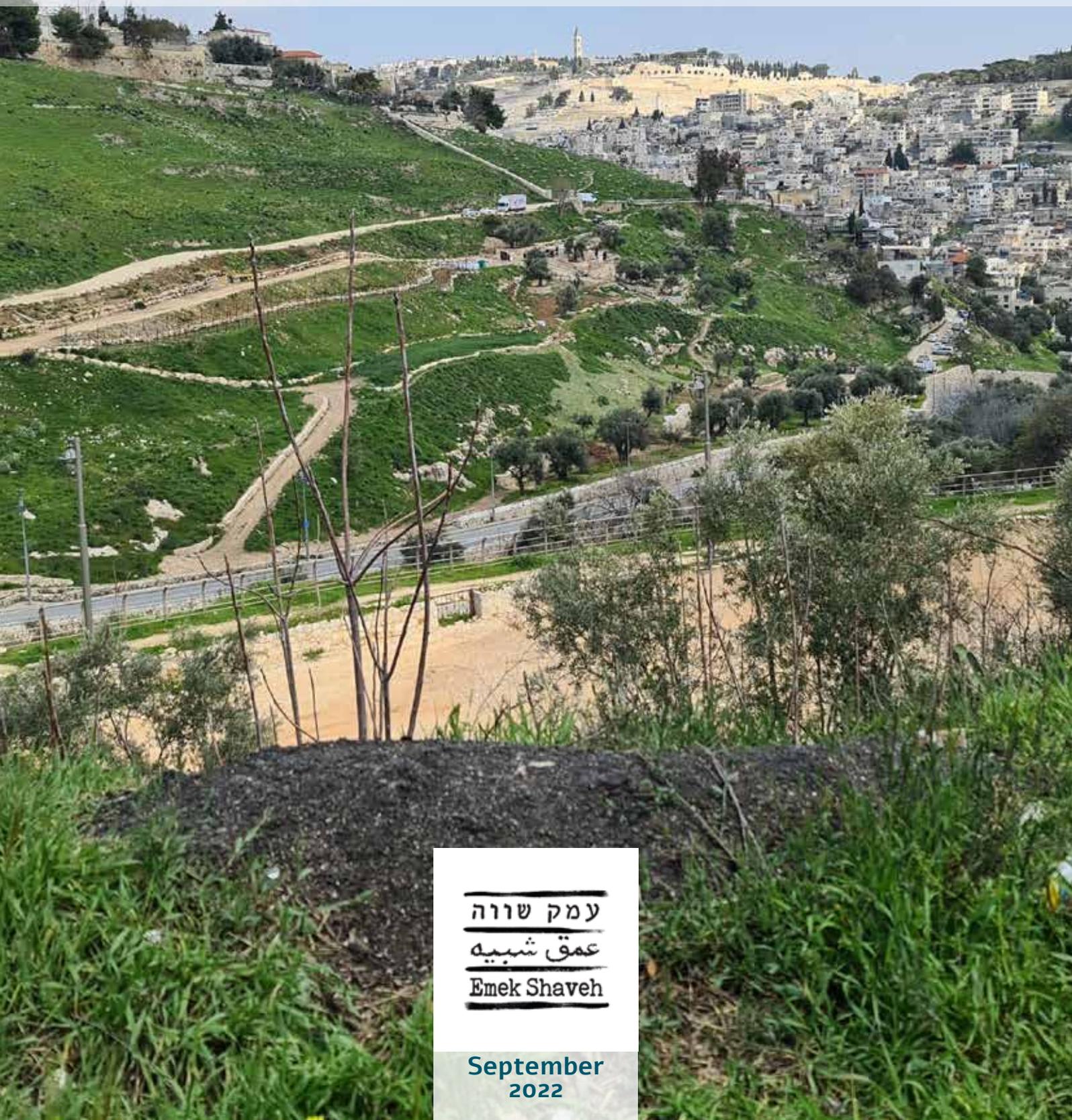


# Hinnom Valley Monitoring Report

The City of David Expanded



עמק שווה

عمق شبيه

Emek Shaveh

September  
2022

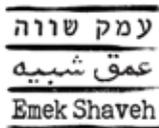
Writing and Research: Uri Erlich

Translation: Talia Krevsky

Editing: Talya Ezrahi

Graphics: Adi Mandler

Photos: Emek Shaveh



Emek Shaveh (RA) | [info@emekshaveh.org](mailto:info@emekshaveh.org) | [www.emekshaveh.org](http://www.emekshaveh.org)

Emek Shaveh is an organization of archaeologists and community activists who challenge the politization of archaeology and tourism in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We view archaeology as a means for building bridges between different national and cultural communities, and work to challenge those who use the ruins of the past to dispossess disenfranchised communities.

Your support is important to us so that we may continue to work toward this goal. To donate, [click here](#).

This publication was produced by Emek Shaveh (CIC) and was supported by the Norwegian Embassy in Israel, The Swedish Foreign Ministry – FDFA, and Swiss Church Aid HEKS/EPER. Responsibility for the information published in this report belongs exclusively to Emek Shaveh and does not necessarily represent the opinions of the above-mentioned donors.

Support for Emek Shaveh comes from organizations, countries, and individuals working to strengthen democracy and human rights. Most of the funding comes from foreign countries.

