aqsa* Mosque but use their influence and authority within their ministries to further this goal.

An investigation by Israel’s Channel 12 highlighted that for some members of the government, the establishment of a Temple on the ruins of *al-Aqsa* Mosque “is a dream for some participants in the government,” referring to the *Otzma Yehudit* (Jewish Power) Party led by National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, and the Religious Zionism Party led by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich. Although Israel’s official rabbinate and the central religious movements prohibit Jews from entering *al-Aqsa* Mosque, warning that violating this religious edict is sinful, Temple groups—whose influence has significantly grown—are now calling for all Jews to enter *al-Aqsa* and pray there, asserting it as a sacred right.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Al-Aqsa* Mosque Incursions as Part of the Moral Construction of the Temple**

Incursions by Israeli settlers into *al-Aqsa* Mosque have risen sharply since 2003, when they secured a judicial ruling authorizing individual and group incursions.<sup>4</sup> Their numbers have increased annually. The presence of security forces patrolling the courtyards of *al-Aqsa* has also steadily grown, and Israeli police have increasingly restricted Muslim worshippers’ access to the Mosque. Additionally, the police have blocked the Jerusalem Awqaf Department from conducting renovations or repairs within the Mosque buildings, while also preventing worshippers from WB, GS and the 1948 occupied territories from entering.

The frequency of settler incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque has escalated, becoming more systematic and organized. Temple groups have launched extensive incitement campaigns on social media to further increase these incursions, particularly during Jewish holidays and occasions, which at times coincided with the holy month of Ramadan and other Islamic occasions.

According to the Jerusalem Awqaf Department, 48,238 settlers stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque in 2022,<sup>5</sup> with 48,223 settlers doing so in 2023.<sup>6</sup> Settlers stormed *al-Aqsa* 258 times in 2023,<sup>7</sup> compared to 262 times in 2022.<sup>8</sup>

Other Palestinian organizations, including the Palestine Information Center—Mo3ta, also track these incidents. Mo3ta reported that 55,545 settlers stormed *al-Aqsa* in 2022<sup>9</sup> and 54,684 in 2023.<sup>10</sup>

This discrepancy arises because the Jerusalem Awqaf Department excludes Jewish students and Israeli security personnel from its annual statistics, while other organizations track all groups involved in incursions into *al-Aqsa*. Additionally, the use of different monitoring tools contributes to the variation between the figures released by the Jerusalem Awqaf Department and other sources.

It can be said that targeting of *al-Aqsa* Mosque has become a central focus for Israel, rather than a temporary or emergency issue. This indicates that extremist Temple groups wield significant influence within the Israeli political system, ensuring that the agenda of Judaizing *al-Aqsa* Mosque remains a priority for the Israeli government, regardless of which coalition is in power.

There are other factors that have contributed to the increased frequency of incursions, including:<sup>11</sup>

- The construction and development of the Separation Wall in WB since 2002 have limited the ability of Palestinians to mobilize large numbers to confront the incursions.
- Israel's unprecedented restrictions on visitors to *al-Aqsa* Mosque, particularly those from Jerusalem and the 1948 occupied territories, have contributed to a reduction in the number of worshippers, especially during periods of incursions.
- Israel banned the Islamic Movement in the 1948 occupied territories on 17/11/2015, under Netanyahu's previous government. Since the 1970s, the movement has played a significant role in mobilizing for *al-Aqsa* Mosque, establishing five institutions dedicated to serving the Mosque. Whenever the movement called on Palestinians to visit *al-Aqsa* Mosque to resist mass settler incursions, thousands would respond.
- The escalation of the normalization process with some Arab countries has emboldened Israel to continue its aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Throughout 2022–2023, Temple groups not only exploited religious holidays and occasions to increase the number of incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque, but also coordinated these incursions with Israeli religious or political events. They used these incursions to impose a new reality at *al-Aqsa* Mosque and pressure the Israeli government to adopt and legalize this policy through legislation.

During the Jewish Passover (*Pesach*) and the anniversary of the occupation of Jerusalem according to the Hebrew calendar (April–May 2022), 3,738 settlers and 1,687 settlers respectively stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Additionally, 1,052 settlers stormed the Mosque in June on the Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot*).<sup>12</sup>

Extremist Israeli organizations continued to exploit Jewish holidays to mobilize the largest possible numbers of intruders, including on *Tisha B'Av*, the day commemorating the destruction of the Temple, 7/8/2022, when 2,201 settlers stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque within a span of five hours.<sup>13</sup>



The Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), observed from 10 to 17/10/2022, marked the most significant period for incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque in 2022. During this time, the Mosque experienced a surge of activity, with thousands of settlers performing biblical rituals at the Western Wall and the Cotton Merchants' Gate. Settlers also engaged in biblical dances at the Lions' Gate, carried the "Four Species," and prostrated in prayer at the Chain Gate. According to sources from the Jerusalem Awqaf Department, 5,795 settlers stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque during Sukkot.<sup>14</sup>

### An Extremist Settler Prostrates in Prayer at the Chain Gate of *al-Aqsa* Mosque



During the celebrations of the Festival of Lights (*Hanukkah*) (18–26/12/2022), 1,797 extremist settlers, under the protection of the Israeli police, were able to prostrate themselves, for the second time in 2022 and the second time since the occupation of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in 1967. They also performed collective biblical prayers at the gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and prostrated themselves in its eastern square. Among them were Moshe Feiglin, a leader of the extremist Temple groups, MK Zvika Vogel of the Religious Zionism bloc and MK Nissim Vaturi of the Likud Party, and leaders of "Women for the Temple" group.<sup>15</sup>

In 2023, Jewish settlers continued their incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque during Jewish religious occasions, including:

**Jewish Passover (*Pesach*) (5–13/4/2023):** During this period, the number of settlers storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque increased significantly, with 3,430 settlers

entering the site and conducting public biblical prayers and rituals. The month of Ramadan coincided with the Jewish Passover, prompting the *Murabitun* (*al-Aqsa* Mosque defenders) at *al-Aqsa* Mosque to begin the Spiritual Retreat (*I'tikaf*) earlier than usual in anticipation of the expected incursions. *Al-Aqsa* saw repeated incursions by Israeli forces, who attempted to disrupt the *I'tikaf* each night but were met with the steadfast resistance of the *Murabitun*. On the night of Ramadan 15, the Jerusalem Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Council issued a statement allowing *I'tikaf* for the remainder of Ramadan, a position that many had expected them to take before the holy month began.<sup>16</sup>

**Anniversary of the complete occupation of Jerusalem according to the Hebrew calendar (18/5/2023) and the Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot*) (25/5/2023):** Temple groups mobilized to storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque, especially during the anniversary of Jerusalem's occupation, when 1,286 settlers stormed the Mosque. In addition, 380 settlers, some dressed in priestly garments, stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque on *Shavuot* and performed biblical rituals. In total, 6 thousand settlers stormed *al-Aqsa* during these holidays.<sup>17</sup>

The Israeli government, led by Netanyahu held its weekly session in a tunnel beneath the western side of *al-Aqsa* Mosque to mark the 56th anniversary of Jerusalem's occupation. This took place hours after Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, along with dozens of settlers stormed *al-Aqsa*. At the start of this weekly cabinet session, Netanyahu said, "Fifty-six years ago, in the Six Day War, we unified Jerusalem. But I must say that the fight for its unity has not ended."<sup>18</sup>

**Temple Destruction (*Tisha B'Av*) (27/7/2023):** July saw large-scale incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque, marked by provocative rituals coinciding with the commemoration of *Tisha B'Av*. On 27/7/2023, 2,180 settlers stormed *al-Aqsa* and openly performed biblical prayers and rituals. Ben-Gvir participated in the morning incursions, marking his third visit to *al-Aqsa* since taking office at the beginning of 2023.<sup>19</sup> On 26/7/2023, extremist rabbi Yehuda Glick, along with dozens of settlers, also stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>20</sup> The Israeli government held a meeting near the Western Wall, alongside several settler associations, where they signed agreements related to the new Temple model project.<sup>21</sup>

**Hebrew New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*), Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) and Sukkot (15–16/9/2023, 24/9/2023 and 29/9/2023–6/10/2023):** Around 1,600 settlers stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque for the Hebrew New Year and the Day of Atonement<sup>22</sup> (1,144 settlers on the Day of Atonement alone).<sup>23</sup> Among the intruders was the extremist former MK Yehuda Glick, who led a group of foreign tourists on a tour promoting Talmudic misrepresentations with false biblical interpretations.<sup>24</sup> During the New Year incursions, settlers sounded the horn in the eastern courtyards of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, marking a dangerous escalation in these incursions, and conducted public biblical prayers en masse.<sup>25</sup> During Sukkot, 5,739 settlers stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>26</sup>

**The Festival of Lights (*Hanukkah*) (7–15/12/2023) and the repercussions of Operation al-Aqsa Flood:** Hanukkah, the last holiday season of 2023, began on the evening of Thursday 7/12/2023 and lasted for eight days according to Jewish tradition. However, the storming of *al-Aqsa* Mosque occurred for only five days due to the closure of the Moroccan Gate on Friday and Saturday. A week before the holiday began, nine Temple groups mobilized their supporters for “March of the Maccabees,” which was approved and protected by the Israeli police. They demanded the expulsion of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department from *al-Aqsa* and the imposition of Jewish control over the Mosque. The police required 200 settlers to participate in the march, but only 150 joined. The march started half an hour late and was halted by the police minutes after it began, preventing it from reaching the New Gate near Jaffa Gate.<sup>27</sup> During this holiday period, about 1,332 settlers stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>28</sup>

**Table 1/3: Number of Settlers Storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque During Jewish Holidays 2022–2023**

Jewish Holidays	2022	2023
Passover	3,738	3,430
Hebrew anniversary of the occupation of Jerusalem	1,687	1,286
Shavuot	1,052	380
Tisha B’Av	2,201	2,180
Yom Kippur and Sukkot	7,941	6,883
Hanukkah	1,797	1,332

Due to the exclusion of *al-Aqsa* guards since Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the enforcement of a 50-meter distance between them and settlers during their incursions into the Mosque, as well as the general prohibition on worshippers and journalists from entering the Mosque, especially during these incursions, the violations committed by Temple groups at *al-Aqsa* Mosque could only be documented through their own posts on social media.<sup>29</sup>

### **Ben-Gvir (R) Lights a Candle of the Hanukkah Menorah in the Western Wall Plaza Near *al-Aqsa* Mosque**



**Incursions by Rabbis and Yeshiva Students:** Rabbis, heads of yeshivot and their students have played a significant role in escalating incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Citing biblical claims and plans for the establishment of the Third Temple, rabbis and yeshiva leaders have increasingly called for regular incursions, while Jewish prayers and symbolic biblical offerings intended to “intangibly build the temple” in preparation for its physical construction. Rabbis and seminary students actively participated in numerous incursions conducted by settlers throughout 2022 and 2023.

