Update
Rise in Infrastructural Work and Excavation Activity at the City of David Archaeological Site in Silwan

In the last months, particularly since September 2016, we have been witness to a wide range of development work at the City of David visitor center, in existing excavation sites and in the digging of additional tunnels beneath Wadi Hilweh St. in Silwan. The projects are initiated by the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs and the Jerusalem Municipality. Emek Shaveh turned to various governmental entities and the municipality, demanding that they show their permits for these projects or halt them immediately. As of writing this update they have not revealed any permits.

1. In the last year, the City of David visitor center (No. 2 on the map) has been undergoing extensive changes. The national park’s offices, box offices, restrooms and gift shop, which were built over a decade ago are undergoing extensive renovation, including redesign and massive building for purposes of roofing over the plaza (Images 1 and 2).

2. Across from the antiquities area called Area G (No. 3 on the map), adjacent to the visitor center, an amphitheater has been placed on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs and the Jerusalem Municipality. Ancient tombs were discovered at this site in the 1980s, and since then, the Haredim have prevented the site from being excavated, claiming that the graves belong to the Jewish people and that excavating would be a dishonor to the dead. In order to construct the amphitheater it was decided to build the foundations on a concrete platform, without digging into the ground (images 3 and 4).

3. At the entrance to the visitor center (No. 2 on the map) the Elad association is establishing a donor wall. Our guess is that the association will select the names of donors to display on this wall to benefit their interests. Elad has
permission from the registrar to conceal its full list of donors. It is safe to assume that the donors whose names the foundation would prefer to conceal will not appear on the wall. It is quite possible that the wall was built in order to deal with public criticism of Elad for concealing their full list of donors while human rights organizations are required to heighten their transparency with regard to their sources of funding.

4. The expansion of the excavation area called the “Givati Parking Lot” (No. 1 on the map) into Silwan’s main road: in recent years different areas have been dug beneath the street dividing the entrance to the “City of David” visitor center and the “Givati Parking Lot”. Recently, fencing projects have begun which permanently narrow the road from a two-lane road to a one-lane road (image 6).

5. Since 2013 the Elad Association has been digging an expansive tunnel beneath Silwan village (No. 10 on the map). The tunnel will link the Pool of Siloam with the Givati Parking Lot, and eventually with the Old City. The Roman street’s inauguration ceremony, which Elad and the government representatives refer to as “Pilgrim Road”, took place in December 2016, with the Minister of Culture Miri Regev and the Mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat.

In conclusion: In recent years and even more so in the last year, there has been a substantial rise in the excavation, building and development of Silwan. If Elad association was once at the forefront of these developments, then today it is easy to see the added involvement of different government offices and declared support of government ministers.

For further information:
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Image 1+2) The new City of David visitor center
Image 3+4) The Amphitheatre in construction
5) Construction of the donor wall at the entrance to the City of David visitor center

6) Fencing and connecting part of the road to the “Givati parking lot” Excavation area