---

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary ..... 4

Background..... 5

The Legal Status of the Land ..... 7

Overview of Developments at the Agricultural Farm..... 9

Large Scale Development and Negligent Oversight..... 12

The Big Picture ..... 17

Funding ..... 19

A Piece of the Puzzle ..... 20

Conclusion ..... 21

## Executive Summary

Over the past twenty-five years consecutive Israeli governments have worked in cooperation with right-wing organizations to create a biblical theme park in Jerusalem's Historic Basin. To this end, archaeological and historic assets have been transferred to the hands of the settlers organization called the Elad (or Ir David) Foundation. The primary cultural assets in the area south of the Old City are the City of David National Park, located in the heart of the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood in Silwan, and the Hinnom Valley, known as Wadi Rababa in Arabic. The manner in which these and other assets were appropriated, reveal a desire for fundamental change in the area. It includes seizure of land through a mix of administrative and legal mechanisms, and the use of Jewish-religious-nationalist content to generate a heightened sense of Israeli entitlement over Jerusalem's historic center.

The Hinnom Valley is a historically fascinating ravine which until recently was at the margins of the political conflict that has characterized the adjacent neighborhood of Silwan. The traditions and beliefs associated with the place cut across religions and peoples. The area is also one of the last green spaces in East Jerusalem, and particularly in the area adjacent to the Old City.

In 1974, in a decision to conserve a green belt around the Old City, the valley was declared part of the Jerusalem Walls National Park. Following the decision, residents of Abu Tor/a Thori and Silwan who owned land in the valley were no longer permitted to build there. In 2018, the municipality took over large swaths of the valley through a mechanism called "Gardening (or Landscaping) Orders" (more below).

In 2020, the measures to take over the valley were scaled up when the Center for Ancient Agriculture (also called "The Farm in the Valley") was established. Since then, Emek Shaveh has been monitoring the project's progress. Monitoring entails documenting visits and conversations with residents living near the valley, the settlers and the various governmental authorities involved in developing the area. These have been accompanied by efforts to raise awareness to Elad's activities.

The developments described in this report underscore Elad's hold over a highly strategic area that links West Jerusalem to important sites in Silwan/City of David adjacent to the Old City walls. The new route provides access to the northeastern Sambuski Jewish Cemetery, where it descends toward the City of David site, the Elad Foundation's flagship project in Silwan. At its eastern tip, the valley borders the al-Bustan neighborhood which, according to a municipal plan, will lead into a garden that simulates that of the biblical King David.

Activities in the Hinnom Valley are integral to the efforts to transform the Historic Basin of Jerusalem and force Palestinians out of the area. Together with the appropriation of Palestinian homes and lands, the creation of archaeological touristic attractions that tell an exclusive Judeo-centric story of the city serves to legitimize the settlement enterprise in the eyes of the Israeli and international publics. Needless to say, this process is highly detrimental to the prospect of a negotiated political resolution for the conflict.

This report will detail developments in the valley as documented by Emek Shaveh, and outline the mechanisms used to accomplish the Elad Foundation's objectives including:

- > Exploitation of legal and administrative mechanisms to promote Elad's interests.
- > Selective enforcement: Palestinians experience increased enforcement; while enforcement against Jews in the valley is much more lenient.
- > Influence over planning institutions to promote plans that fundamentally change the character and demographics of the valley.

> Direct influence over State authorities – the Jerusalem Development Authority (JDA), the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) and the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), along with links to the Ministry of Education, IDF, and other authorities – which serve to promote plans and activities that alter the Hinnom Valley’s landscape and undermine its heritage.

## Background

In 1974, the Jerusalem Walls National Park was declared to preserve the historic character of the belt around the Old City. The Hinnom Valley, also known as Wadi Rababa, is part of the park. The western section of the Hinnom Valley is home to the Jerusalem Cinematheque and the Sultan’s Pool. Further westward it meets the neighborhood of Mamilla. The eastern section of the valley is a green space between the neighborhoods of Abu Tor/A Thori and Silwan, and despite the fact that the area has, over the years, been neglected by the municipality and the INPA, it was used by residents of both neighborhoods for outdoor family recreation. On the eastern border is the al-Bustan neighborhood of Silwan, and the valley is traversed by neighborhood residents on their way to and from work in the west of the city.

The landscapes of the valley were shaped by its inhabitants over hundreds of years, and over the last century by its Palestinian landowners. Historically, the valley and the hills surrounding it was the ancient city’s necropolis and is dotted with caves, tombs and cemeteries from various periods beginning with the Iron Age (Kingdom of Judah), and through the Roman and Byzantine periods, along with the Karaite cemetery from the early Islamic period, the “House of Bones” from the Crusader period, and Christian cemeteries from the Ottoman period. A Hasmonean era aqueduct is also found in the valley, along with the St. Onuphrius Monastery associated with Akeldama (the “field of blood” in Aramaic), referring to the Christian tradition that identifies the site with the parcel of land purchased by Judas Iscariot with the money he received for betraying Jesus. Many diverse traditions are woven into the valley and its burial sites.

The pastoral reality in the valley changed beyond recognition [approximately two years ago](#) when during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the INPA, which oversees national parks, transferred management over large swaths of the valley to the Elad Foundation, authorizing it to run a tourism scheme throughout the entire valley. This move is changing the character of the area from an open and green space to a place of friction between Israelis and Palestinians. The INPA transferred the area to Elad without a tender, and without public participation. On July 20, 2020, the [INPA announced on its website](#) its intention to launch a joint venture. Already at that time Elad Foundation employees were on the ground, digging ditches and creating terraces in the center of the valley. The work has not ceased ever since, and the valley is no longer the same as it was two years ago.

The Elad Foundation is a non-profit organization that works primarily to Judaize the neighborhood of Silwan (also known as the “City of David”) and adjacent areas. It uses two main methods to achieve this objective: The better-known method involves purchasing or otherwise acquiring homes in Silwan through the exploitation of discriminatory laws and replacing the Palestinian residents with Jewish families. The second entails developing and running tourism ventures throughout the Historic Basin which the state has entrusted to the Elad Foundation. These projects appear under the City of David brand, which is perceived by the public as a mainstream (a-political) touristic entity that is not identified with a settlers organization, despite the fact that it is an integral aspect of Elad’s activities. Each year, hundreds of thousands of Israelis, including students and soldiers, visit the sites operated by the Foundation. This is also increasingly the case for the Hinnom Valley venture, which was named “The Center for Ancient Agriculture,” and also the more marketable title “The Farm in the Valley.”