In this context, more than 50 rabbis and heads of Jewish religious schools stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 3/4/2022, to mark *Rosh Chodesh Nissan* (first day of Nissan month in Hebrew calendar). The incursion was led by Rabbi Shlomo Rosenfeld of the Shadmot-Mehola yeshiva, and Rabbi Eliezer Shankolevsky from

Beit Shemesh. Rabbi Yisrael Ariel emphasized the importance of “ascending to the Temple Mount” (making *aliyah*) according to Jewish law (*halakhah*) and considered the incursion by 50 rabbis “a seal of approval, comparable to the chief rabbinate’s endorsement of ascension.” During the incursion, Rabbi Shmuel Moreno said, “We are honored to come here daily for dawn and afternoon prayers. Upholding the law on the Temple Mount is a good deed (*mitzvah*) from the Torah, and we are fortunate to experience things here that even in the days of King David, when the ‘Palace of a King did not conquer’ [were not achieved].”<sup>30</sup>

Among the intruders was Rabbi Yoel Elitzur, an early advocate of Israel’s “return to the Temple Mount.” Rabbi Shimshon Elboim, head of the Temple Mount Administration, said that “Despite the significant gap between what is desired [outcome] and the current situation on the Temple Mount, considerable progress has been made compared to eight years ago.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Rabbis Storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque to Mark the First Day of Nissan Month in Hebrew Calendar**



On 19/4/2022, Rabbi Yisrael Harel and Shlomo Ne’eman, head of the Gush Etzion Regional Council, were among 853 settlers who stormed *al-Aqsa* on Passover.<sup>32</sup>

## Jewish Seminary Students Storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque



**Incursions by Israeli Political Officials:** In 2022 and 2023, several Israeli politicians stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque. In 2022, extremist MK Itamar Ben-Gvir stormed *al-Aqsa* five times.<sup>33</sup> On 26/1/2022, MK Eli Cohen (Likud) stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque and led a tour for dozens of party members, accompanied by Rabbi Shimshon Elboim, head of the Temple Mount Administration.<sup>34</sup> MK Simcha Rotman (Religious Zionism Party) also stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque four times.<sup>35</sup> On 7/11/2022, on the eve of the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), Rotman, along with former MK Yehuda Glick, stormed the Mercy Gate Cemetery and blew the horn along with other settlers who performed the “prostration” ritual at *al-Aqsa* gates.<sup>36</sup> On 21/12/2022, MK Zvika Vogel (Jewish Power) stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque, accompanied by Rabbi Shimshon Elboim.<sup>37</sup> On 22/12/2022, MK Nissim Vaturi, along with 249 Israeli settlers, stormed *al-Aqsa* under the protection of Israeli forces, who imposed restrictions on the entry of Muslim worshippers.<sup>38</sup>

In 2023, Israeli politicians continued to raid *al-Aqsa* Mosque on several occasions, most notably among whom were National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, Minister for the Development of the Periphery, the Negev and the Galilee Yitzhak Wasserlauf, MK Yitzhak Kroizer, Likud Party MKs, and dozens of rabbis and officials from Temple groups.<sup>39</sup>

**Turning *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its Courtyards into an Israeli Tourist Attraction:** In the context of incursions at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Israel has been using various measures to assert control over the Mosque and restrict access for Muslim

worshippers. One such tactic involves transforming *al-Aqsa* and its courtyards into a tourist attraction for Israelis, thereby opening it to tourists and the general Israeli public in an attempt to diminish the Islamic religious sanctity of the Mosque.

The Israeli targeting of *al-Aqsa* Mosque peaked in 2017 with the introduction of “Jerusalem 2050” project. This initiative, launched in 2011 by Australian-born Jewish businessman Kevin Bermeister, aims to transform *al-Aqsa* Mosque into a global tourist destination over the next 30 years by altering its Islamic characteristics.<sup>40</sup>

In August 2022, dozens of foreign tourists, including fashion models wearing clothing that disregarded the sanctity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, entered the site. Some tourists shared photos of themselves on social media in inappropriate poses.<sup>41</sup> Naser al-Hidmi, head of the Jerusalem Anti-Judaization Committee, commented, “These photos are intended to promote the notion that *al-Aqsa* courtyards are like public parks, as the occupation wishes to portray them.” He further noted that the occupation seeks to assert its sovereignty over Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque by determining who is allowed to enter the site.<sup>42</sup>

### **Foreign Tourists Disrespect the Sanctity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque**



For years, the Knesset Committee on Education has advocated for including *al-Aqsa* Mosque in the excursion programs of Israeli schools and the integration of related educational materials into history lessons. This marks the first time such an initiative has been promoted since the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967. The committee has called for the introduction of topics related to the Temple Mount and the Temple in exams and the Bagrut certificate, emphasizing the teaching of

Temple heritage in schools, alongside encouraging and increasing student visits and school trips to the site.<sup>43</sup>

### **Ongoing Efforts to Undermine the Role of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department**

The Jerusalem Awqaf Department poses an obstacle to Israel’s plans to Judaize *al-Aqsa*, as Israel seeks to impose full sovereignty over the Mosque and eliminate Islamic exclusivity in managing its affairs. This effort includes marginalizing the role of the Awqaf Department to pave the way for complete “Israeli sovereignty” over *al-Aqsa*, in line with the vision of Israel and its extremist organizations.

In this context, on 18/1/2023, Deputy Director of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department Sheikh Najeh Bkeirat warned of Israel’s relentless attempts to diminish Palestinian, Arab and Islamic presence at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, through deportation orders against Jerusalemites, along with arrest campaigns and harassment of *al-Aqsa* guards.<sup>44</sup>

In 2022–2023, Israel intensified its policies and measures against the Jerusalem Awqaf Department and its employees, impeding restoration, maintenance and expansion projects. The following outlines the most notable attacks on and responses to it:

- In 2022, the Israeli police prevented the Jerusalem Awqaf Department from conducting restoration and repair work at *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 103 occasions and arrested 24 maintenance workers, including the head of the maintenance department at *al-Aqsa*.<sup>45</sup>
- Dozens of new guards appointed by the Jerusalem Awqaf Department for *al-Aqsa* Mosque (15 guards appointed in November 2021 for night shifts, and 60 appointed during the Lion’s Gate Uprising in the summer of 2017) remain prohibited from working under Israeli orders. Additionally, current guards face repeated arrests, deportations and work restrictions.<sup>46</sup>
- There are currently 256 guards who face daily harassment while performing their duties at *al-Aqsa* Mosque and for its worshippers. The Jerusalem Awqaf Department needs to appoint 70 additional guards to address this shortage.<sup>47</sup>
- On 3/4/2022, the Israeli authorities issued a six-month ban order against Sheikh Najeh Bkeirat, Deputy Director of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department, prohibiting him from entering *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, on 20/6/2023, the Israeli army’s Home Front Command ordered Bkeirat’s deportation from both Jerusalem and his hometown of Sur Baher for six months, with the possibility of extension.<sup>49</sup>



- The Israeli authorities have prevented the Jerusalem Awqaf Department from restoring and maintaining *al-Aqsa* Mosque, including the repair of the sound system in al-Qibli Mosque where 60% of the internal speakers are malfunctioning, with over 40 speakers damaged.<sup>50</sup>
- On 2/7/2023, the Israeli authorities issued a decision banning the employees of the reconstruction committee from working at *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>51</sup> A condition for resuming the maintenance was the closure of the *Musalla* (area allocated for prayer) of the Gate of Mercy, which had been reopened during the Mercy Gate Uprising in 2019.<sup>52</sup>
- In 2023, Israeli forces arrested several guards while they were performing their duties at *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Policy of Expulsion From *al-Aqsa* Mosque**

The Israeli authorities persisted with their deportation policy from *al-Aqsa* Mosque to undermine the resolve of *Murabitun* and imprint the situation on the consciousness of Jerusalemites. This policy is part of a broader Israeli strategy aimed at emptying *al-Aqsa* Mosque of *Murabitun* and worshippers and achieving its final Judaization. Most deportations occurred while the *Murabitun* were in detention, with decisions being used as leverage to force them into accepting deportation as a condition for their release. The deportation periods varied, ranging from three days to six months.

According to Wadi Hilweh Information Center—Silwanic, Israeli authorities issued in 2022 about 523 deportation orders from *al-Aqsa* Mosque, 436 from the Old City of Jerusalem and 31 from the city of Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup> In 2023, the Center recorded 568 deportation orders from the Old City, 412 from *al-Aqsa* Mosque and 29 from Jerusalem.<sup>55</sup>

The deportation orders from *al-Aqsa* Mosque included several notable figures from Jerusalem, such as Sheikh Najeh Bkeirat, ‘Abdul Rahman Bkeirat, Director of Zayd bin Thabit Center for Memorizing the Quran<sup>56</sup> and Jerusalem teacher Hanadi Halwani.<sup>57</sup>

After 15 years of deportation, Sheikh Raed Salah performed the Maghrib prayer at *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 6/2/2022. The Israeli authorities had expelled Sheikh Salah on 7/2/2007 from *al-Aqsa* Mosque, following excavation activities near the Moroccan Gate.<sup>58</sup>

Based on the data above, we can identify the key strategies that the Israeli authorities worked to implement in 2022 and 2023 to impose more control over *al-Aqsa* Mosque through incursions:

- Establishing the strategy of “moral construction of the Temple,” particularly during Jewish holidays and Judaization events, by institutionalizing the performance of Jewish rituals related to the Temple as a regular practice for Temple groups.
- Public prayers, once considered individual acts among settlers, have evolved into a significant tool for Temple groups. Israeli authorities have facilitated this through legal rulings. On 22/5/2022, the Israeli Magistrate’s Court issued a ruling permitting settlers to perform the “prostration” ritual at *al-Aqsa*, as well as the loud recitation of “*Shema*” prayers, stating that these rituals do not endanger “peace” and that the right to pray is universal for all religions.<sup>59</sup>
- Enforcing a policy of temporal division of *al-Aqsa* by restricting the entry and exit of worshippers during periods of incursions, along with spatial division by prohibiting worshippers from accessing the eastern area of *al-Aqsa*. This is accompanied by the raising of Israeli flags in the courtyards, the blowing of the horn, and permitting incursions into *al-Aqsa* through the Lions’ Gate for the first time since the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967. Previously, incursions were typically conducted through the Moroccan Gate, which has been under Israeli control since that time.
- Forcibly attempting to clear *al-Aqsa* Mosque of worshippers before these incursions.
- Undermining the influence of *al-Aqsa* guards by harassing them and blocking the appointment of new guards.
- Strengthening extremist organizations’s ties with Israeli security, political and judicial bodies to secure additional decisions that facilitate storming the Mosque and increasing the participation of invaders.
- Reinforcing the inclusion of *al-Aqsa* in educational tours for Jewish students, under the claim that it is the “Temple Mount.”
- Continuing to storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque during Islamic holidays.
- Seeking to intensify incursions by increasing the number of invaders in each group, coordinating simultaneous rather than consecutive incursions, and reducing wait times at the Moroccan Gate.

## b. Constructions and Excavations Under al-Aqsa Mosque and in Its Vicinity

### Constructions in *al-Aqsa* Vicinity

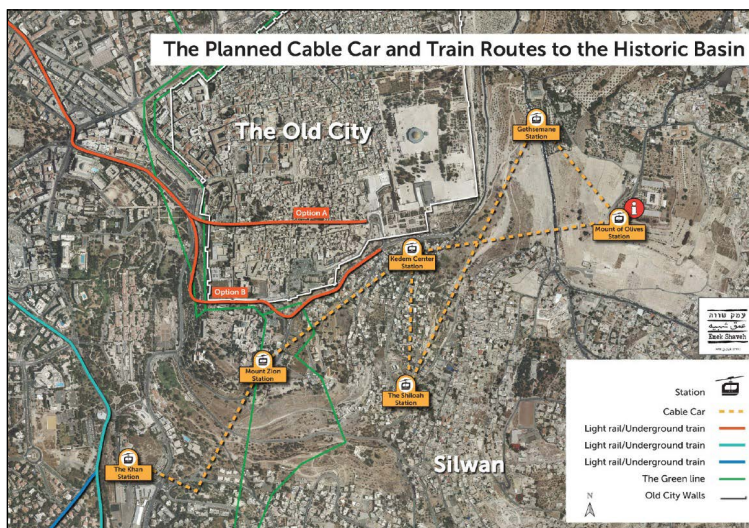
Throughout 2022–2023, Israeli authorities continued to implement and advance various Judaization projects around *al-Aqsa* Mosque, with a focus on infrastructure. This intensified following the formation of the Netanyahu government at the end of 2022, and the appointment by Smotrich and Ben-Gvir to key ministerial positions, making the Judaization of *al-Aqsa* and its surrounding areas a priority for the government.

