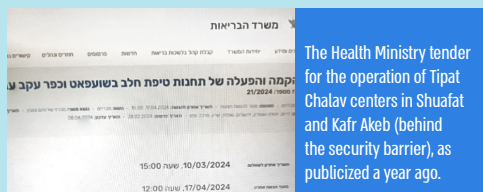


UNRWA CONTINUES TO OPERATE IN JERUSALEM

UNRWA is outlawed in Israel, but has it stopped working? It does not seem so. According to various reports, the offices and schools in Jerusalem continue to operate as they did before, except that some UNRWA signs have been removed or replaced. The schools are open, and the pupils are at their desks. In the wake of reports that the schools were closed down, the principals received instructions from the PA's education authority in Ramallah not to deny the reports in the media, but to simply continue working as usual beneath the media radar.

1 Practically speaking, the only place that Israeli law enforcement personnel made a real effort to expel UNRWA from Israel's sovereign territory was in the Calandia refugee camp in northern Jerusalem. Police units arrived there in February, together with a representative of the municipality who was to officially accept the structure in the city's name, and begin operations there in an Israeli framework. However, the UNRWA workers there did not cooperate, and in fact threw him out and then proceeded to resume working as usual. And thus, even in Calandia, UNRWA is still active.

2 It has been reported that the Red Crescent was chosen in a public tender to replace UNRWA in Jerusalem, and that when internal Arab pressure was exerted, it then withdrew its bid to do so. In fact, however, the tender was only for providing baby care services (Tipat Chalav), and was publicized a year ago – well before the Knesset outlawed UNRWA. The Red Crescent already runs three baby care medical centers in Jerusalem, and never submitted a bid for the additional tender, which was closed without having received any bids. **It appears that the Red Crescent wanted to expand its baby care services in Jerusalem without having to participate in a tender, given that it already had a monopoly and no other bids were submitted.** In the end, as mentioned, the tender was closed and no contract was signed.



3 Ceasefire, yes or no? The Arabs of Jerusalem feel that even if yes, it will collapse as soon as Israel attains its objectives, in light of Israel's understanding that it cannot continue to live aside a terror entity whose sole objective is to destroy it. They see the current quiet as the calm before the storm. Given the tremendous damage wrought upon Gaza in the course of Israel's campaigns to uproot Hamas, and the more recent thorough job on terrorist infrastructures in Judea and Samaria, especially in Jenin, the Arabs feel that Jerusalem is next, even though the city's Arabs have been relatively quiet throughout the war. The proof, in their eyes, is the manner in which Israel relates to PA chieftain Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas), whom they regard with disdain as a collaborator who aided Israel, even if indirectly, in its war against Hamas in Jenin. And still, despite his being a "traitor" to his people, in many Arab eyes, Israel continues to weaken him. And if this is how Israel treats collaborators, the Arabs in Jerusalem feel, it is clear that the fate of the others will be even worse.

The residents cite the "white ox" simile to make their point: "There were once three oxen – red, white, and black – and a lion. The lion, knowing that the three together could easily overcome him, turned to the black and red oxen and told them, 'The white ox is endangering all of us. He stands out at night, attracting the attention of hunters who will come and kill us all.' The two oxen agreed with the lion, and stood aside as he attacked and ate the white one. He then turned to the black ox and said, 'The red ox is endangering both of us. His bright red color stands out, attracting the attention of hunters who will come and kill us both.' The black ox stood dutifully aside as the lion ate the red one. The lion then said callously to the black ox, 'Now it's your turn to be eaten by me.' The black ox answered back, 'You already ate me when I agreed in the first place that you should eat the white ox...'"

The Arab residents of Jerusalem see themselves as the black ox, who perhaps should not have been so silent when the white ox of Gaza and then the red ox of Jenin were hit so bad by Israel. But even in hindsight, they know there was nothing of significance they could have done to stop Israel from wiping out existential threats wherever they are.



4 Preparations for Ramadan, which began this week, were very quiet this year in comparison to previous years. The reason apparently is that Israel's security forces have shown little tolerance for disturbances, certainly during the current war in Gaza. Rumors abound in the eastern Jerusalem neighborhoods that the three areas in which Israel has intensified its enforcement activities – collection of property taxes (arnona), demolition of illegal structures, and confiscation of land – mean that the Israelis are simply trying to Judaize the Holy City by making it hard for Arabs to live there. Meanwhile, according to Wikipedia, the Arab population in Jerusalem was nearly 40% in 2022, up from 37.2% just two years earlier.

5 Aside from the above, many residents also cite economic difficulties for their interest in leaving Jerusalem. Housing is in short supply, prices are rising, and opportunities are decreasing. True, outside Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, the situation is even harder, because of the war. But the solution that many have found, an illegal one, is to move to cheaper housing outside Jerusalem, even in Jericho, while retaining an official address in Jerusalem for the purpose of receiving various benefits given only to Jerusalem residents. **However, most of those who are interested in leaving hesitate to take this approach – and thus, the crowded conditions in the city are perpetuated. This also takes its demographic toll at the expense of the Jewish population: In 1967, when the city was liberated, the population was 26% Arab, while today it is approximately 40%.**

6 In recent years, thousands of official eastern Jerusalem residents have been caught having moved without changing their official address – and at least some of their benefits were suspended. UNRWA then stepped in to provide support when Israel withdrew its help from those who no longer live in Jerusalem. Now, however, with the closure of UNRWA because of its many Hamas-member employees, these former Jerusalem residents will lose out – although some of them received, in the past, financial aid from Qatar for medical needs; it is not clear whether the Qatari aid continues today as well. **Although the outlawing of UNRWA has certain immediate consequences, as above, in the larger picture, UNRWA's aid and services helped only a small portion of the Arab population.**