Development work in the valley is carried out in the heart of the Palestinian area between Silwan and Abu Tor/A-Thori, on predominantly privately-owned Palestinian land used for traditional agriculture (mostly olive trees), thus creating constant friction between the Foundation's workers, and the landowners and other Palestinian residents of the area. Alongside the development work, over the past six months the Elad Foundation has expanded educational activities bringing large groups of Jewish students from formal and informal educational frameworks to visit the farm and work in the valley. The increase in the volume of visitors has led to a heightened police presence. Border Police are increasingly detaining Palestinian youth passing through the area, and the entire space has emerged as a new site of friction in Jerusalem.

In the contract between the INPA and the Elad Foundation, the latter committed to investing up to five million NIS in the valley, and covering at least half of its cost. Although the contract was signed for a period of five years, with the possibility of extending it for another five years, about a year after it was first signed [the contract was extended](#) by another five years until 2030. Extending the contract without having the requisite time to gauge the success of the contract is puzzling, as is the fact that this sensitive area was entrusted to a private foundation with a controversial political agenda.

As mentioned, Elad began to develop agricultural areas in the valley between 2020–2021. It established a visitors' center in the heart of the valley, and its venture Bayit Ba'Gai (meaning House in the Valley), which opened in 2019, is set up as an administrative center. Throughout the second half of 2021, Elad built a fence around the farm, with gates installed at the entrance. The fence and gates signal to the public that they are the landlords. Elad's staff also began development of the northern bank of the valley, above the visitors center, where they are building terraces, creating paths, building storage spaces, and water and electricity infrastructure stretching all the way to the Sambuski Jewish Cemetery on the outskirts of Silwan and the neighborhood of Wadi Rababa (called thus because it is adjacent to the valley).

Although the contract stipulates a separation between Elad and the INPA, on the ground it is difficult to distinguish between the two -- Elad employees' shirts bear the logos of both entities, and INPA supervisors cooperate with Elad employees and authorize their problematic activities.

The Emek Shaveh team has been monitoring the developments since the works in the valley began and maintains ongoing contact with the landowners and with a group of Jewish activists from Abu Tor who also track what takes place in the valley. This report records seemingly specific and anecdotal incidents which taken together reveal the dramatic change in the landscape and identity of the area. This report concludes the course of Emek Shaveh's frequent monitoring of the Hinnom Valley until July 2022.



# The Legal Status of the Land

Israel's legally enshrined mechanisms that apply to the Hinnom Valley predominantly serve settler groups while the Palestinian community remains unprotected. Understanding how these mechanisms work is necessary for understanding the latest developments in the valley.

## National Parks

Emek Shaveh [previously surveyed](#) the use of national parks as a tool to seize territory and shape the historic narrative. From the moment an area is declared a national park, strict restrictions are imposed on its use. For instance, construction is prohibited, no business license will be granted, and any action that is liable to damage or jeopardize the area's designation as a national park is effectively forbidden. As noted, since 1974, the year in which the area was declared a national park, no development whatsoever has been approved on the plots of the Hinnom Valley that belong to residents of Abu Tor/A Thori and Silwan.

## Gardening Orders

Gardening orders are a statutory tool allowing the municipality to make temporary use (for five years) of privately owned areas for the public benefit, including paving parking lots, creating public gardens, etc. The location of privately owned plots in the Hinnom Valley, within the territory of a national park, has created a Kafkaesque situation in which the landowners' capacity to use them is in fact highly restricted, and the gardening orders (issued on the basis of an area's alleged neglect) enable de facto expropriation.

[The Jerusalem Municipality issued gardening orders](#) for most of the plots in the valley. The municipality claims that the orders were issued for the purpose of building terraces, paving paths, and planting trees. The owners of these plots collectively petitioned the court demanding that the orders be rescinded. Even while the court case was taking place, the municipality had authorized the INPA to oversee the plots and the INPA, in turn, contracted the Elad Foundation to carry out development works on the said plots. On August 15th, 2022 the court ruled against the landowners.