#### 1. The Cable Car Project

Israeli officials expected the implementation of the cable car project in Jerusalem in the near future. That was when the Israeli High Court approved the project on 15/5/2022, after rejecting four petitions filed by leftist Israeli organizations, thus removing all obstacles preventing its implementation.<sup>60</sup>

The 200 million shekels (\$61.4 million) project, approved by the government in November 2019, calls for a 1.4-km track, with a capacity of three thousand visitors per hour.<sup>61</sup> According to the Jerusalem municipality, at the first stage the cable car in the air will have three stops—the Khan Theater, Mount Zion and the Moroccan Gate where a station will be built for settlers to use to reach the Western Wall and Old Jerusalem. At the second stage other lines will lead to the Pool of Siloam, the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane.<sup>62</sup>

**Map 1/3: The Route of the Cable Car Project in Jerusalem<sup>63</sup>**



## 2. The Light Rail

As part of the ongoing implementation of the light rail project in Jerusalem, four tenders were submitted on 9/8/2022 for the construction and operation of the “Blue Line.” This line will join the existing Red and Green Lines within the JNET network, both of which are already under construction.<sup>64</sup> The project involves the development of a new light rail system, about 20 km long, with an elevated section from the Rosemary Junction in southern Jerusalem, running along the Hebron Road, Keren HaYesod and King George Streets in central Jerusalem. An underground section, about 2 km long, will be constructed in the city center, featuring three subway stations. The first section of the Blue Line is expected to be operational in 2028, with full operation slated for 2030.<sup>65</sup>

## 3. Expanding the Moroccan Gate to Increase Incursions

Temple groups have revealed plans to expand the Moroccan Gate, the entry point used for incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque, as part of their 2023–2024 vision. These groups stated that the plans were discussed with Israeli government and the Jerusalem municipality officials, and they have called for extending the daily incursion hours from four to ten hours, including nighttime access during Jewish holidays. Regarding the expansion of the Moroccan Gate, Temple groups mentioned discussions with officials about removing the earthen hill and the wooden bridge that connects the Western Wall Square to the Moroccan Gate. They also proposed constructing a permanent bridge, inscribed with biblical phrases, large enough to accommodate increased numbers of Israelis storming *al-Aqsa*.<sup>66</sup>

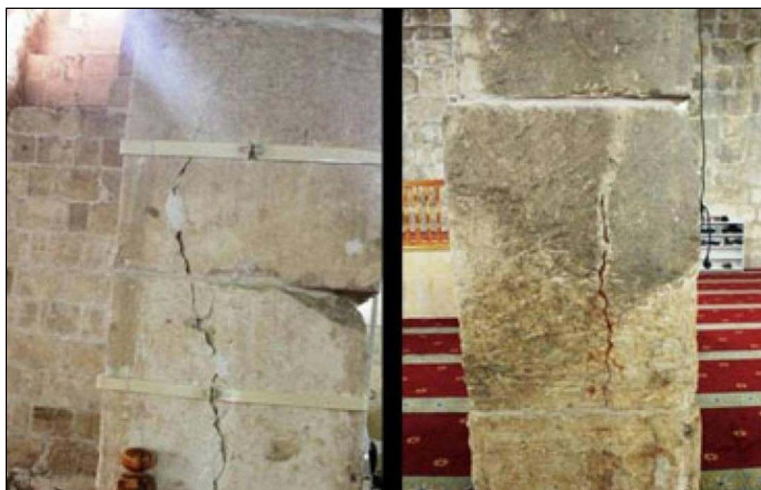
### Excavations

The Israeli authorities continue to target the *al-Aqsa* Mosque area, both above and below ground, through various Judaization projects carried out by official and unofficial Israeli institutions. This report highlights the most prominent of these projects.

**Excavations adjacent to the external foundation of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in the areas of the Western Wall and the Umayyad Palaces:** Ongoing excavations by Israeli authorities beneath and around *al-Aqsa* Mosque are posing a serious threat to its foundations. Jerusalem institutions have reported the emergence of new cracks in the mosque’s floor as a result of these ongoing excavations. The cracks

have appeared in the western section of the Mosque, near the Islamic Museum and the Moroccan Gate adjacent to the Western Wall, extending towards the Umayyad Palaces area.<sup>67</sup>

### **Israeli Excavations Cause Cracks and Dust Fallout From *al-Aqsa* Mosque Columns**



The Jerusalem Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Council has warned about the dangerous excavations being conducted by Israeli authorities around *al-Aqsa* Mosque. On 23/6/2022, the Council reported that the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) and the Ir David Foundation (Elad) have been carrying out “suspicious and mysterious excavations” using bulldozers and large drilling machines near *al-Aqsa*, particularly on its southern and western sides, near the external foundation of the Mosque, in the vicinity of the Western Wall and the Umayyad palaces, close to the lower foundations of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The Council emphasized that observers have reported the systematic destruction of significant archaeological stones over the course of months, with the stones being reduced to small fragments, concealed and disposed as garbage by excavation workers associated with settler associations.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, Jerusalem institutions have reported that the Israeli authorities are conducting excavation work near *al-Aqsa* Mosque’s wall. According to the Jerusalem-based al-Qastal platform and corroborated by local activists, these excavations are occurring in the Umayyad Palaces area, which is adjacent to the southern wall of the Mosque. This area is close to the mosque’s lower foundations,

raising concerns about potential damage if these activities persist.<sup>69</sup> The institutions also noted that Elad is secretly carrying out new tunnel excavations 130 meters from the southeastern wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Israeli forces have admitted workers and vehicles into a tunnel opening near the Fountain of the Virgin complex, dug by the Canaanites, which extends 533 meters to the underground Silwan Spring complex.<sup>70</sup>

### Israeli Excavations in *al-Aqsa* Mosque



## 2. Islamic Holy Sites in Jerusalem

### a. The Yusufiyah Cemetery

The Israeli authorities have continued their targeting of the Yusufiyah Cemetery, located north of the Mercy Gate Cemetery and adjacent to the eastern wall of *al-Aqsa*. On 28/2/2022, the District Planning and Building Committee in Jerusalem approved the confiscation of part of the Yusufiyah Cemetery and the land opposite to it, to develop a walkway and park. Lawyer Muhannad Jbara reported that the decision affects privately owned Arab land used as a parking lot and the Martyrs' memorial area, which the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) began bulldozing in 2021, uncovering some graves.<sup>71</sup> Khalil Tufakji, Director of the Mapping and Geographic Information Systems Department at the Arab Studies Society, said that the committee's decision aims to transform al-Khandaq land (Friday Market) and part of the Yusufiyah Cemetery in the eastern corner of the Old City wall into a tourist park, covering an area of 4.5 donums (1 donum = 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>). He added that the land belongs to the 'Oweis, Hamad and 'Atallah families.<sup>72</sup>

## **b. Targeting Mosques by Demolition**

In a blatant violation of the sanctity of holy religious sites in Jerusalem, Israeli authorities issued a decision in January 2022 to demolish al-Taqwa Mosque in al-Issawiyah. Additionally, demolition orders were issued for the golden dome of al-Rahman Mosque in Beit Safafa, which has stood for over 100 years. On 15/10/2022, 20 Jerusalemites from Beit Safafa, south of occupied Jerusalem, filed an objection with the Israeli Local Affairs Court to prevent the demolition of the golden dome of the mosque in their village.<sup>73</sup>

## **3. Islamic Holy Sites in the Rest of Palestine**

### **a. Ibrahimi Mosque**

The years 2022–2023 saw a significant escalation in Israeli attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque, particularly following the removal of parts of the historic white stairs of the Mosque. This period also witnessed extensive excavations aimed at altering the mosque’s archaeological features and advancing the “electric elevator” project designed to facilitate settler incursions.<sup>74</sup> Approved on 24/2/2020, by then Israeli Defense Minister Naftali Bennett,<sup>75</sup> the project received authorization from the Planning Committee in the Civil Administration.<sup>76</sup> The Israeli authorities began foundational excavations for the elevator on 10/8/2021.<sup>77</sup> According to the Hebron Reconstruction Committee, the elevator project will reduce the mosque’s space by 91 m<sup>2</sup> and affect an additional 300 m<sup>2</sup> of external yards and corridors.<sup>78</sup>

Since the start of the war on GS on 7/10/2023, Israeli forces have tightened security measures around the Ibrahimi Mosque and restricted access, resulting in a decrease in the number of worshippers and visitors. They closed two of the three military checkpoints leading directly to the mosque, namely Abu al-Rish checkpoint and Checkpoint 160, effectively preventing around three thousand residents living nearby from visiting and praying there. Although the Israeli authorities reopened Abu al-Rish checkpoint on the second day of Ramadan, extremist settler groups protested during *Tarawih* prayers, demanding its closure, which was subsequently re-closed, and it was opened in an irregular manner. In addition, settlers raised Israeli flags and religious and historical symbols such as the menorah on its walls, held noisy celebrations, repeatedly closed it, prevented its restoration and maintenance, and imposed a curfew in the surrounding area.<sup>79</sup>



During 2022–2023, there were 1,747 Israeli attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque detailed as follows:

**Table 2/3: Israeli Attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque 2022–2023<sup>80</sup>**

Attacks	2022	2023
<b>Incursions and performing biblical rituals</b>	63	59
<b>Excavations and constructions altering its surrounding features</b>	67	17
<b>Mosque closure</b>	16	13
<b>Arrests in the mosque’s vicinity</b>	4	7
<b>Beating worshippers, <i>murabitun</i> and mosque employees</b>	24	13
<b>Attacks on infrastructure</b>	2	2
<b>Overstepping the Hebron Waqf Directorate’s authority</b>	13	1
<b><i>Adhan</i> ban</b>	617	714
<b>Obstruction and denial of worshippers’ access</b>	53	55
<b>Attacks on Mosque property</b>	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>860</b>	<b>887</b>

### **b. Islamic Holy Sites in GS and Other Areas of WB 2022–2023**

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs’ annual report, 2023 saw a rise in violations against mosques due to the Israeli war on GS. The report states that 388 mosques were affected: 145 were completely destroyed, and 243 mosques were partially destroyed, rendering them unusable for prayers.<sup>81</sup>

In WB, the Ministry’s report documented violations and attacks on 24 mosques in Hebron, al-Bireh, Masafer Yatta, Salfit, Beit Safafa, Bethlehem, Tulkarm and its refugee camp (RC), in addition to Jenin and its RC. Some mosques were attacked multiple times—up to eight incidents at the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Mosque in Nur Shams RC in Tulkarem. Additionally, several mosques in Jenin RC and its surroundings, such as al-Ansar Mosque and Khalid al-Asir Mosque, were shelled with missiles several times. Furthermore, Israeli soldiers broke into Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Jenin RC and performed biblical prayers inside.<sup>82</sup>



Settlers also attacked and desecrated the Karantina Cemetery in Hebron. Israeli authorities have announced the demolition of seven graves in al-Burj village, southwest of Hebron, citing the need for construction in Area C. Additionally, settlers vandalized tombstones in a cemetery in Burqa village, northwest of Nablus, on lands near the evacuated Homesh settlement.<sup>83</sup>

### c. Al-Qassam Cemetery in Haifa

In January 2022, activists from the 1948 occupied territories and the custodians of al-Istiqlal Endowment Committee in Haifa established a protest tent to oppose plans to remove the Islamic cemetery in the village of Balad al-Sheikh. This move followed a decision by Israeli authorities to build a commercial project on the cemetery land, located to the west of Haifa. The cemetery is the largest burial site for martyrs in Palestine, including those from the *Nakbah* and earlier periods, notably the martyr Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam.<sup>84</sup> On 7/2/2022, Israeli bulldozers and vehicles, accompanied by Israeli police forces, stormed the cemetery and commenced excavation and bulldozing operations to prepare for infrastructure construction. This work was commissioned by the Israeli company Kerur Akhzakot, which claims ownership of part of the cemetery and intends to develop a commercial project. However, protesters successfully forced the vehicles to leave.<sup>85</sup>

In January 2023, Israeli authorities blocked the restoration of the buildings in the cemetery, citing a lack of permits. Despite the efforts by Haifa's al-Istiqlal Endowment Committee to carry out the restorations "legally," the Nesher municipality—established on the forcibly depopulated Balad al-Sheikh town—and the Planning and Building Committee remained adamant in preventing the maintenance and restoration.<sup>86</sup>

The Israeli authorities have divided the cemetery into three sections; the first (14 donums) is officially recognized by Israel as a cemetery; the second (14 donums) is claimed to be owned by the Israel Land Authority; and the rest of the cemetery is owned by an Israeli company that claims ownership of the land.<sup>87</sup>

## Israeli Bulldozers Encroaching on al-Qassam Cemetery Land



### Al-Qassam Grave



## 4. Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem and Palestine

To consolidate the policy of exclusion and religious cleansing pursued by Israel in Jerusalem for decades, and to establish a Jewish character as the sole and dominant identity in the city, attacks on churches and Christian properties have continued, alongside relentless efforts to control Christian properties and endowments, which are subject to attempts at diversion by various agents of the occupation.

