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## 'Jerusalem ghettos: Transforming Palestinian neighbourhoods into Israeli prisons'

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The Qatari-based newspaper, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, has recently published an article describing what has happened to the Palestinian areas of Jerusalem over the past few months.

The article can be found at:

<http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/features/2015/11/30/jerusalem-ghettos-transforming-palestinian-neighbourhoods-into-israeli-prisons>



Two months after the beginning of what has been termed the Jerusalem Uprising, which erupted in the Old City and at the al-Aqsa mosque compound before spreading across the occupied West Bank, several Jerusalem neighbourhoods have been turned into ghettos, surrounded by Israeli army roadblocks and barricades. Concrete walls separate streets from other neighbourhoods, such as the southern district of Jabel Mukaber, which Israeli authorities describe as the source of the violent resistance against them. Israel's measures against several Palestinian neighbourhoods, particularly in Jabel Mukaber, al-Sawana, Ras al-Amud, Issawiyah, and Shuafat, have affected nearly 100,000 residents.

These moves have compromised residents' basic rights, such as movement and access to work, hospitals and schools, said Ziyad Hamouri, head of the Jerusalem Centre for Social and Economic Rights (JCSER). Hamouri told al-Araby al-Jadeed that JCSER had documented a 300-percent increase in such violations. The centre can no longer keep up with people's complaints, he said. For more than two decades, JCSER has documented basic violations, such as home demolitions and the retraction of the residency permits of thousands of residents. The centre also followed up on medical and social rights, which had been violated by Israel's National Insurance Institute.

According to Hamouri, nearly 30,000 Jerusalem residents have lost their residency permits and access to healthcare, as well as their basic social rights, for which they pay high expenses upon turning 18. The most recent of these violations were the closure of certain neighbourhoods, surrounding them with the separation wall, cramming nearly 125,000 residents into a series of ghettos.

### **Jabel Mukaber**

The case is more tragic in the southern neighbourhood of Jabel Mukaber. The area has been home to a number of fighters who have launched fatal attacks against Israeli settlers and soldiers over the past few years. Main streets have been blocked with concrete barricades, checkpoints have been set up, and parts of the apartheid wall have been built to isolate the neighbourhood from the Armon Hanatziv settlement, as well as to isolate residential blocks from each other. Rassem Obeidat, a resident of Jabel Mukaber and a member of a local rights committee, told al-Araby al-Jadeed that the residents had embarked on protest against such "racist and fascist" measures.

Israeli soldiers subject residents to daily oppression and harassment. Some patients even die at the checkpoints. Nadim Shuqairat died three weeks ago, when an Israeli soldier stopped him from leaving the neighbourhood after having had a heart attack. Nearly 7,000 students are affected, as they try to reach schools and colleges outside the neighbourhood every day, standing in long queues at the checkpoints near the concrete blocks. These tense situations sometimes lead to clashes, which the Israeli forces suppress with rubber-coated bullets.

### **Al-Sawana**

The same applies to the neighbourhood of al-Sawana, northeast of the Old City, in which concrete barricades placed by Israeli forces have blocked the movement of students to their schools, as well as patients to hospitals. Ambulances face major difficulties in moving patients to hospitals, prompting the Red Crescent to call on the relevant international bodies, particularly the Red Cross, to intervene immediately. Samer al-Natsheh, a student from the Old City, told al-Araby al-Jadeed that it had become extremely difficult for hundreds of students to reach their college, as Israeli soldiers at the checkpoint in front of the university subject them to daily harassment. Natsheh was once beaten, along with two of his colleagues, simply for objecting to being stopped from reaching their college.

### **Al-Tur**

Adjacent to al-Sawana, al-Tur has turned into another Palestinian ghetto, only 150 metres from the Old City. The neighbourhood includes al-Maqased hospital, as well as three schools and a number of charity organisations, all of which are too difficult to reach, especially after the closure of the Suleiman al-Farsi main street. For the two months that followed the Jerusalem Uprising, students and patients have been targeted. Israeli troops have stormed the al-Maqased hospital three times in the past few weeks. The

hospital staff were beaten and pepper-sprayed, while computers and patient files were confiscated, according to the hospital's general manager, Rafiq al-Husseini, who described the events as a violation of the hospital's sanctity. Al-Tur resident Mohammed Sayyad told al-Araby al-Jadeed that Israeli settlers enjoyed freedom of movement through all neighbourhoods without any obstacles, and under the protection of Israeli soldiers. The Israeli authorities even opened shortcuts for them to reach their homes, says Sayyad.

### **Ras al-Amud**

The neighbourhood of Ras al-Amud is adjacent to al-Tur to the south, overlooking the Old City. Its residents also face a similar daily suffering. It is mostly students who are assaulted, pepper-sprayed, and beaten. Nearly 30,000 residents live in Ras al-Amud, where the Israeli authorities built a new settlement called Ma'ale ha-Zeitim in recent years, housing 132 settlers' families. Many of the settlers there join Israeli forces in their assault against Palestinian residents and their properties. They even control the movement of residents.

Mohamed Shaaban, a resident of Ras al-Amud, told al-Araby al-Jadeed that the settlers sometimes close down the entire neighbourhood when they hold a funeral at the nearby Jewish cemetery. Another resident, Saed Abu Sawi, said that the oppression went from checkpoints and beatings to tax fines imposed on shop owners for the sake of revenge. "Wherever you go, they shut the doors before you," he said. "We can no longer reach our homes, and we have stopped our children from going to school because we fear for them."

### **A daily reality**

This daily reality in Palestinian ghettos has shattered any hopes of establishing a state under a political settlement. Jerusalemites' main concern is simply to end the occupation of their city, according to Shuafat-based Fatah spokesperson Thaer al-Fasfous. Israeli forces have turned Shuafat and Issawiyah into the largest ghettos in north Jerusalem, home to more than 60,000 suffering residents. "Shuafat is like a pressure-cooker," says Fasfous, "what is happening is collective punishment, and the people are running out of patience." "All doors are shut," says Abu Homs, "siege, oppression, arrests, and stopping people from going to work." "How much longer will the people's patience last?" Over the past few weeks of the Jerusalem Uprising, these ghettos have been the scene for violent confrontations, and the daily reality shows that more is yet to come.