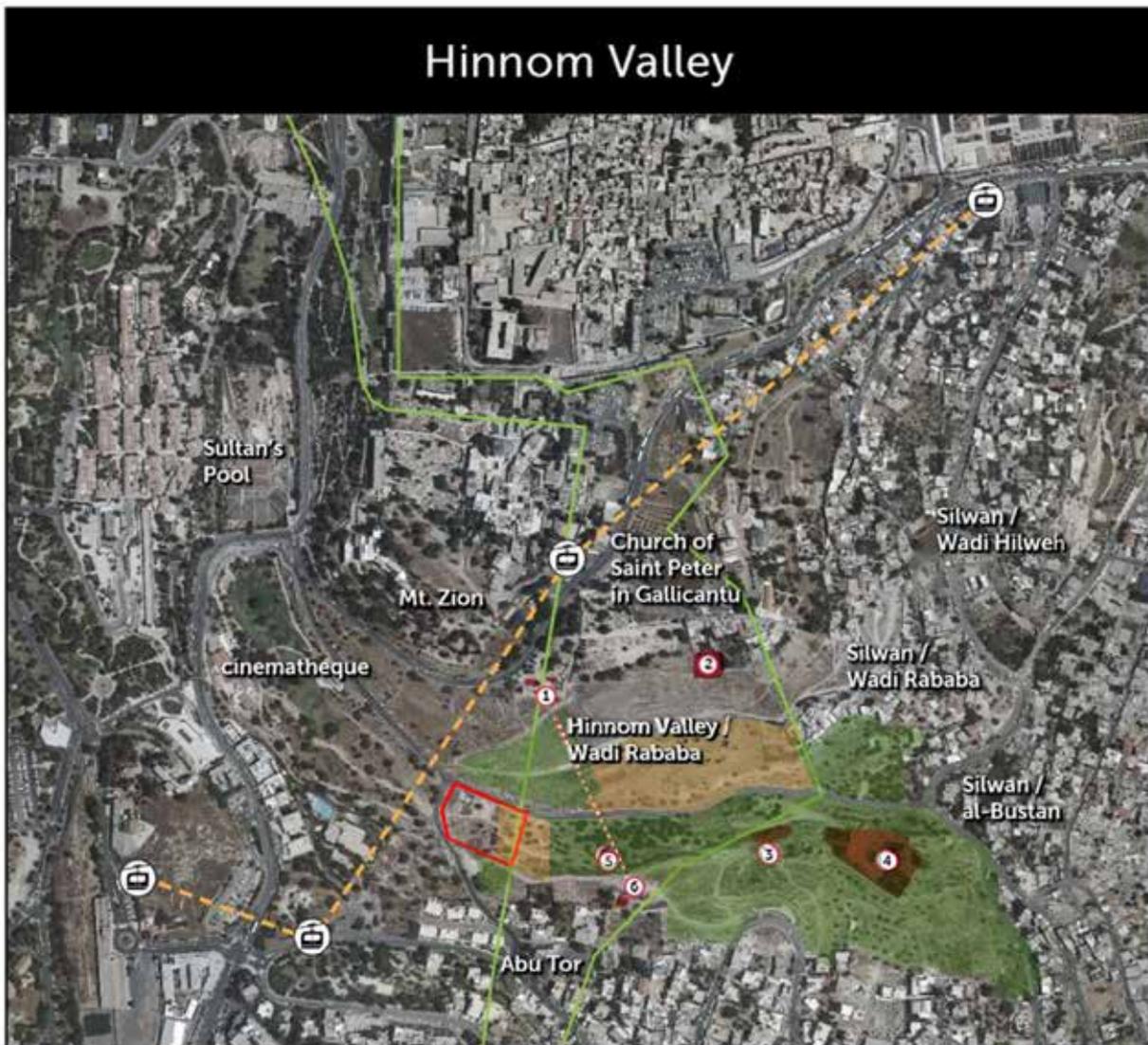
## Absentee Property

The Absentee Property Law was enacted after 1948 sanctioning the transfer of property owned by those who had left their homes for an enemy country to the management of the Custodian for Absentee Property. After 1967, the law was expanded to include East Jerusalem. Some of the plots in the valley's northern bank were transferred to the Custodian for Absentee Property on the grounds that the grandfather of the family was an absentee. Yet the same landowners who had cultivated the land over the past several decades claimed that the grandfather had passed away and was never deemed an absentee. The issue remains pending before the court.

When development works began in the valley, the landowners appealed to the court requesting an injunction order to stop development works on their land. Their request was rejected, and the Custodian for Absentee Property permitted the INPA to carry out development works in the plots currently under its auspices. In this case too, the INPA transferred development rights and these activities are effectively carried out by Elad Foundation employees.

## Elad-INPA Contract

The contract signed between the INPA and Elad on August 11, 2020, included a map (see below map #2 in Hebrew) stipulating the area for which the INPA permits Elad to carry out development works. This map is interesting because it offers official confirmation for the effective change in the area's status (even though the INPA retains overall responsibility for the area). But in addition, the map also designates an area of land for use by Elad which is currently outside the boundaries of the national park, over which the INPA has no authority whatsoever. We will address this anomaly later in the report.



1. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS ON MOUNT ZION,
2. SAMBUSKI JEWISH CEMETERY,
3. CRUSADER "HOUSE OF BONES" BURIAL STRUCTURE,
4. ST. ONUPHRIUS MONASTERY
5. APPROXIMATE BRIDGE ROUTE,
6. BAYIT BA'GAI, THE ELAD FOUNDATION'S EVENTS HALL

- PHASE I OF THE CABLE CAR'S ROUTE
- CABLE CAR STATION
- THE GREEN LINE
- GARDENING ORDERS
- CUSTODIAN FOR ABSENTEE PROPERTY WHERE ELAD IS CONDUCTING DEVELOPMENT WORK
- THE AGRICULTURAL FARM VISITORS CENTER

עמק שווה  
 عمق شبيه  
 Emek Shaveh

(תל"צ | ש.ל.ק | 08) |

# Overview of Efforts to Develop and Expand Activities at the Agricultural Farm

The Elad Foundation has been working in the Hinnom Valley since 2020. Over the past eight months, Elad and the INPA have also begun bringing students and volunteers to the valley for educational activities. Until March of 2022, activities of this nature were primarily documented in plots for which gardening orders had been issued (which, as noted, are indisputably privately owned). Yet from March 2022, the majority of visits have been to plots under the auspices of the Custodian for Absentee Property, on the valley's northern bank. It is worth noting that we do not retain full documentation for all activities in the valley, and it is possible that visits and activities took place in other areas as well.

## High School Students and Social Involvement

Participation in the Ministry of Education's Program for Personal Development and Social Involvement<sup>1</sup> is a prerequisite for receiving a matriculation certificate in the State of Israel. The program operates within the framework of the Ministry of Education's Social and Youth Division, and some of its overarching goals, as presented on the [Ministry of Education's website](#), are to "cultivate an independent, engaged, socially conscientious and sensitive graduate." As suggested by the events outlined below, these values are far from those represented by the activities offered in the valley, and yet teenagers often arrive on site for activities within the framework of the program.