### a. Decrease in the Arab Christian Population in Jerusalem

For decades, Israel has maintained a policy of discrimination, economic marginalization and harassment against Palestinians in Jerusalem, including Palestinian Christians. This policy has driven many Christians to emigrate, leading to a decline in their population over the years. On 25/12/2022, British newspaper *Daily Mail* reported that in 1948, Jerusalem's 31 thousand Christians represented around 20% of the population, whereas they currently number just 10 thousand, less than 2%, and numbers are continuing to fall.<sup>88</sup>

According to CBS, the number of Arab Christians in Jerusalem reached 13 thousand by the end of 2022. Adding 3,500 non-Arab Christians living in the city brings the total to 16,500 (see table 3/3). When measured against the total population of the city, the percentage of Christians in Jerusalem in 2022 is 1.7%, the lowest since the establishment of the church in the region two thousand years ago.

**Table 3/3: Ratio of Christians to Jerusalem's Population 2014–2022<sup>89</sup>**

Year	Arab Christians	Ratio to Jerusalemites (%)	Christians in general	Ratio to the population of both sides of Jerusalem (%)
2014	12,300	3.9	15,600	1.8
2015	12,600	3.9	15,800	1.8
2016	12,600	3.8	15,800	1.8
2017	12,600	3.7	15,800	1.8
2019	12,900	3.6	16,200	1.7
2020	12,900	3.4	16,300	1.7
2021	12,900	3.4	16,400	1.7
2022	13,000	3.4	16,500	1.7

### b. Diversion of Christian Properties and Real Estate to Settler Associations

The diversion of Christian properties and real estate to settler associations has continued through deceptive methods and fraudulent operations, supported by biased decisions from the Israeli Supreme Court. This Court authorized the Ateret Cohanim settler association to seize properties belonging to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in East Jerusalem. The decision, issued on 8/6/2022, permitted the

association to take over the Imperial and Petra hotels in Omar Square near Jaffa Gate and Muzamiya House, in the Christian Quarter. In its ruling, the court dismissed the Patriarchate’s challenge to the legality of documents submitted by Ateret Cohanim years earlier to claim ownership of these properties.<sup>90</sup> Notably, the area where the Petra Hotel is located serves as the main entrance for Christians to access the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

During deliberations at the Jerusalem District Court on 30/6/2022, it was revealed that members of Ateret Cohanim had established shell companies, including one based in Morocco, and used them to seize control of several Arab properties belonging to the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, with the aim of Judaizing them.<sup>91</sup>

On 18/2/2022, church leaders in Jerusalem warned that “Under the guise of protecting green spaces, the plan appears to serve an ideological agenda that denies the status and rights of Christians in Jerusalem.” The warning was issued in a letter addressed to Israeli Environment Minister Tamar Zandberg, following the disclosure of a “project to expand a national park onto church-owned lands and Christian holy sites in East Jerusalem.”<sup>92</sup>

### **Petra Hotel in Jerusalem**



### **c. Attacks on Christians and Christian Holy Sites and Endowments in Jerusalem**

Israeli authorities and settlers continued their attacks on Christians, Christian holy sites and endowments in Jerusalem. The following are the most significant attack documented in the report for 2022:

- On 27/3/2022, settlers affiliated with Ateret Cohanim broke into the Petra Hotel, near Jaffa Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem and took control of part of it.<sup>93</sup>
- On 12/4/2022, settlers assaulted Christian clerics near the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.<sup>94</sup>
- On 21/4/2022, during Easter, the Israeli authorities restricted the number of participants in the Holy Saturday celebrations in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher to four thousand. Of these, 1,800 were allowed inside the church, with the remaining participants confined to the courtyard. This decision was based on a ruling from the Israeli High Court.<sup>95</sup>
- On 7/6/2022, settlers attacked the Church of the Holy Spirit and the Greek Garden of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. They vandalized the property, desecrated graves, disturbed its contents and littered the courtyards with garbage.<sup>96</sup>
- On 17/7/2022, a group of Haredi youths verbally assaulted 140 priests and monks, hurling insults and spitting at them as they entered the Old City of Jerusalem.<sup>97</sup>
- On 2/12/2022, settlers demolished ancient walls of the Petra Hotel near Jaffa Gate.<sup>98</sup>
- On 27/12/2022, settler gangs, with the protection of the Israeli police, seized al-Hamra land in Silwan in Jerusalem. The land, covering about eight donums, belongs to the Greek Orthodox Monastery in Silwan, administered by the Greek Patriarchate.<sup>99</sup>

In 2023, settler attacks on Christian holy sites and Christians in occupied Jerusalem continued, and the following are the most prominent of these attacks:<sup>100</sup>

- On 1/1/2023, settlers desecrated over 30 graves at the historic Protestant cemetery on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, destroying crosses and smashing Christian gravestones.
- On 4/1/2023, extremist settlers attacked a cemetery belonging to the Evangelical Episcopal Church in Jerusalem, desecrating graves and breaking crosses.
- On 2/2/2023, a settler stormed the Church of the Prison of Christ in the Old City of Jerusalem and attempted to set it on fire.
- On 15/4/2023, Israeli authorities imposed severe restrictions on Christian access to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for Holy Saturday celebrations and closed several gates in the Old City leading to the church.

- In the first week of October 2023, during the Jewish Sukkot holiday, settlers walking and praying in the alleys of the Old City attacked Christians, pilgrims and churches by spitting and hurling insults, and this was repeated several times.

#### **d. Israeli Attacks on Christian Holy Sites in GS Following Operation al-Aqsa Flood (7/10/2023–31/12/2023)**

Since the start of the Israeli war on GS on 7/10/2023, Israeli aggression have not spared Palestinian Christians, their churches or Christian institutions. On 17/10/2023, the Israeli army targeted the Ahli Arab Hospital in GS with a missile, killing 500 Palestinians, including many children, and damaging the adjacent church. The hospital, run by the Anglican Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, was providing medical care to the sick and wounded Palestinians and shelter to thousands of displaced Palestinians. On 19/10/2023, Israel targeted Saint Porphyrius Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza City, destroying part of the church building and killing 17 Palestinian Christians, including 9 children, the oldest aged 12 and the youngest only three months. Other Israeli attacks affected the Arab Orthodox Cultural and Social Center of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Rosary Sisters School of the Catholic Church, the Holy Family Catholic Church and the Convent of the Sisters of Mother Theresa (Missionaries of Charity).<sup>101</sup>

According to data from the GS Government Media Office, as of 22/1/2024, Israeli forces have fully destroyed three churches.<sup>102</sup>

## ***Second: Population Under the Occupation***

### **1. The Reality of the Demographic Battle**

The Jerusalem municipality developed the “Jerusalem Master Plan” based on projections by Sergio Della Pergola, a prominent Jewish demographer, predicting that Arab Jerusalemites would make up 40% of Jerusalem’s population by 2020. The plan focused on preventing this 40% Arabs-to-60% Jewish ratio, a shift from earlier plans guided by the Interministerial Committee to Examine the Rate of Development in Jerusalem (Gafni Committee). The committee set a binding policy, approved by the Knesset, to maintain the Palestinian Jerusalemite population at no more than 30% compared to 70% for Jewish settlers.<sup>103</sup>

In 2021, 11,900 new residents relocated to Jerusalem from other localities in Israel, up from 11 thousand in 2020. During the same year, 22,700 residents left Jerusalem for other areas, an increase from 18,800 in 2020. As a result, Jerusalem experienced a net negative intercity migration of 10,800 in 2021.<sup>104</sup>

In 2022, Arab Jerusalemites comprised 39.2% of Jerusalem’s population, while Jews made up 60.8% (see table 4/3). This occurred despite Jewish internal and external migration, the Israeli discriminatory policies against Arab Jerusalemites and the higher fertility rates among Jewish women in Jerusalem (4.4) compared to Arab Jerusalemite women (3.1).<sup>105</sup>

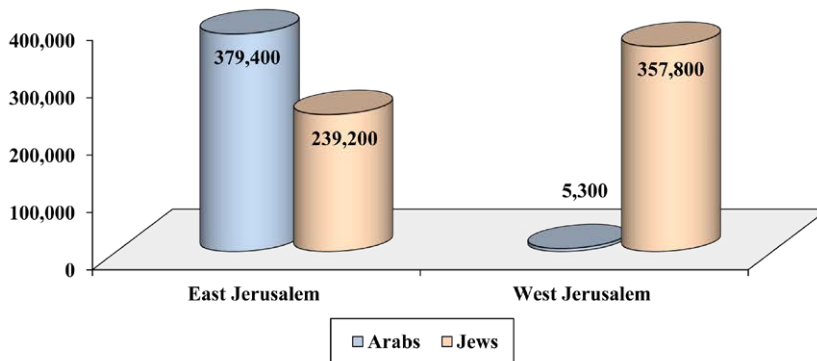
The actual figures for Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem from 2019 to 2022 were as follows:

**Table 4/3: Demographic Balance in Jerusalem 2019–2022<sup>106</sup>**

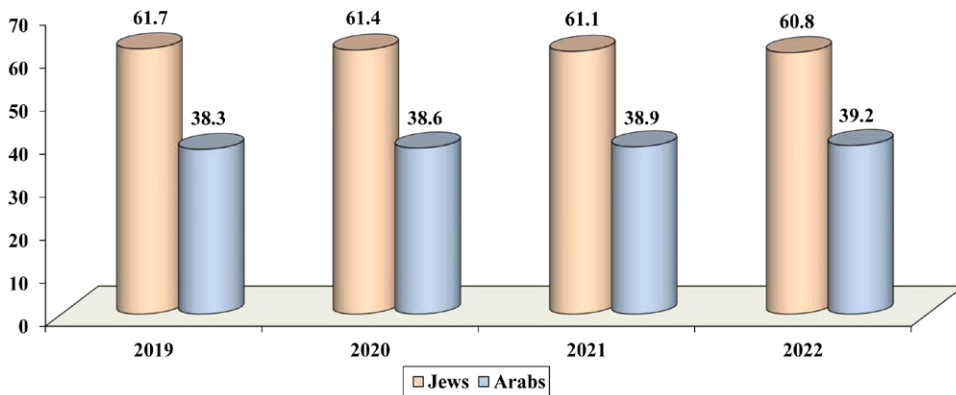
		East Jerusalem (Occupied in 1967)		West Jerusalem (Occupied in 1948)		Total for both sides of Jerusalem	
		Arabs	Jews	Arabs	Jews	Arabs	Jews
2019	Number	354,000	227,100	4,800	350,500	358,800	577,600
	Percentage (%)	61	39	1.4	98.6	38.3	61.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>581,100</b>		<b>355,300</b>		<b>936,400</b>	
2020	Number	361,700	233,700	5,000	350,700	366,700	584,400
	Percentage (%)	60.7	39.3	1.4	98.6	38.6	61.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>595,400</b>		<b>355,700</b>		<b>951,100</b>	
2021	Number	370,500	236,600	5,100	354,000	375,600	590,600
	Percentage (%)	61	39	1.4	98.6	38.9	61.1
<b>Total</b>		<b>607,100</b>		<b>359,100</b>		<b>966,200</b>	
2022*	Number	379,400	239,200	5,300	357,800	384,700	597,000
	Percentage (%)	61.3	38.7	1.5	98.5	39.2	60.8
<b>Total</b>		<b>618,600</b>		<b>363,100</b>		<b>981,700</b>	

\* The 2022 figures were derived from growth rates published by the Israeli CBS, showing a 2.4% increase for Arabs and 1.1% for Jews in Jerusalem.

### Population Balance in Jerusalem 2022



### Population Balance in Jerusalem 2019–2022 (%)



According to the Israeli CBS, as of the end of 2022, approximately 371 thousand Muslims lived in Jerusalem, making up 37.9% of the city’s population in both its eastern and western parts. The community is notably young with 32.2% under the age of 14, while those aged 65 and over account for about 4.7%.<sup>107</sup>

## 2. Attempts to Expel the Palestinian Population

### a. Sheikh Jarrah Neighborhood

For years, Israeli authorities have sought to displace residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in occupied Jerusalem using a combination of intimidation and enticement, including offering “financial incentives” to homeowners who have resisted these offers, remaining steadfast in their commitment to their homes despite ongoing Israeli efforts to persuade them otherwise.



