



A Stranglehold on Sheikh Jarrah



New Tools for Israeli Takeover
and Palestinian Displacement

July 2025

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Cover Photo: Al-Mahameed

I. Introduction

For the past five decades, settler organizations, with government support, have worked to seize homes in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. To its south lies the Old City and to its West lies the Green Line and West Jerusalem, making Sheikh Jarrah a strategic target for settler activities, land seizures, and efforts aimed at *Israelizing* the space. Within Sheikh Jarrah, two smaller areas have been, for decades, the target of eviction attempts: the Kerem al Ja'ouni section in the east of the neighborhood, and the Umm Haroun area, bordered by the Green Line to the west. In the north of Sheikh Jarrah, where the Shepherd Hotel once stood, a housing complex for settlers has been built but currently remains unpopulated.

Since the 1970s, eviction lawsuits have been filed against approximately 80 Palestinian families in the neighborhood. The threats intensified 15 years ago with the eviction of three Palestinian families and reached a peak in 2021, when the Supreme Court discussed appeals filed by seven families facing eviction in Kerem al Ja'ouni. The aggressive police response to demonstrations against these planned evictions led to an escalation of tensions in Jerusalem, followed by a war with Hamas ("Operation Guardian of the Walls") and violent confrontations across Israel.

At the time, the Supreme Court ruled that the families could remain in their homes, at least provisionally. It also provided, for the time being, some protection for an additional 25 families threatened with eviction in the Kerem al Ja'ouni area.

The existing settler enclaves in Sheikh Jarrah, and the Israeli attempts to take control of the area constitute an ongoing threat to the Palestinian

families facing eviction and have for many years infringed on the freedom of movement, personal security, and other basic rights of the local residents. Certainly, the highest price has been paid by the families whose homes were already seized. Nevertheless, 58 years after the occupation of East Jerusalem, only ten houses in the neighborhood are in the hands of settler organizations. Most families whose homes are under threat of settler takeover have, until now, managed to protect their homes and prevent these attempts from being realized. The neighborhood remains not only a Palestinian neighborhood, but also a prominent symbol of the Palestinian struggle in Jerusalem.

In this context, the State of Israel has begun to develop new ways of displacing Palestinian communities and taking over Sheikh Jarrah. Under the cover of urban renewal, the state is promoting two housing projects that would settle around 2,000 Israeli settler families in the neighborhood, along with the potential displacement of the entire Umm Haroun area and the dozens of Palestinian families who live there. Another plan is being advanced for the establishment of a yeshiva (a religious Jewish institution and dormitory) on a plot of land expropriated by the Jerusalem Municipality, who at the time claimed that the property would serve the needs of Sheikh Jarrah residents. At the same time, the state is seizing the neighborhood's public spaces—as it has done in Silwan—and allocating significant funds to develop Israeli religious and nationalistic projects in these areas.

In recent years, the Jerusalem Municipality has also promoted several projects adjacent to Sheikh Jarrah—the business complex in Wadi Joz (“Silicon Wadi”) and the municipal park “Pit’hat Kidron”—purportedly intended to serve East Jerusalem residents. However, the new settlement plans currently being advanced reveal that these existing projects may,

in practice, be used to further the displacement of Palestinian residents and accelerate Israeli takeover of Sheikh Jarrah specifically and the Old City Basin in general.

The government projects described in this report are liable to transform Sheikh Jarrah from a Palestinian neighborhood—a core part of the Palestinian environs surrounding the Old City—into a major Israeli settlement that severs the center of Palestinian Jerusalem from the areas to its north, leaving only a few small and threatened Palestinian enclaves alongside it.

II. The Threat of Evictions in Sheikh Jarrah – An Update

Most eviction threats against Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah are concentrated in two central areas of the neighborhood. These eviction lawsuits are based on claims that the lands or houses were owned by Jews prior to 1948. According to discriminatory Israeli legislation, Jews are granted the right to reclaim pre-1948 properties in East Jerusalem while denying Palestinian residents the same right to retrieve properties lost in the same war which are located in what is now Israel. For several decades, state-sponsored settler organizations have focused their efforts on evicting Palestinian families and seizing their homes for Jewish settlement in the neighborhood, resulting in the takeover of around ten houses. Before describing the new steps Israel is taking, the following sections will provide a current update on the eviction lawsuits targeting Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah.