## Cooperation with the Greater Baka Community Council

In January, the director of the Greater Baka Community Council suggested that students partake in "Social Involvement" at the Agricultural Farm, without explaining to the students and their parents that this was a politically oriented activity on behalf of, or in cooperation with, the Elad Foundation. In response, Jewish residents of Abu Tor initiated a [petition](#) calling on the director of the Greater Baka Community Council to cease such activities. Following the campaign, the director of the Community Council stopped advertising the activity.

## Cooperation with the Jerusalem Municipality

In February, less than a month after the petition was published, entire classes visited the valley within the framework of a school-related activity. The Jerusalem Municipality published the activity on its website as part of the Program for Social Involvement. Following a letter by Deputy Mayor Yosi Havilio, the publication was removed from the municipality's website.

## Cooperation with Right-Wing Organizations

The organization "HaShomer HaChadash," [also invites](#)<sup>2</sup> groups of students to partake in agricultural activity on site. The organization's activity in the valley, which also involves transporting groups to the site, is funded by the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage and the INPA. Within the framework of this program, dozens of students from three schools visited the valley and entered plots that had been transferred to the Custodian for Absentee Properties a year-and-a-half earlier. The Palestinians who claim ownership over these plots were not even aware of the change in status of the land which had been subject to Gardening Orders (a confirmation that they were privately owned) in 2018.

---

<sup>1</sup> Known by its popular nickname "Social Involvement," this program is a prerequisite for receiving a matriculation certificate in the State of Israel, to which each high school student is required to devote several hours.

<sup>2</sup> HaShomer's Jerusalem page appears in Hebrew only. Even here the website does not specify where the activity takes place.

## Field–Nation–Society Programming on Behalf of the Ministry of Education

On June 30, 2022 dozens of students visited the farm as part of their Field–Nation–Society studies, within the framework of the Ministry of Education’s Social and Youth Division. Students worked in the valley’s north bank on plots held by the Custodian for Absentee Property. Throughout the programming, landowners spoke with students and explaining that this was their land. The students continued to work, and some began singing “all the land of Israel is ours.” The defiant singing was not addressed by the instructors who were present at the scene. One of the landowners who was on his land while the students were working told us: “I’m not mad at these kids. They don’t know anything about what’s going on here. I’m mad at whoever’s sending them here.”

A representative of Emek Shaveh contacted the director of the Field–Nation–Society programming on site. The director’s answer was: “Emek Shaveh is an anti–Semitic, self–hating Jewish organization with which I prefer not to cooperate,” adding: “Were I alive during the Holocaust, I would not be willing to be a Kapo. I’d rather not be a Kapo.” Such harsh words are entirely unacceptable, and their severity is further magnified by the fact that they were articulated by an educational figure leading an ideological educational program.

## IDF Soldiers’ Activity on the Agricultural Farm

On March 22, 2022, a group of soldiers who are students of the Nativ Military Course, came to volunteer on the northern bank of the valley. The landowners spoke with them and explained the situation on site, after which the soldiers left the area. Emek Shaveh wrote to Member of Knesset (MK) Mossi Raz who, in turn, appealed to the Ministry of Defense demanding that such cases not reoccur. In response to his appeal, the IDF claimed that they are not familiar with such activity. The details of the company’s commanding officer were transferred to the Ministry of Defense. A response has yet to be received. On June 2, 2022, a meeting was held in the fenced–off area of the farm for dozens of officers from the Steel Formation (162nd Armor Division of the Southern Command) and their spouses. The farm was decked with the Division’s flags and closed to the general public during the event.



Students partaking in Ministry of Education programming on land which is claimed by Palestinians to be privately owned.

## Festival in the Valley

Throughout the Passover holiday, in April 2022, a festival was held at the farm. The event catered primarily to ultra-orthodox and national religious publics. Elad's promotional material for the festival stated: *"The festival will include workshops on the ancient secrets of making perfumes, stone carving, basket weaving using natural materials, crushing herbs, stomping grapes, and more. They will be joined by special shows, photo magnet stations, and unique tours of the valley's agricultural environment that reveal the area's history."*



# Large-Scale Development and Negligent Oversight

As noted above, for nearly four decades the Jerusalem Walls National Park preserved the ancient landscapes of the Hinnom Valley. Recently, two plans were approved, with INPA support, which will seriously damage the historic skyline: The cable car which is slated to sail over the valley, and the suspension bridge. Both ventures serve the interests of the Elad Foundation. On the ground, development work has not ceased for the past two years and is reshaping the timeless character of the ancient valley.

## The Cable Car

The cable car plan for the Old City was approved in a government decision in 2017. According to the current plan, the cable car will depart from the First Station complex in the Baka neighborhood of West Jerusalem, and conclude at the Elad Foundation's Kedem Center compound that is slated for construction on the Givati Parking Lot across from Dung Gate and the Old City walls. The length of the cable car route is 1.4 kilometers, and it will traverse the Hinnom Valley, Mount Zion, and run along the Old City walls. The cable car plan is highly controversial, a long list of professional and civil society organizations opposed it, and four petitions were submitted against it to the High Court of Justice. In May 2022, the [High Court rejected the petitions](#).

## Suspension Bridge

The suspension bridge is expected to be the longest suspension bridge in Israel, at 209 meters. It will serve pedestrians traveling from Mount Zion straight to Elad's event hall in the Hinnom Valley – Bayit Ba'Gai (a House in the Valley). Even the manner in which the bridge was advanced is questionable. In January 2022 a tender was published for construction of the bridge. In the original document that the Jerusalem Development Authority (JDA) uploaded to the Internet, the Elad Foundation appeared as one of the project's developers. Following inquiries and questions, the documents were altered and Elad's name no longer appears on the list of developers. In April 2022 for a reason yet unknown, [the tender was published](#) once again.