Sheikh Jarrah is home to over three thousand Palestinians living on approximately one thousand donums of land, the last remaining area following the confiscation of thousands of donums, which were used to build three settlements known as the French Hill settlements.<sup>108</sup> In Sheikh Jarrah, 160 Palestinians from 12 families face the threat of eviction due to eviction orders issued as part of the ongoing Israeli settlement campaign aimed at displacing Palestinian families from the neighborhood.<sup>109</sup>

At the beginning of 2022, Israeli officials and settlers intensified their attacks on Sheikh Jarrah. Dozens of settlers, led by extremist MK Itamar Ben-Gvir, and the Jerusalem Deputy Mayor Aryeh King, along with Tzachi Mamo, member of Nahalat Shimon settler association and its court representative, actively participated.<sup>110</sup> Tensions escalated in February when Ben-Gvir provocatively set up his office on the Salem family's land on the western side of the neighborhood, sparking unrest.<sup>111</sup> Ben-Gvir continued to storm the neighborhood on a daily basis in a provocative manner, accompanied by settlers who hurled profanities against Prophet Muhammad, all under the tight protection and heavy presence of the Israeli forces and police.<sup>112</sup>

On 17/2/2022, the Council of Torah Sages called for reinforcing the Jewish presence in Sheikh Jarrah. The rabbis' statement declared that the "Shimon Hatzadik" neighborhood (Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood) is located in the heart of Jerusalem and serves as a frontline for Jewish control over the holy city, the capital of Israel.<sup>113</sup>

In a provocative move on 12/3/2022, Ben-Gvir extended an invitation to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin to hold negotiations in his office in Sheikh Jarrah.<sup>114</sup>

On 19/1/2022, Israeli police raided the home of Jerusalemite Mahmoud Salhiyeh in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. Shortly after, the Jerusalem municipality demolished the house, and arrested six members of his family, along with at least 18 other Palestinians who were present in solidarity. The land, owned by Salhiyeh, where his house, a plant nursery and a car showroom stood, spans approximately six thousand square meters.<sup>115</sup>

The Israeli authorities, through the Ministry of Justice, are working to Judaize large areas of land in Jerusalem, by registering the ownership of extensive sections in the occupied city, including areas around the Old City, *al-Aqsa* Mosque and

Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, under Jewish ownership. This is being done “with government funding earmarked for narrowing economic disparities and improving the quality of life of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem,” according to a *Haaretz* report published on 26/6/2022. The report also noted that “the registration process has been completed and nearly all of the land registered to Jews.”<sup>116</sup> Additionally, the process is targeting locations in the French Hill area, where plans are in place to build a new settlement neighborhood called Givat HaShaked in southern Jerusalem. The Judaization efforts are also focused on the area between the Har Homa settlement and the town of Sur Baher, near the Haredi settlement Har Shlomo, areas administered by the Custodian for Absentee Property.<sup>117</sup> According to a report published in July 2022 by Europeans for al-Quds Organization, “40 houses inhabited by 45 Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood were registered in the names of settlement associations, without the knowledge of their owners.”<sup>118</sup>

The Israeli authorities have been working to suffocate Sheikh Jarrah through surrounding settlement projects. The Jerusalem municipality plans to expand the Shimon HaTzadik settlement outpost and double the number of settlers in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood through three settlement projects, in collaboration with the Israel Land Fund and foreign Jewish investment companies.<sup>119</sup>

### **b. Silwan**

Silwan is one of the most targeted towns in Jerusalem for settlement projects, carried out either by the Israeli government or by settler associations such as Elad and Ateret Cohanim. These groups primarily advance their settlement agenda in Jerusalem by issuing eviction orders to Palestinian families who have lived there for decades. They justify these actions with various claims of ownership and leverage legal backing provided by the Israeli authorities to seize Palestinian homes.

About 59 thousand Jerusalemites live in Silwan, which spans an area of 5,640 donums. In contrast, Israel has settled 2,800 Jewish settlers in 78 settlement outposts while forced displacement poses a threat to around 7,500 residents in six targeted neighborhoods: Wadi Hilweh, al-Bustan, Batn al-Hawa, Wadi al-Rababa, Wadi Yasul and ‘Ein al-Louzeh. These neighborhoods face the risk of home demolitions under the pretext of unlicensed construction or eviction for the benefit of settler organizations.<sup>120</sup>

Settlement building in Silwan, particularly in the Batn al-Hawa neighborhood situated in the town's heart, carries significant strategic implications. This area lies between the large settlement on the Mount of Olives near Damascus Gate, and Elad settlements in the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood near the Moroccan Gate. The implementation of the settlement building plan in Silwan would establish an extensive and interconnected settlement network within the Old City area, effectively severing the town from its Palestinian surroundings. This would infringe upon the residents' right to freedom of movement, even on foot, especially with the presence of armed settlers, a special guard unit, Israeli police and Israel Border Police forces.

The Israeli plan is realized through the Judaization of Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah, as it involves the appropriation of public space in the Old City, imbuing it with a distinctly Jewish character and connecting the settlements to the surrounding Jewish areas.

Throughout 2022, the neighborhoods of Silwan were subjected to ongoing settlement plans and persistent targeting by Israeli authorities and settler organizations. According to settlement researcher Ahmed Sub Laban, the town faces ten settlement projects, some of which have already been implemented, while others await approval from Israeli planning and construction committees.<sup>121</sup> In 2023, Israeli authorities demolished three residential buildings and 12 houses in Silwan, and killed three Jerusalemites, including a child. On 4/8/2023, Israeli authorities constructed a suspended bridge over the lands of the Wadi al-Rababa area in Silwan.<sup>122</sup>

### **3. The Policy of Assaults, Arrests and Deportation**

Throughout 2022 and 2023, various towns and neighborhoods in Jerusalem experienced numerous violations aimed at large numbers of Jerusalemites who resisted Israeli pressures. The Jerusalemites paid a heavy price for their steadfastness, with the most profound sacrifice being their lives; 18 Jerusalemites were killed in 2022,<sup>123</sup> and 37 in 2023 as a result of Israeli attacks.<sup>124</sup>

#### **a. Assaults**

According to Mo3ta, Israeli forces and settlers carried out 5,363 attacks against Jerusalemites, encompassing various crimes and violations such as killings, expulsions, arrests, house demolitions, land bulldozing, property confiscations and

assaults on the education and health sectors.<sup>125</sup> In 2023, the number of such attacks increased to 5,703.<sup>126</sup>

On 18/7/2022, the Israeli Ministry of Interior, settler associations and the Jerusalem municipality announced the formation of armed militias composed of extremist settlers to undertake “security tasks.” According to the Hebrew newspaper *Maariv*, one of the militias’ roles is to intervene during resistance operations in the settlements or in Jerusalem and its surroundings.<sup>127</sup>

### **b. Arrests**

During 2022 and 2023, Israeli authorities continued to use arrests as a tool to terrorize and harass Jerusalemites, restricting their movement and activities against the occupation.

In 2022, the Israeli forces carried out large-scale arrest campaigns targeting Jerusalemites under dubious pretexts. A total of 3,003 arrests were documented, including women, the elderly and children. Among those arrested were 35 children under the age of criminal responsibility (less than 12 years old), 619 minors and 120 females, including 9 minor girls.<sup>128</sup> In 2023, Silwanic monitored 3,261 arrests in Jerusalem, including 53 children under the age of responsibility, 643 boys and 165 females. The Center further noted that 987 of the arrests were documented between 7/10/2023 and the end of 2023.<sup>129</sup>

### **Israeli Forces Arrest a Young Jerusalemite Woman in Jerusalem**



The Israeli authorities continued the practice of re-arresting recently released Jerusalemite prisoners, detaining them either at the prison gate upon release or shortly after they return to their residential areas. They are then released after several hours or days under specific conditions, the most notable being expulsion from Jerusalem, eviction from their place of residence and a ban on celebrating their release.

The Palestine Center for Prisoners Studies reported that the arrests in 2022 targeted Islamic and national leaders, including deported Jerusalemite MP Ahmad ‘Atoun, Director of *al-Aqsa* Mosque Sheikh ‘Umar al-Kiswani and Head of Committee of Families of Prisoners from Jerusalem Amjad Abu ‘Asab, accusing them of incitement on Facebook. Israeli intelligence repeatedly renewed its ban on Jerusalem Governor Adnan Ghaith from entering the occupied WB, as well as its decision to prohibit *al-Aqsa* Mosque preacher Sheikh ‘Ikrima Sabri from communicating with some figures, including Sheikh Raed Salah and his deputy Kamal al-Khatib. Additionally, an administrative detention order was issued against Muhammad Abu Tair, a Jerusalem member in the PLC.<sup>130</sup>

In late September 2022, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz issued an order to seize and confiscate the funds of Palestinian prisoners from Jerusalem and the 1948 occupied territories, under the “Counter-Terrorism Law of 2019.” The decision targeted 41 prisoners from the 1948 occupied territories and 8 prisoners from Jerusalem, one of whom was a freed prisoner.<sup>131</sup>

In 2022, 33 Palestinians were placed under house arrest following the filing of indictments against them.<sup>132</sup> Among those sentenced to house arrest was Jerusalemite journalist Lama Ghosheh, who has been suffering under this decision since the last quarter of 2022.<sup>133</sup>

In 2022, the Israeli authorities placed 43 Jerusalemites under administrative detention, including MPs Muhammad Abu Tair and Ahmad ‘Atoun, with some of the prisoners having their administrative detention orders renewed multiple times.<sup>134</sup> In 2023, 21 more Jerusalemites were sentenced to administrative detention.<sup>135</sup>

### **c. Deportation**

The Israeli authorities have increasingly employed deportation as an effective tool against Jerusalemites, aiming to clear *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Jerusalem

neighborhoods of *Murabitun*, Palestinians and activists. In 2022, there were about 523 deportation orders from *al-Aqsa* Mosque, 436 from the Old City and 31 from the city of Jerusalem.<sup>136</sup> In 2023, 412 deportation orders from *al-Aqsa* Mosque, 568 from the Old City and 29 from the city of Jerusalem were recorded.<sup>137</sup>

**Table 5/3: Deportation and Ban Orders Against Jerusalemites 2022–2023<sup>138</sup>**

Deportation and ban orders	2022	2023
Deportation from <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque	523	412
Deportation from the Old City of Jerusalem	436	568
Deportation from Jerusalem	31	29
Deportation from Palestine	1	NA
Ban on entry to WB	2	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>993</b>	<b>1,105</b>

Among those permanently deported from Jerusalem were Mansour Abu Gharbiyeh,<sup>139</sup> Murad Ghazi al-‘Abbas<sup>140</sup> and the prisoner lawyer Salah Hammouri who was stripped of his Jerusalem ID and deported to France on 18/12/2022 after being detained for nine months.<sup>141</sup>

#### 4. Demolition of Houses and Structures

The Israeli authorities implement a demolition policy in occupied Jerusalem as part of punitive measures, forced displacement, ethnic cleansing of Jerusalemites and the Judaization of the city. They justify home demolitions primarily on the grounds of unlicensed construction, yet rarely issue the necessary permits for Jerusalemites to build homes, while charging exorbitant fees for the few permits that are granted. In 2022 and 2023, the Israeli authorities continued these demolitions under the same pretext. The Jerusalem municipality also forces residents to carry out demolitions themselves under the threat of fines or imprisonment. If residents do not comply, they must pay the costs of the vehicles, crews, security forces and workers involved in the municipality’s execution of the demolition order.

In 2022, Silwanic documented 140 demolitions across various towns and neighborhoods in Jerusalem.<sup>142</sup> In 2023, 209 structures were demolished, 68 of which occurred during the war.<sup>143</sup>

In 2022, the number of demolition orders reached 984, while 521 building permit applications were submitted to the Jerusalem municipality. Of these, 509 were rejected for purely political reasons. A total of 22,389 homes in Jerusalem are under threat of demolition, placing about 124 thousand Jerusalemites at risk of forced displacement. Additionally, 1,380 residents in the Sheikh Jarrah and Batn al-Hawa neighborhoods face the danger of ethnic cleansing, following Israeli court rulings that mandate their expulsion in favor of settler associations.<sup>144</sup>

According to figures from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA-oPt), the number of structures demolished over the past six years is as follows:

**Table 6/3: Demolished Structures in Jerusalem 2018–2023**<sup>145</sup>

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Numbers	178	208	178	181	144	229

Adding the above figures to the 1,352 structures demolished between 2000 and 2017,<sup>146</sup> the total number of structures demolished by the Israeli authorities in Jerusalem from 2000 to 2023 amounts to 2,470, primarily consisting mostly of residential buildings.