Kerem al Ja’ouni — In this compound, Palestinian families were evicted from around eight houses, and today approximately ten settler families reside in these homes. Since the early 2000s, eviction lawsuits have been filed by a company named “Nahalat Shim’on.” The last evictions in this area took place in 2009 after Nahalat Shim’on’s successful lawsuit against three families from the area. Following these evictions, the company housed settlers in the vacated homes.

In 2021, the Supreme Court accepted the appeal of seven other families against a District Court ruling that had authorized their eviction. The Supreme Court ruled to provisionally freeze their eviction and stated that the families must be allowed to submit proof of ownership in the framework of a future land registration process (Permission for Civil Appeal 2401-21, 2841-21). As of now, the state has not begun the formal process of registering lands in the

area. This ruling should protect the rest of the families in the compound, at least for now, as their legal situations are similar.

However, in 2024, the Jerusalem District Court ruled in favor of the Nahalat Shim'on company in the eviction lawsuit filed against the Diab family¹ from the same community. The Diab family has filed a request to appeal this ruling, which is currently being considered by the Supreme Court.²

Umm Haroun —Located on the western side of Sheikh Jarrah, 43 Palestinian families currently reside in this neighborhood. So far, settler organizations have successfully seized and taken over two homes in the area.³ One of these houses is not consistently inhabited, while settlers reside in the other. Eviction lawsuits are ongoing against several local families, based on claims that they lost their protected tenancy status and/or breached the terms of their contracts. These lawsuits have either been filed by the General Custodian within the Ministry of Justice—who, under Israeli law, administers alleged pre-1948 Jewish properties—or by settler organizations to whom the General Custodian transferred the properties based on proof of land right acquisition from the purported heirs.

1 Civil Appeal 27677-06-24, Diab vs. Nahalat Shim'on.

2 Permission for Civil Appeal 32396-04-25, Diab vs. Nahalat Shim'on.

3 One of these houses was seized after the childless Palestinian woman who lived there died, leaving no eligible heir; the Shamasneh family was evicted from the second house in 2017.

III. New Mechanisms for Israeli Land Seizures and Displacement of the Local Community

a. Settlements and Eviction of Palestinians Under the Cover of Urban Renewal

Over the past decade, the Jerusalem municipality has invested many resources in what is known as “urban renewal” (*pinui binui* in Hebrew) - a process of increasing housing units by demolishing older residential structures and replacing them with new multi-story apartment buildings. This process has become a central tool in Jerusalem’s urban planning system.

Despite criticism of how it is implemented, urban renewal is considered an effective means of increasing the housing supply and upgrading aging infrastructure in the city. Yet as of today, both the municipality and the state promote urban renewal exclusively in the city’s Israeli neighborhoods and settlements. Among the many dozens of projects—amounting to tens of thousands of housing units—not a single one is located in a Palestinian neighborhood.⁴

Given this, the two new zoning plans submitted by the Jerusalem Development Authority for Sheikh Jarrah under the banner of urban renewal are particularly noteworthy. Together, these plans will construct roughly 2,000 housing units for Israelis within this Palestinian neighborhood—exceeding the number of housing units currently existing there.⁵ In effect, this amounts to the construction of two major new settlements in the heart of a Palestinian neighborhood.

4 For detailed information, see Ir Amim’s report, “Planned Negligence: How Palestinian Neighborhoods Disappeared from Jerusalem’s Current & Future Urban Planning Policies”, 2021.

5 According to the Statistics Yearbook of the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, in 2022 the total number of housing units in Sheikh Jarrah and the neighboring (and larger) Wadi Joz together was 2,310.

1. Urban Renewal in the Umm Haroun Area

In late 2024, the Jerusalem Development Authority submitted a zoning plan (TPS 1237767) for the urban renewal of Umm Haroun, which proposes to construct 316 housing units, replacing the roughly 40 houses which exist today in the neighborhood. This area covers 17 dunam (17,000 m²) and is located adjacent to Bar Lev Road on the western edge of Sheikh Jarrah, extending to Nablus Road—the main thoroughfare that crosses Sheikh Jarrah and connects it to Damascus Gate and the Old City.