## Land Development

Elad Foundation employees built terraces in the valley, paved paths, and now grow crops on the same plots used by Palestinians for traditional agriculture. Most of the development takes place on land on the valley's north bank, which is under the auspices of the Custodian of Absentee Property. Yet from time to time, work is also carried out on land seized through gardening orders. Such work creates ongoing friction between landowners and laborers. During the work, fences have also been put in public areas to guard the farm's agricultural endeavors on the northern bank of the valley.

Noteworthy developments documented by Emek Shaveh include:

**January:** During a meeting with residents in September of 2021, they shared that Elad employees, accompanied by an INPA inspector, broke the fence surrounding a plot placed under a gardening order. Then an iron gate was erected, and the landowners called the police. The gate was removed, yet the fence remains broken. Farm utility vehicles drive through the area, and tractors leveled the area bordering the southern cliff.

**February–April:** Development work intensified on the valley's northern bank and Elad employees built terraces and steps, paved paths, and planted trees. On March 7, 2022, Elad employees allegedly mounted anchors in preparation for the suspension bridge near Bayit Ba'Gai.

**May:** In early May, Elad employees started to build a permanent structure on the valley's northern bank along with workers from a hired contractor. The workers told the landowners that the building would be used as a synagogue. As construction is prohibited within the territory of a national park, and building without a permit is certainly forbidden, the landowners called the police who stopped the work. Yet work resumed the next day, whereupon the police were called again.



The photo on the right is the structure that the INPA inspector described as a terrace; the photo on the left is the inspector in conversation with the police officer

On May 4, 2022, the works resumed. When the police arrived, an INPA inspector was also summoned to the scene. He told the police that it was not a permanent structure, but rather a terrace. The officers stated that insofar as they are not presented with construction permits, the work cannot proceed. Permits are yet to be presented, and work has not resumed since.

The INPA inspector for his part did not only fail to stop illegal construction but allegedly aided Elad workers in committing construction offenses when he told one of the policemen an untruth.

In response<sup>3</sup> to Emek Shaveh's inquiry regarding the construction offense with the INPA's Jerusalem Warden Ze'ev HaCohen, he replied: "*The claim regarding a synagogue is unfounded, no such thing ever occurred. As soon as the inspector arrived on site, he identified what he deemed*

<sup>3</sup> The response was given verbatim in its entirety as a means of highlighting the gap between the reply and our account of the incident.

*to be a construction violation. The inspector informed me, I arrived on site and also received the impression that there was indeed a construction violation. Contrary to your letter, the police did not stop the construction, but rather we did. Already on the same day, we gave explicit instructions to modify the construction in accordance with regulations' guidelines. What took place on the ground in the days that followed was under our guidance, the walls that were built were dismantled to match the height of the terraces, and as you also noted in your letter, work on site did not continue."*

## **Damage to Trees**

During a visit by Emek Shaveh on June 30, 2022, one of the landowners shared that one day that week, branches of an ancient olive tree in the plot owned by his family had been severed. Our inspection revealed that an Elad employee had severed it. The worker explained to us that the tree was an obstruction preventing his utility vehicle from passing through. Beyond the fact that it is unclear why Elad staff would need to drive through private land, and beyond the fact that the olive tree whose branches were severed is also private property, it is utterly unacceptable for employees of a private organization to cut off branches of ancient olive trees within the territory of a national park.

The employee claimed that pruning the branches had been coordinated with an INPA inspector. If that is indeed the case, it is unclear why it was permitted by the inspector. If this is not the case, it is unclear how pruning the branches of ancient trees within the territory of a national park would not prompt the INPA and the INPA inspector to act in accordance with legally stipulated sanctions.

HaCohen replied to this as well: *"Ancient olive trees are among the most important conservation objectives. The reality on the ground unmistakably testifies to the fact that we are fighting for every tree and we have added further saplings to renew the groves that were previously there... The pruning of trees is an essential act to conserve the trees and encourage their growth. This year the olive trees in the valley have yielded a good harvest for the first time in several years. Pruning a branch to prevent it from being broken by a passing tractor is also an imperative act. Incidentally, the photo that you attached to the right, depicts an olive tree that has been pruned. The picture on the left is of another tree, whose branch grew out of the side of a burnt olive tree stump. The branch collapsed upon attempting to saw off the burnt stump, the branch was found to be wormy with many holes. We are not giving up on the burnt stump either, and actions are being carried out to renew the tree's growth."*



In the photo on the left a partially severed branch; In the photo on the right an olive tree whose branches were sawn off.

## Increased Friction and Policing in the Valley

The development work creates constant friction in the valley. In the past two years there have been several incidents where the friction escalated into physical confrontations between residents and Elad employees, or laborers working on their behalf. The police arrived on the scene to keep the peace. Naturally, the establishment of the farm and the presence of Israelis on site also led to increased police presence. Police vehicles are regularly stationed at the intersection adjacent to the farm, and policemen conduct random searches of Palestinians passing by on foot or by car near the gates of the farm. Needless to note, these searches do not contribute to a peaceful atmosphere. According to the landowners, over the past two years approximately 30 youth from landowners' families have been arrested due to conflicts surrounding the works.

Between January to June 2022 friction led to conflict, including around the construction of the permanent structure, which included shoving and shouting. Most of the time however, these incidents did not result in significant physical violence and arrests.