## **5. Confiscation and Seizure of Jerusalemites' Properties and Real Estate**

The Israeli attempts to control the lands and real estate of Jerusalemites continued. In 2022 and 2023, Israeli authorities escalated the targeting of families in Sheikh Jarrah and various neighborhoods in Silwan, as highlighted in this chapter. This indicates that the authorities employ various tools to confiscate properties from Jerusalemites and harass them.

Settlers seize Palestinian properties and homes through methods such as the Absentee Property law from 1950, claiming the properties belong to Jews who owned them before the 1948 war, or by purchasing rights, including ownership or disposal rights from protected tenants who lived in the properties before 1967. This latter method has been increasingly used by settlers.

According to Khalil Tufakji, director of the Mapping and Geographic Information Systems Department at the Arab Studies Society, from 1967 until 30/3/2022, Israeli authorities have confiscated over 35% of East Jerusalem land, amounting to 24 km<sup>2</sup>, citing “public interest.” In addition, 87% of the remaining area is categorized as green land, prohibiting construction or confiscation for streets. Thus, only 13% of land is allocated for construction for Jerusalemites.<sup>147</sup>

The Israeli Ministry of Justice has started registering ownership of large tracts of land belonging to Islamic endowments and other Palestinians in the so-called “archaeological park” south of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This is part of a land registration and settlement project initiated by the Israeli government in mid-2018 with a budget of about \$15.5 million, as part of its five-year plan. The project aims to register 50% of the lands in East Jerusalem by the end of 2021 and finalize the settlement of remaining lands by the end of 2025.<sup>148</sup>

In April 2022, the implementation of the project in Sheikh Jarrah resulted in the registration of portions of land in both the eastern and western parts of the neighborhood in favor of Jews who claimed pre-1948 ownership without presenting any evidence or documentation. Meanwhile, residents provided two Turkish title deeds (*tabu*-original ownership documents), which the Israeli court refused to consider.<sup>149</sup>

In an attempt to facilitate the confiscation and diversion of Jerusalemites’ properties and real estate to Jews, Israel empowered its courts to grant Palestinians “inheritance injunctions” without referring to Palestinian courts, as a response to the intensive Palestinian campaign to prevent such actions. On 27/7/2022, *Israel Hayom* reported that the decision issued by Yehuda Fox, commander of the Israeli army’s central command,<sup>150</sup> aimed to facilitate sales and protect the Palestinian seller who leaked and sold lands and properties to Jews from being prosecuted by the PA. In November 2021, Fox issued military order No. 2081, the reasons for which were unclear at the time. This order granted Israeli courts the authority to issue “inheritance injunctions” to Palestinians living in WB who sought them. This order was kept secret until recently due to “political calculations.”<sup>151</sup>

#### **a. Land Confiscation Through Fictitious Cemeteries and Biblical Parks**

Israeli authorities have used claims of the existence of Jewish cemeteries in various Jerusalem neighborhoods as a means to control land and reserve it for settlement development. Settler associations have worked for years to place fake



graves in many areas of Silwan, alleging they were Jewish burial sites undergoing rehabilitation. More than 50 fictitious graves have been placed by Israeli authorities north of the town. Additionally, hundreds of donums of Jerusalem land have been confiscated to establish seven biblical parks, spanning from the towns of Silwan and Jabal al-Mukaber in the south, to al-Issawiyah and Mount Scopus in the north, Ras al-Amud and al-Tur in the east, and Solomon's Pool in the west.<sup>152</sup>

Jerusalem data reveals that biblical parks and fake cemeteries established by Israel occupy more than 5 thousand donums of land in the city. Israeli authorities began placing fake graves in 1978, and by November 2022, a total of 12,800 fake graves had been planted around *al-Aqsa*. Of these, 32% are located in Silwan, south of the Mosque, including 935 in Wadi al-Rababa neighborhood, with over 50 are newly added graves in that area.<sup>153</sup>

### **Fake Jewish Graves in Jerusalem to Seize Vacant Land for Settlement Expansion**



#### **b. Revocation of Jerusalemites' Blue ID Cards**

Since occupying Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has consistently worked to alter the holy city's features with the aim of Judaizing it, erasing its identity and diminishing the Arab, Islamic and Christian presence. Various policies and measures have been implemented against the city and its residents. One of the most prominent strategies is the displacement of Palestinians, as successive Israeli governments strive to establish a new reality, where Jews form the majority in Jerusalem.

The academic report prepared by the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department confirms that the Israeli authorities withdrew more than 14 thousand ID cards from Jerusalemites between 1967 and 2009, impacting more than 20% of Palestinian families in Jerusalem. Between 2006 and 2008 alone, 4,577 ID cards were revoked, marking a 50% increase in total withdrawals. Israeli statistics indicate plans to increase the number of settlers to half a million, leaving only 70–80 thousand Palestinians, which would represent 22% of the population.<sup>154</sup>

According to PCBS, data on the confiscation and revocation of Jerusalemite ID cards are largely based on announcements from the Israeli Ministry of Interior, which have reported 14,701 revoked cards between 1967 and 2020. However, this figure includes IDs of heads of families, meaning the IDs of individuals associated with withdrawn cards are also revoked, resulting in a much higher number of individuals affected.<sup>155</sup> Jerusalem affairs specialist Fakhri Abu Diab asserts that about 20 thousand Jerusalemites have had their IDs withdrawn and have been completely deported from Jerusalem since the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967 until 19/12/2022, with this policy increasing significantly in the 1990s.<sup>156</sup>

### **c. Targeting Education in Jerusalem**

Several authorities oversee education in Jerusalem. Some schools are affiliated with the Israeli Ministry of Education, while others are private institutions, many of which follow the Israeli curriculum. The PA curriculum is implemented in schools run by the PA, the Jerusalem Awqaf Department and UNRWA. Since 1948, and especially following the 1967 occupation, Israel has aimed to erase Palestinian and Arab identity.<sup>157</sup>

This fragmentation of educational authorities has allowed Israeli authorities to single out each group separately and impose more arbitrary measures, further Israelizing education in Jerusalem. The education system faces three main challenges, the first being high dropout rates due to the economic conditions faced by Jerusalemites and the targeting of Palestinian schools and students. Statistics show that 32% of Palestinian students in occupied Jerusalem do not complete the 12 years of schooling, compared to about 1.5% of Jewish students.<sup>158</sup> Additionally, the dropout rate among Jerusalemite students exceeds 13% each year, whereas only 1% of students in Israeli schools in western Jerusalem drop out.<sup>159</sup>

The second challenge is the inability of Palestinian schools teaching the Palestinian curriculum to address the classroom shortage. According to the Israeli organizations Ir Amim and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, there was a shortage of about 2,500 classrooms in occupied Jerusalem for the 2021/2022 school year. In contrast, the Israeli authorities provide extensive support and funding to schools that adopt or align with the Israeli curriculum.<sup>160</sup>

The third challenge is overcrowding in Jerusalem's schools, a result of the Israeli authorities' neglectful policies. A report by Faisal Hussein Foundation in August 2022 revealed that schools under the Palestinian umbrella have the capacity for 31,500 students but currently serve 45,500. This necessitates the addition of 560 classrooms to accommodate the excess of 14 thousand students, along with 80 classrooms each year to address the annual increase of two thousand students.<sup>161</sup>

Following calls from the Parents' Union and various legal committees and institutions, the Israeli Supreme Court issued several rulings mandating the Ministry of Education to address classroom shortages. In response, the Ministry began purchasing educational services from private schools, compensating them on a per-student basis. This approach benefited Israeli authorities by incentivizing private schools to accept government funding, which was initially unconditional, allowing them to plan and budget accordingly. Consequently, 98% of private schools now receive Israeli funding, making them susceptible to infiltration and Israelization efforts, especially given the lack of support from the PA.<sup>162</sup>

The Jerusalem municipality has been constructing new, modern schools under the Ministry of Education that adopt the Israeli curriculum. The number of municipal schools has risen from 54 in the 2011/2012 academic year to 92 available for registration in the 2022/2023 academic year. This approach has proven to be the simplest way to expand the Israeli curriculum without facing the conflicts associated with transitioning established schools from the Palestinian curriculum, which has been in place for decades.<sup>163</sup>

To reinforce Israelization, the five-year plan for 2018–2023 was approved, followed by a subsequent five-year plan for 2023–2028. These two major initiatives target East Jerusalem, ostensibly aimed at its development and reducing social and economic disparities within the city. However, they are intended to penetrate its demographic, geographic, economic and cultural structures. Both plans placed



special emphasis on the education and higher education sectors. Funding for education in the first plan was 445 million shekels (about \$120 million), which nearly doubled in the second plan to 800 million shekels (about \$216 million). This funding was allocated to promote the Israeli curriculum in schools, Hebrew language education, extracurricular activities and higher education. However, the higher education component was removed from the latest plan due to objections from Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who cited concerns about the alleged radicalization of Arab students in universities.<sup>164</sup>

One of the primary objectives of the initial plan was to integrate 90% of Jerusalemite students into the Israeli education system “Bagrut.” However, this effort failed, with the highest conversion rate reaching only 21% in the 2019/2020 academic year. Recognizing that this approach was ineffective, new strategies were implemented, including promoting a distorted Palestinian curriculum that is as problematic as the Israeli curriculum itself, mandating its use in both municipal and private schools. In the last two years, Israeli authorities have demonstrated unprecedented rigor in monitoring the curriculum used in schools in East Jerusalem.<sup>165</sup>

In June 2022, as part of efforts to tighten Israeli control over the education sector in East Jerusalem, the Finance Committee of the Jerusalem municipality allocated an estimated budget of 514 million shekels (about \$152 million). This includes 18 projects for the construction of classrooms and kindergartens in the city’s villages and neighborhoods, as well as public buildings and infrastructure improvements.<sup>166</sup>

Israel continues its assault on education in Jerusalem, employing various methods to impose its own narrative. On 28/7/2022, the Israeli Ministry of Education revoked the permanent operating licenses of six Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem, citing allegations of “dangerous incitement” in their curricula. These schools were granted a temporary licenses for one year, during which they were required to remove the “incitement books.” The decision affected al-Iman Islamic Schools, with its five branches, serving approximately 1,755 students at the primary and secondary levels, as well as al-Ibrahimiéh College, with about 288 secondary-level students.<sup>167</sup> On 26/10/2022, Israeli forces, accompanied by officials from the Israeli Department of Education, raided al-Iman Islamic Schools, searching for books from the Palestinian curriculum.<sup>168</sup>

After multiple confrontation, Israeli authorities forced schools in Jerusalem to abandon the Palestinian curriculum, imposing a modified version in its place. The Israeli campaign against schools, bolstered by its control over the city, is driven by the need for financial support, renovation, aid and teacher recruitment. Around 70% of schools fall under the control of the Israeli Ministry of Education: 45% are directly affiliated with it, while 25% receive its funding.<sup>169</sup>

In September 2023, at the start of the 2023/2024 academic year, the Israeli Ministry of Education issued official letters to schools in Jerusalem titled “Receipt of Educational Textbooks for an Educational Institution by the Jerusalem Municipality,” threatening to revoke the educational institution’s license if it distributes any curriculum containing “inflammatory content,” referring to Palestinian curriculum books. Additionally, the Israeli police stationed at the gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque were provided with a list of books prohibited for students of *al-Aqsa* Sharia schools. In August 2023, the Israeli police confiscated “Palestinian curriculum books” being transported to the Our Lady of Pilar College in the Old City of Jerusalem. The Jerusalem municipality also compelled some schools in the city to remove the “Palestinian flag and keffiyeh” from the covers of these books. Israeli forces further raided and searched several schools in Jerusalem.<sup>170</sup>

### ***Third: Development of Settlement Expansion in WB***

It is challenging to determine the exact number of Jewish settlers in WB, as Israeli statistics intentionally exclude figures for settlers in East Jerusalem and are often vague about the rest of WB to temper potential Palestinian and international backlash against its settlement policies. According to the annual report of the Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission (CWRC) for 2022, the number of settlers in WB was 726,427,<sup>171</sup> and the Commission’s 2023 report stated that this number had risen to 730,330.<sup>172</sup> Meanwhile, the Applied Research Institute–Jerusalem (ARIJ) reported on 14/5/2024 that the number of settlers in WB exceeded 954 thousand with 350 thousand (36.7%) residing in East Jerusalem.<sup>173</sup>

Regarding the number of settlements in WB, Israeli authorities, while continuing their aggression against GS, persist in issuing settlement plans aimed at expanding Israeli settlements and seizing vast areas of Palestinian land for



settlement construction and related activities. Additionally, Israel maintains systematic policies that infringe upon Palestinians' rights to land, housing, freedom of movement and freedom of worship. These policies impose restrictions and obstacles intended to perpetuate displacement, promote Judaization, and undermine prospects for establishing an independent Palestinian state. The exact number of Jewish settlements in WB is difficult to ascertain. According to Peace Now, there are 147 officially government-established settlements in WB, excluding East Jerusalem, along with 191 outposts.<sup>174</sup> However, ARIJ estimates the number of settlements in WB at 199.<sup>175</sup> The 2022 annual CWRC report stated that the number of settlements in WB was 176, with 186 outposts,<sup>176</sup> compared to 180 settlements and 194 outposts in 2023.<sup>177</sup>

In addition to the intentional ambiguity of Israeli officials, there is also the challenge of distinguishing between what is considered “official” and “unofficial” by Israeli standards. This includes differentiating between outposts that are unstable and those that have taken a permanent status, pending “legalization” by Israel.