The Jerusalem Development Authority is a company jointly owned by the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs and the Jerusalem Municipality, serving as a key tool for implementing government projects, including those advancing settlements in the Old City Basin.⁶

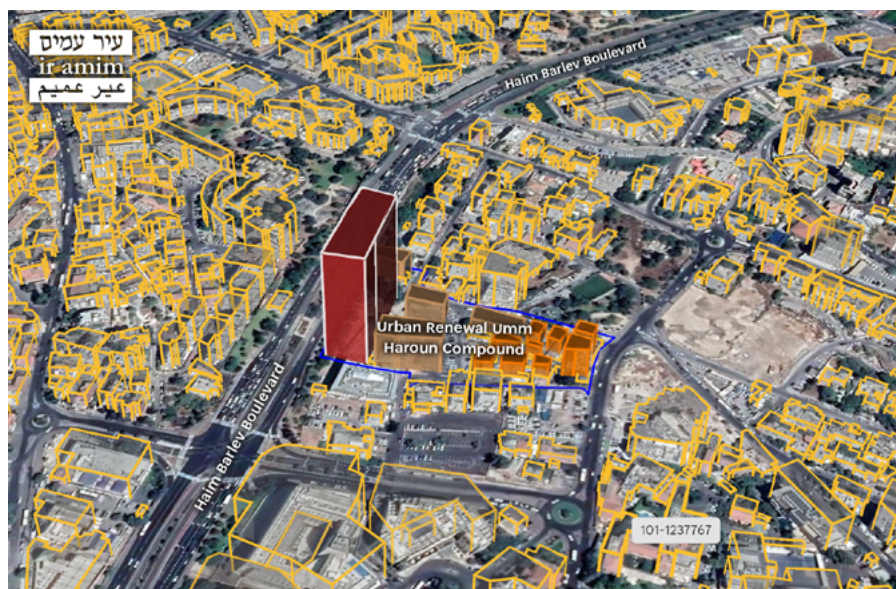
As stated in the planning guidelines and documents, the plan is being promoted as a “renewal of the Nahalat Shimon neighborhood” and includes a new road that will connect the area directly to West Jerusalem, replacing the current access road that passes through Palestinian areas.

While some Palestinian families in Um Haroun have been forcibly evicted in the past years (as mentioned above), attempts to carry out mass evictions have remained largely unsuccessful because the families have protected tenancy rights. Yet now, under the veneer of an urban renewal project, the state and settlers can bypass the obstacles associated with protected tenancy and in one fell swoop uproot the entire community for the establishment of a Jewish settlement. Israeli planning and building

6 For example, the Jerusalem Development Authority works closely with the Elad settler organization: it is responsible for building the cable car which will connect Elad’s visitor center in Silwan to West Jerusalem and sponsors Elad’s events in the Hinnom Valley/Wadi Rababa.

laws enable urban renewal to be advanced without the agreement of protected tenants.

In May 2025, the Jerusalem Municipality's Local Planning Committee discussed the settlement plan for Umm Haroun and recommended advancing it with several amendments.



2. Urban Renewal in the Menachem Begin Government Complex

Another urban renewal plan (TPS 1181593) was submitted by the Jerusalem Development Authority for an area comprising 121 dunam (121,000 m²) on the northern edge of Sheikh Jarrah. This area, known as the Menachem Begin Government Complex, currently hosts several government offices and the national police headquarters. The land belonged to Palestinians and was expropriated in 1968 for “public needs.”

According to the plan, high-rise buildings will replace the existing structures and include 1500 new residential units, government offices, police facilities, and commercial spaces. The proposed mix of residential areas alongside government and police offices raises reasonable suspicion that the residential units are intended for Israelis—effectively creating a major new Jewish settlement/neighborhood on the northern edge of Sheikh Jarrah.

This planned settlement will include more housing units than all of Sheikh Jarrah currently contains, drastically altering the neighborhood’s character and significantly strengthening the small settler compounds already present in the area. An Israeli settlement here would also connect the Mount Scopus and French Hill areas to the north with West Jerusalem and the Israeli settlement/neighborhood of Ma’alot Dafna. This would create a contiguous block of Israeli settlements and neighborhoods, severing the existing Palestinian urban fabric and cutting off the Old City Basin area from the northern Palestinian neighborhoods of Shu’afat and Beit Hanina.



