



(As Delivered)

Briefing to the UN Security Council by Ir Amim Executive Director, Dr. Yudith Oppenheimer

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Thank you, Mr. President and members of the Security Council for the opportunity to address you today.

I grew up in Jerusalem and likewise raised my children here. My Orthodox Jewish upbringing deepened my understanding of the profound role of religion and tradition in shaping attachment to the city. Jerusalem is in every meaning of the word—*my home*—yet also *home* for the many Palestinians who live alongside Israelis like me. When I think of Jerusalem, I cannot imagine it without the multiplicity of peoples, religions and historical narratives it contains. It is precisely this diversity that makes Jerusalem so extraordinary, but also what transforms it into an arena of acute conflict.

For this reason, I joined Ir Amim – an Israeli organization that envisions an equitable and sustainable Jerusalem with an agreed political future. Ir Amim means "City of Peoples," which reflects our vision of Jerusalem as a shared city, the current home and future capital of two peoples with equal measures of attachments and claims to Jerusalem. Yet, the rights and liberties I enjoy as an Israeli citizen are not afforded to the city's 350,000 Palestinian residents, who today make up nearly 40% of its population.

Since the 1967 occupation and unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem - in contravention to International Law— Israeli authorities have employed a system of discriminatory policies to weaken the Palestinian hold on the city. These policies have included land confiscation and settlement building, denial of citizenship and political rights, permanent residency revocations, insufficient service provision, and severe restrictions on planning and building in East Jerusalem.

This not only violates the individual and collective rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem, but also contravenes UN Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 2334, and destabilizes conditions for an agreed resolution based on a two-state framework with two capitals in Jerusalem.

The recent escalation in violence and tension in our region further underscored the centrality of Jerusalem to the conflict and its wider implications on regional stability. The main trigger behind the clashes was the ongoing pressures to undermine Palestinian rights to Jerusalem, exemplified by the continued erosion of the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, the arbitrary closure of the Damascus Gate plaza during Ramadan and the pending evictions of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah.

Indeed, in recent years, evictions of Palestinian families and home demolitions have significantly grown, serving as acute mechanisms of Palestinian displacement from Jerusalem.

Mr. President, I am speaking before the council today because these measures of Palestinian displacement have recently increased in scope and scale in an unprecedented manner. A total of four Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem: Sheikh Jarrah, Batan al-Hawa, Al Bustan, and

Al Walajeh, numbering approximately three thousand Palestinians, are simultaneously under impending threat of mass expulsion.

Many of these families have exhausted their limited legal remedies, which could lead to a devastating wave of evictions and demolitions in the coming months.

Beyond the geopolitical implications, these measures severely violate Palestinian rights to housing and the right to family and community life as an occupied minority group protected under International Law. The Israeli government presents their actions as legitimate within the framework of its democratic and legal institutions. However, these institutions are largely inaccessible to East Jerusalem Palestinians who are devoid of political rights and the power to participate in the legislative and policymaking processes which govern their lives.

The two communities facing mass eviction are Sheikh Jarrah and Batan al-Hawa, Silwan. Nearly 150 Palestinian families - numbering over 1000 people - are at risk of displacement based on discriminatory laws. These laws afford Jews with the reclamation of assets in East Jerusalem lost in 1948, now inhabited by Palestinians, while denying Palestinians the same right for lost properties on the Israeli side of the Green Line. **Many of the families facing eviction are Palestinian refugees who lost homes in Israel in 1948 and now stand to be displaced for a second time.**

Although successive Israeli governments have framed these cases as standard property disputes, they are rather part of a systematic campaign aimed at uprooting Palestinian families and supplanting them with settlers to create Israeli enclaves in the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods. These settler compounds are accompanied by the daily presence of security forces, which together generate constant friction and severely disrupt life in the community.

Currently, several eviction cases in both neighborhoods are pending at the Supreme Court with a major hearing scheduled for August 2nd pertaining to four families in Sheikh Jarrah. Concurrently, the Attorney General has been asked by the Supreme Court to submit a legal opinion by August 29th in one of the cases in Batan al-Hawa, which will likely impact the additional cases involving 80 more families in this neighborhood.

Mr. President, the court's request indicates a possible understanding that these cases carry far-reaching political and moral ramifications and therefore require government weigh-in. Through the Attorney General's opinion, the Israeli government is now being compelled to take an explicit position on these eviction proceedings.

It is therefore essential to hold the Israeli government accountable and to urge it to prevent the large-scale displacement of these communities.

In parallel, threats of mass demolition loom over 140 homes in Al Bustan, Silwan and Al Walajeh, placing some 1800 more Palestinians at risk of displacement. **Upcoming court decisions in August concerning both of these communities could immediately accelerate demolitions.**

In Al Bustan, demolitions are being advanced to make way for a nationalistic archeological park, while in Al Walajeh, they are being carried out due to its strategic location between Jerusalem and the southern West Bank settlements, an area targeted for further de-facto or formal annexation.

Demolition orders are served under the pretext of lacking building permits, which are nearly impossible to procure due to the absence of proper zoning plans that the Israeli authorities have consistently neglected to advance. Israeli planning authorities have continually blocked efforts by

residents in both these areas to authorize their homes and promote plans to enable residential development of their communities.

Mr. President: a total of four communities of nearly 3000 Palestinians are currently at risk of losing their homes in East Jerusalem. These are not private property disputes, but rather a manifestation of a national policy aimed at changing the demographic composition of East Jerusalem, which simultaneously deprives Palestinians of their basic right to housing and the right to family and community life.

In his recent remarks to his European counterparts, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, stated, and I quote "what we need to do now is to make sure that no steps are taken that will prevent the possibility of peace in the future. We need to improve the lives of Palestinians. Whatever is humanitarian, I will be for it." End quote.

To fulfill this statement, the Israeli government must therefore be urged to:

1. Immediately cease all demolitions and evictions of Palestinian families
2. Advance proper urban planning and equitable housing policies in East Jerusalem
3. Ensure the provision of fair and adequate services to all of the city's residents
4. Safeguard both peoples' rights to their homes and the city and recognize their historic, religious and political attachments to Jerusalem.
5. Finally, engage with the Palestinian national leadership and together, with the support of the international community, foster conditions for a sustainable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2334.

In the absence of a political agreement in the foreseeable future, the two peoples in Jerusalem will continue to share a complex urban reality predicated on symbiotic relations and interdependence. Given the current reality, dialogue and cooperation must be cultivated, and measures that exacerbate tension should be avoided.

These elements must constitute a basis for negotiations towards a viable solution, out of the understanding that in every possible political constellation, the two peoples will continue to live alongside each other in Jerusalem.

Thank you.