Israeli settlements continue to grow and expand. From 2023 to March 2024, orders and tenders were issued for the construction of over 30 thousand settlement units through more than 220 plans, covering an area of about 16 thousand donums. This brings the total area of land confiscated during the same period for settlement construction and nature reserves to over 36 thousand donums. As for settlement outposts, there were 243 outposts as of the end of 2022. By the time the current Israeli government took office in 2023 and until the first quarter of 2024, 26 outposts were established, of which 15 were legalized.<sup>178</sup>

ARIJ monitored 58 settlement plans in Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem encompassing 5,760 settlement units across 3,470 donums of Palestinian land by 2023. Furthermore, the Israeli authorities issued 152 settlement plans in WB, including the construction of 21,988 settlement units, industrial zones, bypass roads and public buildings on 9,657 donums of Palestinian land.<sup>179</sup>

The CWRC stated in its annual report for 2023 that the Supreme Planning and Building Council of the Israeli Civil Administration held seven sessions to examine and approve master plans aimed at expanding existing settlements or altering the designated uses of previously confiscated lands for colonial settlement purposes. A total of 173 master plans were reviewed, proposing the addition of

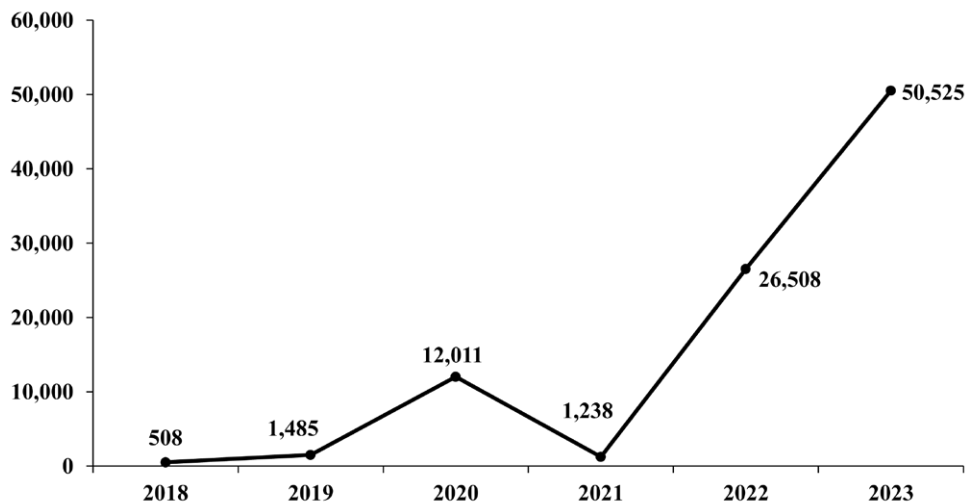
18,625 settlement units. This resulted in the approval of 8,137 settlement units, while an additional 10,486 settlement units were submitted for future approval, affecting 17,881 donums of private Palestinian land across various governorates in WB and Jerusalem.<sup>180</sup>

Israeli settler attacks on Palestinian civilians, their property and land in WB have escalated since the current government took office in early 2023, with a significant increase in the frequency of attacks, particularly following the Israeli war on GS. ARIJ documented 2,191 attacks during 2023, of which 707 (about 32%) occurred after 7/10/2023.<sup>181</sup> The CWRC documented 2,616 attacks in 2023 compared to 1,187 in 2022.<sup>182</sup>

The year 2023 saw direct targeting of Bedouin communities in WB, leading some to migrate in fear for their lives and those of their family members, while others were forcibly displaced due to repeated, brutal settler attacks on their property. The number of forcibly displaced communities reached 28. Notably, there are 126 Palestinian Bedouin communities in WB, including 33 in East Jerusalem, which Israel classifies as “illegal” under its claimed “sovereignty” over the area.<sup>183</sup>

### **1. Land Confiscation**

The confiscation of Palestinian land in 2023 doubled compared to 2022, with 50,525 donums confiscated in 2023, up from 26,508 donums in 2022. These confiscations occurred under various pretexts, including nature reserve declarations, expropriation orders, seizure orders and the designation of state lands. Additionally, approximately 7,152 donums of land were bulldozed by Israeli authorities and settlers. In 2023, violations and attacks against Palestinian trees by Israeli forces and settlers in WB increased, continuing the trend of previous years. The frequency of these attacks rose further after the Israeli war on GS, with a total of 379 incidents recorded, affecting 21,731 trees—87% of which were olive trees (18,964 trees). Hebron, in southern WB, experienced the highest rate of fruit trees uprooting, with 4,910 trees, followed by Nablus with 4,352 trees and Ramallah with 5,811 trees.<sup>184</sup>

**Areas of Confiscated Land 2018–2023<sup>185</sup>****2. Demolition of Palestinian Homes and Structures**

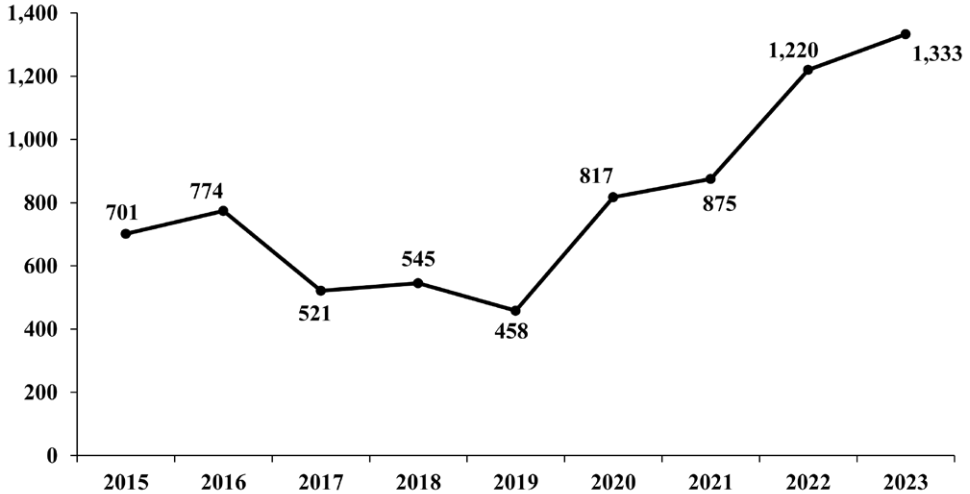
According to the CWRC, in 2022, Israeli authorities carried out 378 demolitions targeting 715 structures in WB, including Jerusalem, affecting 1,235 people, 430 of whom were children. Most of these demolitions occurred in the Jerusalem governorate, with 118 demolitions resulting in 178 demolished structures, followed by the Hebron governorate with 76 demolitions and 171 demolished structures. In 2023, Israeli authorities conducted 514 demolitions, targeting 659 structures in WB, including Jerusalem. The majority took place in the Jerusalem governorate, with 171 demolitions and 209 demolished structures, followed by Hebron with 67 demolitions and 82 demolished structures. The 2023 demolitions included inhabited and uninhabited dwellings, dwellings under construction, agricultural facilities, mobile homes (caravans), commercial and industrial structures, as well as water wells.<sup>186</sup>

In 2022, Israeli authorities issued 1,220 demolition notices for Palestinian structures, citing a lack of building permits. Most of these were concentrated in the Hebron (400 notices) and Bethlehem (225 notices) governorates. In 2023, the number increased to 1,333 notices, with Hebron (356 notices) and Bethlehem (246 notices) again being the primary targets. The notices largely focused on the South Hebron area, particularly Masafer Yatta, which faces the threat of



forced displacement and population transfer. In Bethlehem governorate, a major settlement plan known as the E2 Plan aims to isolate Palestinian villages and towns while geographically connecting settlements.<sup>187</sup>

**Increased Distribution of Demolition Notices 2015–2023<sup>188</sup>**

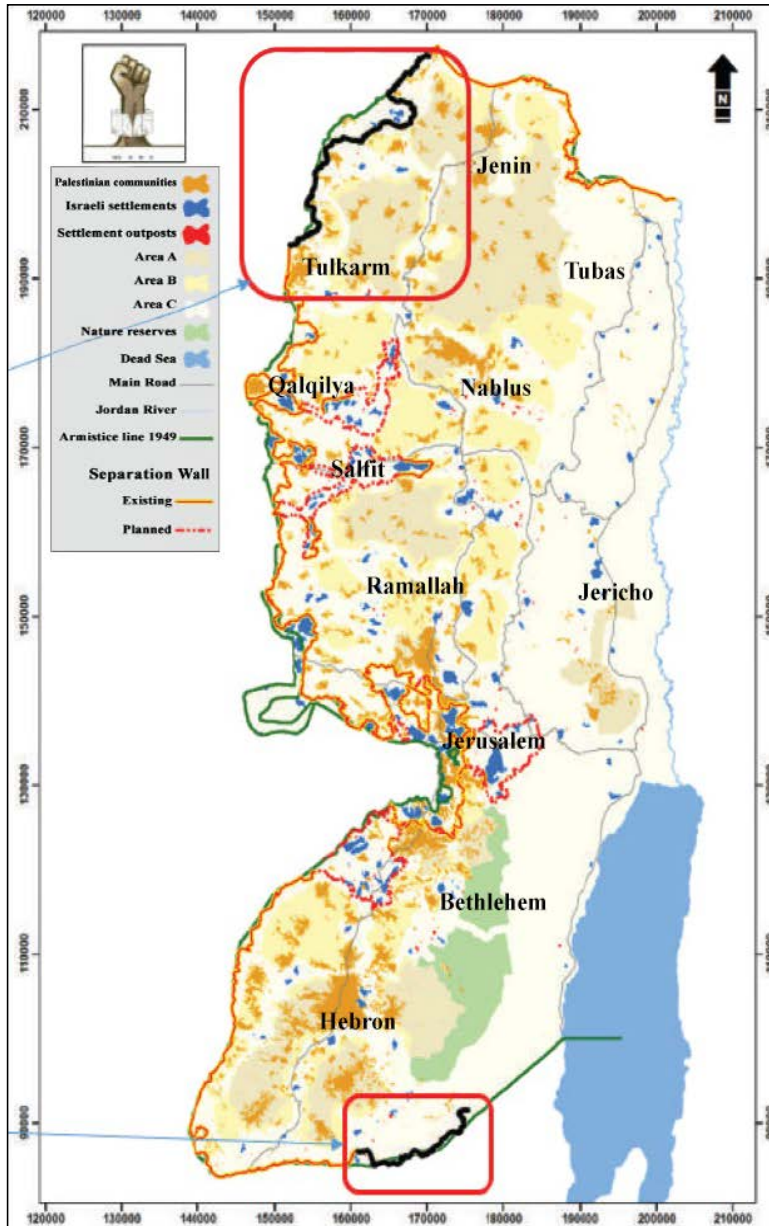


### 3. The Separation Wall

In the first half of 2022, the Israeli government approved the construction of an additional 67 km of the Separation Wall at a cost of 360 million shekels (about \$107 million).<sup>189</sup> The plan involved building a nine-meter-high concrete wall with advanced technological features in areas Israel identifies as worker passageways, known as “openings” or uncontrolled outlets. In early July 2022, Israeli authorities began building two sections of the Separation Wall. The first, located in the northwestern WB, is an eight-meter-high concrete wall running alongside a metal fence, stretching 45 km from Salim village, west of Jenin, to the area west of Shweika village in Tulkarm governorate. The second section, in the southern WB, extends 22 km from Lisifir village to the area south of Khashm al-Daraj village in the Hebron governorate. Although this section is being constructed on the pretext of “security needs,” but the fact here is that it is being built primarily to isolate Masafer Yatta beyond the Wall, where Israel aims to forcibly displace local communities. Upon completion, the Separation Wall will span 714 km, with 489 km of it already constructed on Palestinian land.<sup>190</sup>