A Stranglehold on Sheikh Jarrah

New Tools for Israeli Takeover and Palestinian Displacement

b. The Land Registration Process

In 2018, 51 years after its illegal occupation and annexation of East Jerusalem, the State of Israel began to advance the formal process of land registration (officially known as settlement of land title) in the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. Until this point, 90% of East Jerusalem lands were not registered despite the fact that land registration had been completed in over 95% of land within the boundaries of Israel. The process of land registration in East Jerusalem began under Jordanian rule between 1948 and 1967, but was subsequently suspended by the State of Israel after its illegal annexation of the territory in 1967. Due to political considerations, consecutive Israeli governments refrained from resuming the procedures until 2018.

The land registration procedures were re-initiated within the framework of 2018 Government Decision 3790 for the Reduction of Socio-economic Gaps and Economic Development in East Jerusalem. The government presented the land registration process as intending to benefit East Jerusalem residents by strengthening their economic and property rights, noting that the lack of formal registration of their lands and properties harms them in numerous ways. In practice, however, the process—intended to finalize property ownership in a nearly incontestable way—has been used to facilitate Israeli seizure of land in East Jerusalem. This has been carried out by registering land under the ownership of the state or settler organizations, or by applying the Absentee Property Law, which transfers such assets directly into the hands of the state. Several plots within Sheikh Jarrah are among the areas where land registration has occurred.⁷

7 For further details see Ir Amim's report: [Settlement of Land Title in East Jerusalem: A Means of Dispossessing Palestinians from their Lands and Homes](#), March 2022.

After the approval of Government Decision 3790 in 2018, the Umm Haroun neighborhood in Sheikh Jarrah was the first area in East Jerusalem where the state began to advance land registration. As mentioned above, this area contains 40 homes inhabited by some 43 Palestinian families. In April 2021, land registration was completed, and the land was registered in the name of Jews based on claims of ownership from before 1948. This led to the land being transferred to the General Custodian following the annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967.

The land settlement official from the Ministry of Justice conducted the process without informing the Palestinian families—in breach of the obligation to ensure a fair and transparent process—and thereby prevented them from submitting claims to the land. A legal petition filed by the residents of Umm Haroun, together with Ir Amim and Bimkom, against the land registration, was ultimately rejected (High Court of Justice 2996/21). The underhanded completion of the procedure prevented the Palestinian families from presenting evidence that could establish their rights to the land and undermine claims of Jewish ownership in the area.

In 2024, the land registration process was also completed in the northern part of Sheikh Jarrah—on land where the Ateret Cohanim settler organization has been in the process of establishing a settler compound in and around what was known as The Shepherd Hotel, which is currently uninhabited. This land was handed over to Ateret Cohanim by the Custodian of Absentee Property several years ago. Slightly more than half of it was registered in the name of a private company, C&M Properties, associated with Ateret Cohanim. This registration will make it easier for Ateret Cohanim to populate the settlement and, in all likelihood, to expand it. An additional 25% of the land was registered to the Israeli Development Authority, a government body established to manage

properties seized by the Custodian of Absentee Property. During the registration process, a number of Palestinians—some of them heirs to the land prior to application of the Absentee Property Law—attempted to submit statements of claim, but were refused by the land registration official, claiming they were submitted too late. The Supreme Court dismissed the residents' petition, stating that there is an alternative avenue via the District Court.⁸ Such proceedings are currently underway.⁹