## Violent Attacks on Palestinians by Participants of Farm Activities

On May 31, 2022, a group of participants in farm activities attacked Palestinians. That day, Riad and Laith Sumrin, father and son, were on their way home when they were attacked by approximately 20 youths who were engaged in educational programming at the agricultural farm. Following the attack, Riad was hospitalized for two weeks. His son Laith also required urgent medical treatment. Following the attack, Palestinians who came to the scene called the police, yet four Palestinians were arrested and none of the attackers.

[Documentation](#) obtained by Emek Shaveh indicates that Elad's manager of the farm was also present during the attack. In the filmed documentation, one of the youths who participated in the attack is seen holding a drawn gun. In the footage obtained, when the manager of the farm is asked by the passengers of the car who are the people with him, he replies: "Keep driving, we're from the City of David, it's all good." Thereafter the car passengers ask: "Why is he threatening, why is he drawing a gun?" At this point, the video cuts off. Following the incident, an INPA inspector also arrived at the scene. According to [Nir Hasson's article about the incident](#), the police did not question the participants. In our opinion, such an incident (and other occurrences previously documented) clearly warrant an investigation into how such actions may be carried out by the farm employees or those invited to partake in its programming.

HaCohen replied to this, too: *"This is indeed a grave and unusual incident of an altercation that took place on site. An incident that is neither related to us, nor is it related to the nonprofit organization [i.e. Elad]. The altercation broke out between a group that visited the farm in the valley that day, and passengers of a car driving by, and it is under investigation by the police... Immediately after the altercation took place, the inspector and a site worker arrived at the scene. The inspector immediately called the police, whereafter a riot started in which the INPA inspector*



This photo taken mere moments before the attack, shows one of the farm activity participants in the back has visibly drawn a gun

*and site worker were attacked with clubs. Despite the attack, they remained with the injured car passengers and waited until the police arrived, and contrary to your letter, they ensured that those involved remained on site until the police inspection.”*

### **Security Guards and Vehicles**

In addition to police presence in the valley, since the beginning of the year, the farm has also operated a 24/7 security vehicle that patrols the farm’s environs even on Saturdays and holidays. During tours of the area conducted by representatives of Emek Shaveh, there were several cases in which a security guard was observed stopping passersby on the road near the farm’s gated area, questioning them about their actions.



# The Big Picture

Placing the Hinnom Valley in the hands of the Elad Foundation is part of a strategic plan. Governmental bodies identified with the organization's objectives turn a blind eye allowing it free rein to shape new landscapes and create a new political reality. This pattern applies to planning processes and underlies the geo-political transformation in the entire Historic Basin.

This document has surveyed a series of developments and incidents in the Hinnom Valley that have been enabled by the INPA turning a blind eye or in some cases actively providing assistance. Daily life in the valley, in which the settlers of the Elad Foundation have been granted excessive power, shapes the emergent political reality in the area. Elad, for its part, works on two levels. To the public it presents itself as an efficient subcontractor solely engaged in executing plans, while in reality it is an organization with enormous political power that can mobilize all the relevant State bodies toward conquering its next objective in the Historic Basin.

## The Plan to Expand the National Park

In a highly questionable move, the contract signed between the INPA and Elad in August 2020 stipulated the transfer to Elad of land on the slopes of Hinnom Valley which is not within the boundaries of the National Park. In other words, the INPA agreed to transfer land which is not under its auspices. The plan to expand the national park by 25% (plan no. 674788) includes that stretch of land. If approved, it would retroactively resolve this anomaly. In February a discussion was scheduled to take place in the Jerusalem District Planning Committee to approve the plan which includes the area designated in the agreement.



The map (Map #2) from the contract for the INPA's and Elad's joint venture for the Hinnom Valley. The red line delineates the area subcontracted by the INPA to Elad. The green area (marked by Emek Shaveh) is the land granted to Elad by the INPA which is not currently part of the National Park.

The plan to expand the national park also includes the Kidron Valley [and the Mount of Olives](#), an area of central importance to the Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Churches. The representatives of the churches in Jerusalem sent a [joint letter](#) to the Minister of Environmental Protection Tamar Zandberg, who holds ministerial responsibility for the INPA, in which they wrote that the plan was promoted by “various entities seeking to minimize, if not eliminate, any non-Jewish characteristics of the Holy City.” Thanks to the churches’ action, the plan was removed from the agenda at the time. However, it is now on the agenda for December of 2022.



A slide from a presentation of the plan to expand the national park. A view of the Hinnom Valley looking south. The area marked in dark green is the expansion area.

In other words, if the INPA routinely designates reserves and national parks on purely professional grounds, in the Hinnom Valley the opposite process is taking place: first the INPA grants the land to Elad, and then it acts to declare the area a national park. This case is revealing of the relationship between Elad and the relevant State authorities and demonstrates the lengths to which the latter are willing to go to advance Elad’s ideological agenda.



Elad’s “Farm in the Valley”

# Funding

**The financial section in the contract between the INPA and Elad is another case in point demonstrating the degree to which Elad manipulates State parties who either turn a blind eye to questionable processes or actively assist in pursuing its goals.**

## The Goal: Five Million NIS

As noted, in the contract, Elad pledged to invest up to five million NIS in the agricultural farm. It is worth noting that five million NIS is not a high price to pay for the right to hold and operate a large tourist attraction in the heart of the Historic Basin for 10 years.

However, an examination of the funds received by Elad from various government authorities suggests that Elad may not have been required to invest its own money (as required in a process of semi privatization whereby private money is invested in exchange for the right to run a venture) in the national park, but that the funds invested were instead transferred from one state coffer to another, and Elad likely even increased its own income in the process. That is, instead of being required to invest money in the farm, Elad raised the requisite funding from several authorities while also benefiting from the royalties received from operating the farm. Below is a breakdown of the fund transfers.