**Map 2/3: Locations of Sections Under Construction of the Separation Wall in the Northern and Southern WB<sup>191</sup>**



#### 4. Barriers

According to ARIJ, as of 6/10/2023, there were 567 Israeli barriers, including 77 main checkpoints and 490 other obstacles such as earth mounds, cement blocks and iron gates. Following the war on GS on 7/10/2023, an additional 140 checkpoints and barriers were added. These measures aim to isolate and close off Palestinian cities, villages and towns, restricting communication and movement, while preventing Palestinians from using bypass roads, which have become reserved for settlers. A report by the CWRC indicates that the number of permanent and temporary checkpoints rose from 593 in 2022 to 694 in 2023. Due to the arbitrary measures imposed by Israel on Palestinian citizens in WB, over three million Palestinians have become hostages to these restrictions, significantly hindering their movement between cities and towns.<sup>192</sup>

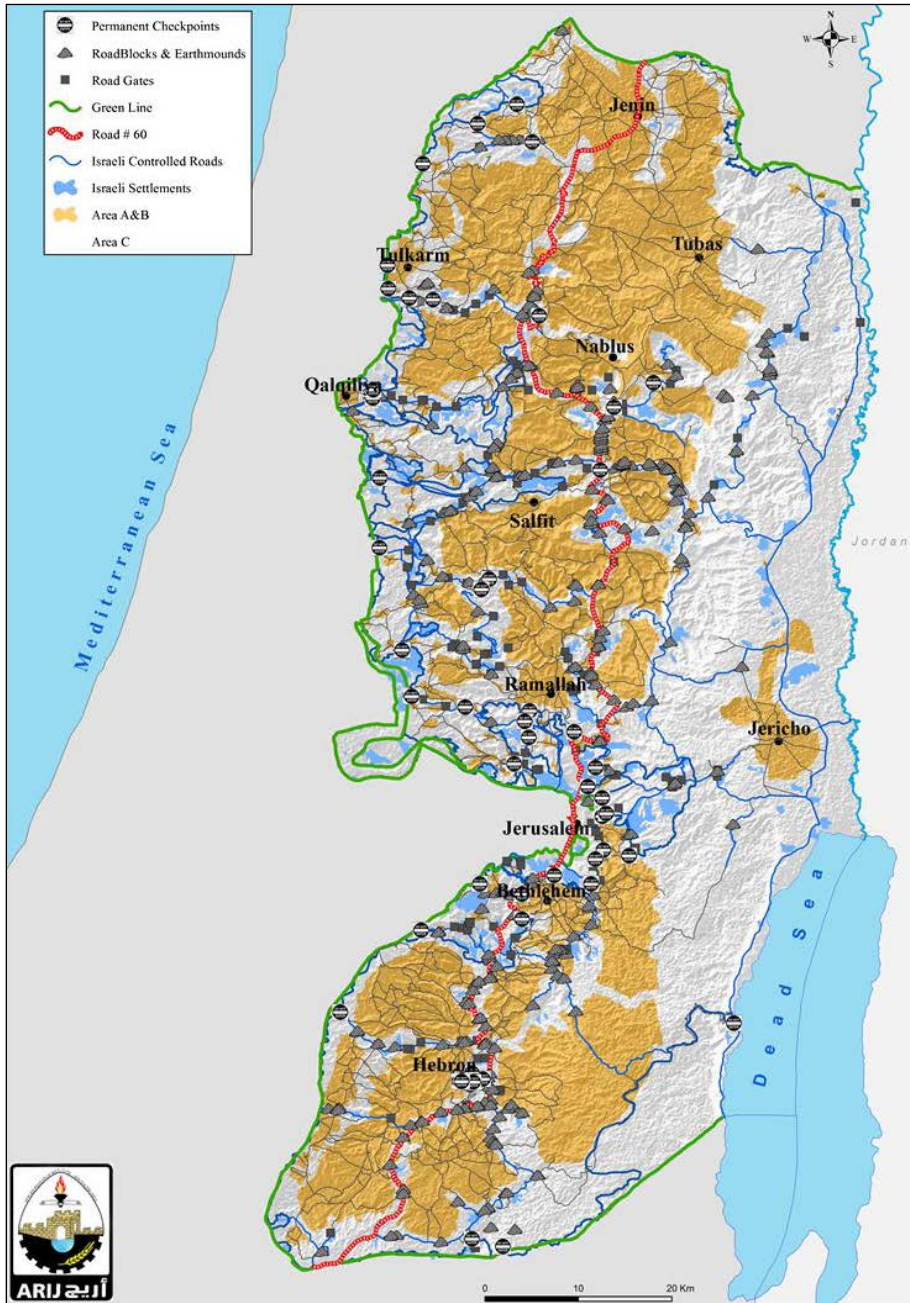
Since 7/10/2023, Israel has barred Palestinian workers from entering the 1948 occupied territories. Furthermore, the Israeli army in WB has increased the number of military checkpoints on roads and at entrances to Palestinian towns and villages, effectively segregating the Palestinian governorates and transforming WB into over 35 isolated areas.<sup>193</sup>

According to UNCTAD’s 2022 report, due to “mobility restrictions, Palestinians lose 60 million work hours per year, equivalent to \$274 million,” and checkpoints alone cost the WB economy at least 6% of GDP.<sup>194</sup>

**Table 7/3: Israeli Forces and Settler Violations in WB 2022–2023<sup>195</sup>**

	2022	2023
<b>Settler attacks</b>	1,187 attacks	2,616 attacks
<b>Cutting, burning or destroying trees</b>	10,291 trees	21,731 trees
<b>Confiscated lands</b>	26,508 donums	50,525 donums
<b>Demolished structures</b>	715 structures	659 structures
<b>Permanent and temporary checkpoints (gates, military or dirt checkpoints)</b>	593 checkpoints and gates	694 checkpoints and gates

**Map 3/3: Israeli Checkpoints Established by Israeli Authorities Between Palestinian Governorates Since 7/10/2023, Dividing WB into Ghettos<sup>196</sup>**



## ***Conclusion***

During 2022 and 2023, Israeli plans and policies aimed at exerting more dominance over land and holy sites continued, seeking to resolve key issues and impose new realities. This strategy focused on resolving the conflict without bearing significant costs, while using the aggressive war on GS since 7/10/2023 to divert attention from the ongoing active war in Jerusalem and the rest of the WB.

The influence of the ultra-nationalist religious Zionist movement has become more entrenched in Israeli decision-making, with Temple groups gaining significant sway within official institutions and expanding their presence in the Israeli Knesset. In recent years, these groups have secured ministerial portfolios, leveraging their powers to advance Judaization plans and tighten control over *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Jerusalem and the rest of WB.

At the level of Islamic holy sites, controlling the administration of *al-Aqsa* Mosque was a primary objective during the reporting period. This included increasing the number of settler incursions into *al-Aqsa*, extending the duration of these incursions, and raising the number of groups participating in these actions. Efforts were also made to entrench the temporal and spatial division of the Mosque, undermine the role of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department and promote the strategy of “moral construction of the Temple,” particularly during Jewish holidays and Judaization events that coincided with Islamic occasions and festivals.

The second aspect of Israel’s targeting of *al-Aqsa* Mosque involves ongoing Judaization projects in its vicinity, alongside continued restrictions on restoration operations within the Mosque. Throughout 2022–2023, Israeli authorities advanced several Judaization projects focused on infrastructure around *al-Aqsa* Mosque, notably the cable car project and the completion of the light rail project in Jerusalem, with the first segment expected to be operational by 2028. Additionally, plans have surfaced to expand the Moroccan Gate, which is often used for incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque. To facilitate this, the proposal includes removing the earthen hill and the wooden bridge connecting the Western Wall Plaza to the Moroccan Gate, and constructing a fixed bridge inscribed with biblical phrases.

The third aspect of targeting *al-Aqsa* involves excavations around the external foundation of the Mosque, particularly near the Western Wall and the Umayyad

Palaces. These excavations extend beneath and around *al-Aqsa* Mosque, posing a serious threat to its foundations, as evidenced by visible cracks in the western section of *al-Aqsa* and dust falling from its pillars.

At the level of targeting and displacing Jerusalemites, this battle focused on plans to displace residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and Silwan town through various methods of intimidation and temptation, often backed by legal frameworks imposed by the Israeli authorities. Numerous settlement projects, carried out directly by the Israeli government or through settler organizations like Elad and Ateret Cohanim, were utilized. Furthermore, Israel intensified house demolitions, eviction orders, and arrest and expulsion measures from Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque, while revoking IDs and imposing the Israeli curriculum in Jerusalem.

At the level of other Islamic holy sites, the policy of Judaizing the Ibrahimi Mosque persisted, with significant excavation operations conducted as part of Israeli plans to alter its archaeological features and complete the “electric elevator” project facilitating settler incursions. During the Israeli war on GS following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, hundreds of mosques were either completely or partially destroyed, including attacks on 24 mosques in Hebron, al-Bireh, Masafer Yatta, Salfit and Beit Safafa.

Regarding Christian holy sites, the diversion of Christian properties and real estate to settler organizations continued through deceptive tactics and fraudulent operations, often under the guise of Israeli Supreme Court decisions. Settlers seized land in al-Hamra, located in al-Ain area of Silwan, which belonged to the Greek Orthodox Monastery. Settler attacks on Christians and Christian clergy in Jerusalem have intensified, including attempts to set fire to the Church of the Prison of Christ in the Old City, as well as the desecration and destruction of Christian graves.

Settlement expansion in Jerusalem continued, with numerous projects and plans launched under the guise of urban development and reducing social and economic disparities among the population. This approach further suffocated Jerusalemites, imposing additional restrictions on movement and urban expansion, while allowing a larger number of settlers to seize real estate and land, effectively encircling Palestinian neighborhoods.

In the rest of WB, Israeli authorities continued to issue settlement plans aimed at expanding Israeli settlements alongside their aggression against GS. These plans involved seizing vast areas of Palestinian land for settlement construction and activities, as well as completing and extending the Separation Wall, building bypass roads, and establishing military checkpoints. This expansion was accompanied by increased restrictions on the movement of Palestinians, the demolition of their homes, the displacement of Bedouin communities and the encouragement of settlers to carry out numerous attacks targeting Palestinian civilians and their properties.

Operation al-Aqsa Flood demonstrated the Palestinian people's commitment to their land and holy sites, showcasing their determination to protect them at any cost. While the extremist Israeli government attempts to mitigate the repercussions of the operation and pursue its plans in various forms, it is increasingly aware of the magnitude of the challenges it faces. These include the growing capabilities of the resistance and the Palestinian people to counter Israeli attempts at Judaization, supported by the Arab and Muslim *Ummah* as well as the free people of the world.



## Endnotes

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## This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is pleased to present The Palestine Strategic Report (PSR) 2022–2023, now in its 13th consecutive edition. This report provides an academic, objective and comprehensive analyses of the developments related to the Palestine issue across various dimensions. It offers up-to-date and accurate information and statistics through the end of 2023, complemented by analytical insights and forecasts.

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Prof. Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

# The Palestine Strategic Report 2022 – 2023



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