8 Supreme Court Justice 5988/22 Hussein vs. the land registration official.

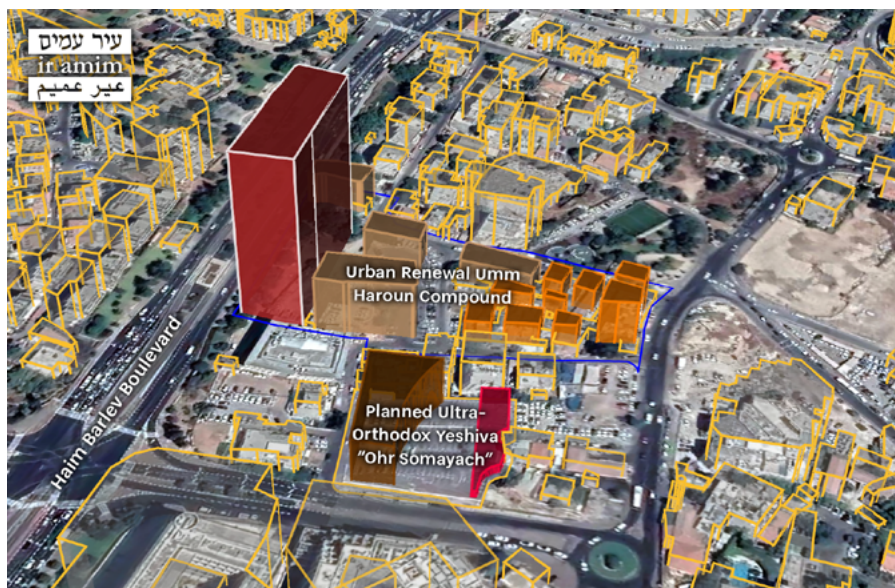
9 Civil Claim 22963-06-24 Hussein vs the land registration official.

c. Taking Over Public Space

1. Establishing a Yeshiva (religious Jewish school) in the Neighborhood

In January 2025, the District Planning Committee decided to advance the plan (TPS 68858) for establishing a yeshiva (religious Jewish school) in Sheikh Jarrah, on a plot of land adjacent to the Umm Haroun area. The yeshiva building is intended to include dormitories and would, in effect, constitute a residential compound housing hundreds of ultra-Orthodox men. Over the years, there have been countless incidents in which young religious men have harassed or attacked Palestinian residents of the neighborhood. The creation of a permanent presence of religious Jewish men in the neighborhood is expected to lead to recurring conflicts and seriously threaten the security of Sheikh Jarrah's residents.

The land in question was expropriated from its Palestinian owners and, according to a zoning plan prepared by the state in the 1980s, was designated for the construction of a public building to serve the neighborhood's residents. Instead, it was transferred from the Jerusalem Municipality to the Israel Land Authority, which allocated it—without a tender nor payment—to an Ultra-Orthodox Jewish organization, known as Ohr Somayach. This organization later submitted a zoning plan for the establishment of a yeshiva. The advancement of the plan was halted in 2020. According to the Jerusalem Municipality's website, the plan was shelved following criticism—including an appeal by Ir Amim—which prompted the Planning Policy Department to review it. This review produced quantitative data highlighting the severe shortage of public infrastructure in the neighborhood, including schools, parent-and-child clinics, and more. Recently, and with no explanation provided, the District Committee brought the plan back to the table and declared its intention to approve it by September 2025.



2. Government Budgets for the Development of Israeli Sites in the Neighborhood

In many areas of what is known as Jerusalem's Old City Basin¹⁰, historical sites are used to develop touristic settlements or settler-operated tourist attractions. This enables settler organizations to take over public space and greatly strengthen the settler presence within Palestinian neighborhoods, while also altering the character of the space.

In Sheikh Jarrah, the Israeli authorities have been developing what they call "The Northern Trail" plan, which is a walking route that includes various sites from the Damascus Gate northwards to Sheikh Jarrah. The list of sites in this plan consists mainly of Jewish-Israeli sites. In Sheikh Jarrah, these include the

10 The Old City and surrounding Palestinian neighborhoods, including Silwan, the Mount of Olives, and Sheikh Jarrah.

Shim'on HaTzadik compound, a memorial for Israeli soldiers who fell in the battles to capture the Old City, and settler compounds, which are presented as the renewal of historic Jewish communities in the neighborhood.

The Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs developed the plan for the “Northern Trail” in collaboration with the right-wing organization Reshit Yerushalayim. Tzachi Mamo, a central player in this organization, is also a senior representative of Nahalat Shim'on, the company behind the eviction lawsuits in Kerem al Ja'ouni. The Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs and the Jerusalem Municipality sponsor the tours that Reshit Yerushalayim operates in Sheikh Jarrah and along the “Northern Trail.”

Through the “Northern Trail” plan, the government has funded the development of the Shim'on HaTzadik compound. Similarly, the Jerusalem National Fund (JNF) financed the expansion of the Israeli military memorial, while the Jerusalem Municipality waived the construction permit requirement for the development works around the site. The monument's expansion is intended to accommodate large public events; however, opposition to its use to further Israelize Sheikh Jarrah has, for now, halted the original plans, which included construction of an amphitheater at the site.