In the contract between the parties, Elad was required to restore the burial caves in the Hinnom Valley. Minutes from the JDA's tender committee meetings indicate how Elad raised eight million NIS for the task without investing a single shekel.

[In a tender meeting](#) on May 3, 2022 (p. 22) it was said that the JDA will invest 4 million NIS in the conservation of burial caves in the Hinnom Valley. The JDA's Head of Development in the Old City Basin, Aner Ozeri, explained during the meeting that the money would match the funds raised by Elad. When asked why the partner organization to this investment is the Elad Foundation, he explained that Elad had received a budget from the Ministry of Tourism for the development of public infrastructure. In other words, Elad raised eight million NIS from two branches of government, and in such a way fulfilled its commitment to the INPA to invest up to five million NIS. Although the restoration of burial caves may be a worthy goal, entrusting the entire process to Elad turns archaeology and history into weapons against Palestinian residents and landowners.

The state's investment in Elad's venture in the Hinnom Valley for 2022 also includes a four million NIS allocation for creating paths, gardening, and lighting. It is unclear what part of the budget is intended for this, yet we have seen that the work has been carried out by Elad, and it is likely that the public will be required to pay.

[Minutes](#) from the JDA's tender committee on April 3, 2022 (p. 3), also indicate that the JDA budgeted 210,000 NIS for the festival at the agricultural farm during Passover. The activity was allegedly managed and run by the East Jerusalem Development company. In practice the activity was run by Elad.

The Moriah Jerusalem Development Corporation estimates that the cost of the bridge that will lead directly to Elad's event hall, Bayit Ba'Gai, is [10.4 million NIS](#), funding for which will also be covered by the JDA.

And last, petty change. From time to time, Elad initiates tours of the farm and runs activities on site. Typically, participants of these tours are required to pay a nominal fee. Recently, [Elad has attempted](#) to promote participation in its Friday programming on the farm, where food and drinks are sold at not an insignificant fee (65 NIS for beer and hummus). Even if these are not hefty sums, it should be noted that any income from the activities taking place on private land, whose cultivation was financed by public funds, entirely profits Elad's coffers. What's more, this money will continue to be used to push Palestinians out of the Historic Basin.

## A Piece of the Puzzle

One of Elad's important insights is that tourism can be a more effective tool for Judaizing the area than traditional settlement. The archaeological site and its hundreds of thousands of visitors play a much bigger role in changing the identity of the area than the houses that Elad acquires. Increased Israeli presence has changed the nature of the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood in Silwan, and Israelis are no longer deterred from visiting it. Over the years Elad has expanded its control over sites in East Jerusalem under its successful "City of David" brand. The "City of David" is generally perceived as an official tourism body. Most Israelis would not associate it with the right-wing organization that acquires homes in Silwan often using highly controversial methods.

Elad expanded its hold over new areas of the Historic Basin and is working to create links between the sites with which it has been entrusted. Four years ago, the Israeli government launched the ["Shalem Plan,"](#) which intends to link all the historic Jewish sites in the Historic Basin including the stepped street in Silwan, which Elad refers to as the ["Pilgrims' Road."](#) The creation of these physical links between the sites entails the practice of horizontal excavations considered potentially destructive and unprofessional, and the digging of tunnels to link the Shiloah/Siloam pool to the Muslim quarter.

In May, the Israeli government announced ["Shalem Plan B"](#). All the sites listed in the plan are managed by Elad. One of the plan's stated goals is to create physical links between the Hinnom Valley, Armon Hanatziv, and the City of David. A further item on the plan is the excavation of the "Ophel Tunnel", which would also link the City of David to the Old City.

In addition to this government plan, Elad promotes programs with the Jerusalem Municipality, the JDA, the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage, and other political bodies. For example, [the King's Garden plan in the al-Bustan neighborhood](#) to the east of the valley. The demolition orders issued over a decade ago have resurfaced, with the goal of establishing an archaeological garden on site and linking the Siloam Pool in the City of David with the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys. To realize this plan, dozens of homes in the al Bustan neighborhood of Silwan are slated for destruction.

On the other side of Abu Tor, in Armon Hanatziv, another Elad visitors' center is under construction. Known as "Beit Shatz", it was also rapidly built over the past year-and-a-half [with public funding](#), from where "the longest zip-line in the Middle East" is planned to link to the Peace Forest, where Elad operates a campsite.

Elad's largest planned visitors' center, the [Kedem Center](#), has been in the pipeline for years. Planned to be situated across the Old City walls it will house a cable car station on the top floor. The seven-story building will cover an area of 16,000 square meters. In the interest of the agreement with Elad's architect Arie Rahamimoff, in June, the Moriah Jerusalem Development Corporation issued an [exemption from a tender](#) for work to a sum of over two million NIS. The cable car passengers will, in other words, be funneled directly to an Elad visitors' center which will be partly funded by the State.

All the above is joined by [a plan for land registration](#), which aims to [examine ownership of land in East Jerusalem](#). Among the areas being assessed by the state is the neighborhood of Abu Tor/a Thori, as well as land in the Ophel, adjacent to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

In such a way, Elad is making use of a diverse toolbox provided by the State, in its efforts to create a sequence of sites that are dramatically changing the demographic, cultural, national and religious identity of Jerusalem's Historic Basin.

## Conclusion

The developments in the Hinnom Valley constitute one element in a broader plan to change the identity of Jerusalem. The agricultural farm is integral to the plan as evidenced by extensive investment in features and activities that highlight the Jewish story at the farm and the burial caves surrounding it. Over the past few months, it has become clear that the farm functions as an intersection to link West Jerusalem with Silwan and the Temple Mount. Its aim is to further erase the Green Line from the public consciousness, along with the possibility that Jerusalem's historic core could one day become the capital city for two peoples.