In addition to appropriating public space in the neighborhood for these projects, holding large-scale events for the Jewish public is used as a pretext to restrict the freedom of movement of Sheikh Jarrah's residents.

d. East Jerusalem Development Projects in Light of the New Settlements Plans

In recent years, Israeli authorities have promoted two major projects in Sheikh Jarrah and neighboring Wadi Joz, presenting them as flagship initiatives to reduce discrimination and increase economic development in East Jerusalem.

The first is Pit'hat Kidron Park, located between Sheikh Jarrah and Wadi Joz, which opened in early 2023. Spanning 25 dunam (25,000 m²), it is the largest park of its kind in East Jerusalem, which suffers from a severe shortage of public parks and gardens. When the municipality announced its intention to establish the park, there were concerns that it would be yet another step in strengthening the ring of settlements around the Old City—a network that includes settlements themselves, settler-operated tourist sites, promenades, national parks, and Israeli recreational attractions. As of now, these concerns have not materialized, and the majority of those who enjoy the park—bordering the two Palestinian neighborhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Wadi Joz—are residents of East Jerusalem.

The second project is the zoning plan for a high-tech complex in Wadi Joz (TPS 977694, “Silicon Wadi”), approved in early 2024. Submitted by the Jerusalem Development Authority, the plan designates several existing commercial structures in the area—garages, shops, and small businesses—for demolition, to be replaced by multi-story buildings housing high-tech companies. The Jerusalem Municipality and the government often present this project as offering high-quality employment opportunities for East Jerusalem residents and furthering the area’s economic development. However, there were concerns that, in practice, this “economic development” would amount

to replacing a central Palestinian commercial area near the Old City with a business complex for Israeli and international companies that would largely employ Israelis. The area in question lies in the heart of the Palestinian neighborhoods of Wadi Joz and Sheikh Jarrah, and Israeli authorities have repeatedly emphasized that this plan is part of East Jerusalem's economic development. Publicity clips released by the municipality, as well as from meetings between municipal representatives and international investors, have consistently highlighted the economic benefits this project will purportedly bring to East Jerusalem's residents.

Today, the large new settlement plans described in previous sections of this report—which threaten to completely transform the character of Sheikh Jarrah—have renewed and intensified concerns about these two major projects. The new aforementioned settlement/neighborhood planned for the Menachem Begin Government Complex (TPS 1181593) would be built adjacent to Pit'hat Kidron Park and would connect West Jerusalem to the area designated for the high-tech hub in Wadi Joz. The plan for the high-tech complex includes the development of access roads to the Umm Haroun area in Sheikh Jarrah, which is itself slated for replacement under the urban renewal settlement plan described earlier in this report.

This raises serious doubts about the declared aims of these plans and how they will play out in practice. With this in mind, the potential outcome of the "Silicon Wadi" project could in fact lead to the establishment of a major Israeli business complex which would serve the new settlements in the area, while replacing a bustling Palestinian commercial space, thereby expanding Israeli control over central areas of East Jerusalem near the Old City's Lion's Gate.

IV. Conclusion

Israeli efforts to entrench control of East Jerusalem and expel Palestinian communities, including in Sheikh Jarrah, have continued since Israel's illegal annexation of East Jerusalem. The determination of Sheikh Jarrah's residents to protect their homes and community has—so far—not only prevented most Israeli eviction attempts but has also created an ethos of successful and largely non-violent Palestinian resistance. Confronted with this ethos and limited success, Israel is now escalating and refining its mechanisms of land seizure and forced expulsion. For years, settler organizations, with the support of the state, were spearheading the attempts to expel Palestinian communities. However, today, the Israeli authorities themselves are at the forefront of these expulsions—initiating, funding, and advancing the mechanisms described in this report.

In July 2024, the International Court of Justice published its Advisory Opinion, ruling that the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank is illegal and must end. Israel's actions in Sheikh Jarrah exemplify the ongoing and severe consequences of this illegality. If these plans are carried out, they will alter the character of East Jerusalem for decades to come, further erasing Palestinian identity, forcibly displacing yet another Palestinian community, and entrenching Jewish supremacy and control over the city.