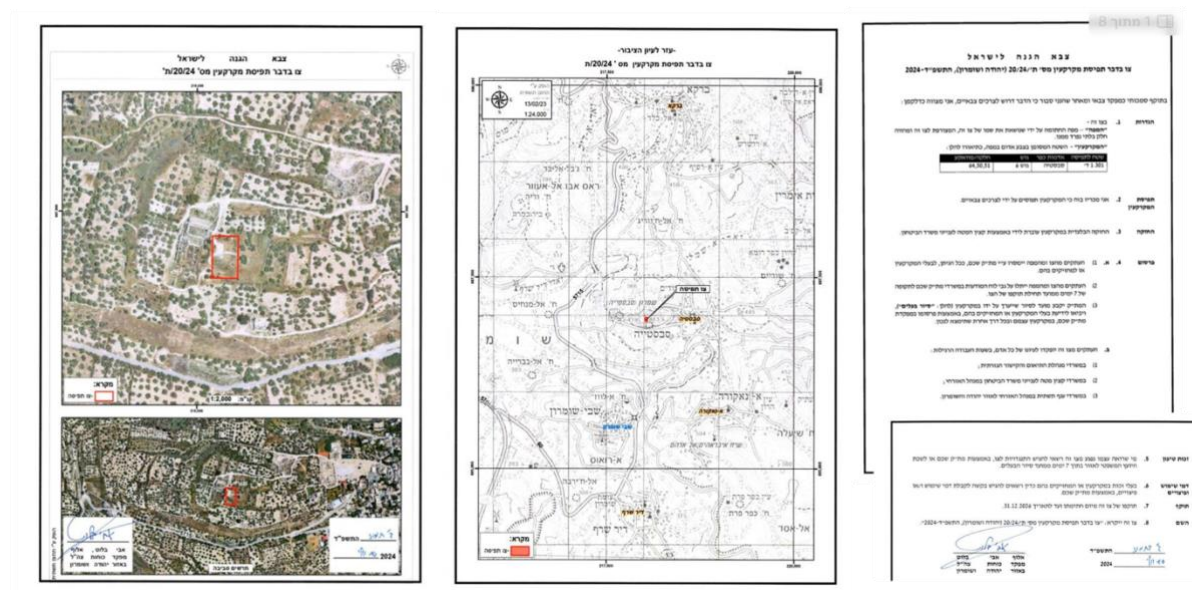


May 23rd, 2025

Objection to Military Seizure Order at Sebastia Rejected; Settler-led Projects Expected to be Given a Boost on Jerusalem Day As Government Plans to Hold Celebratory Meeting at the City of David in Silwan

Sebastia

On Monday, May 19th, we received a response from the Military Advocate General's Office rejecting our objection to the [military seizure](#) order for a summit at the Sebastia archaeological site in the northern West Bank. The order, issued in July 2024 by Central Command Chief Major General Avi Bluth, pertains to 1.3 dunams at the peak of the acropolis.



Sebastia seizure order and map showing summit seized

The Advocate General's response came just one week after the Ministry of Heritage and the Staff Officer for Archaeology began construction at the site—in the framework of a [government-approved](#) plan (no. 491 from May, 2023) allocating [NIS 32 million](#) to develop Sebastia as an Israeli national heritage site. In response to the start of works, UNESCO issued a statement this week expressing concern and calling for the [protection](#) of the archaeological site of Sebastia:

"Informed about infrastructure and development projects as well as ongoing new archeological activities at the site carried out by the Israeli Ministry of Heritage, UNESCO recalls that activities and excavations must adhere to international law and be conducted with the consent and cooperation of all concerned parties", the statement reads.

Sebastia is a historically significant archaeological site with layers from the Iron Age, Assyrian, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Crusader, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods. It holds deep connections to Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions, including associations with the biblical capital of the Kingdom of Israel, Samaria (Shomron). The settlers emphasize the site's Jewish past to claim exclusive sovereignty rights over the northern West Bank. But Sebastia is integral to the living Palestinian cultural heritage of the residents of the historic town adjacent to the archaeological mound, also named Sebastia. The town evolved around remains from the Mamluk period and remains home to a vibrant Palestinian community.



Nabi Yahya Mosque, Sebastia Town

In 2012, the State of Palestine [added Sebastia](#) (the town and mound) to UNESCO's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites, recognizing its outstanding universal value. Today, access to the acropolis—located in Area C—requires passage through the town of Sebastia in Area B. Over the past five years, settler visits, facilitated by

heavy military escorts, have intensified. These visits routinely result in lockdowns for local residents. Since October 7, 2023, Sebastia has lost all income from tourism. Residents report that even the few tourist buses which try to make their way to the site are turned back.

The military justified the land seizure by citing “security needs,” claiming a pole with surveillance cameras was necessary due to incidents of stone-throwing and a roadside explosive targeting visitors in the months preceding the order. The Advocate General acknowledged Israel’s obligations under Article 4.1 of the 1954 Hague Convention to respect cultural property in occupied territories, but emphasized Article 4.2, which permits exceptions in cases of “military necessity.”

We assume that the surveillance is a measure taken in parallel with the start of works on excavating and developing Sebastia in order to add another security layer to the workers at the site.

The beginning of development works and land seizure represents a serious threat to both the archaeological integrity of Sebastia and the rights of the local community. As the UNESCO World Heritage Committee prepares to meet in Paris this July, we urge the committee to consider inscribing to Sebastia as a World Heritage Site in Palestine. Precedents such as the 2014 inscription of [Battir](#) demonstrate how international recognition can sway Israeli policy and protect vulnerable heritage sites.

Jerusalem Day

On Monday, May 26—Jerusalem Day—the Israeli government will hold its annual celebratory cabinet meeting at the City of David site in Silwan in East Jerusalem, marking the first time this symbolic event is hosted at the heart of the archaeological settler enterprise.

The City of David is managed by the Elad Foundation, a settler organization subcontracted by the Nature and Parks Authority. Over the past two decades, Elad has led large-scale excavations and developments throughout Jerusalem’s Historic Basin, turning key cultural heritage sites into biblically themed tourist attractions. Today Elad’s multiple archaeological, touristic and educational projects are spread across the Historic Basin to the south, southwest, and east of the Old City.

In its official statement, the Prime Minister’s Office called the City of David “the cradle of our national heritage and the heart of our united and eternal capital.” In recent years, government announcements on Jerusalem Day have often included major new initiatives, many driven by Elad’s agenda. Last year’s announcements included the [fourth phase](#) of the Shalem Plan, expanding the controversial Pilgrim’s Road excavation under Silwan and launching educational and archaeological programming promoting an ultra-nationalist biblical narrative.

The Shalem Plan, first announced in 2017, has been allocated about NIS 112 million to date. It has enabled Elad to spearhead numerous projects including the Pilgrim’s Road, the Farm in the Valley in the Hinnom Valley, and projects in the Peace Forest near Jabel Mukaber.

The choice of venue may also signal movement on the contentious Jerusalem cable car project, designed to link West Jerusalem with the City of David. Criticized for its environmental and cultural impact, as well as for its infringement on the lives of Silwan residents, the project was [legally approved in 2022](#) but a tender for its construction has not been issued to date. Nevertheless, earlier this month, the Ministry of Transport joined the Ministry of Tourism in advancing the cable car, announcing a revised budget of NIS 473 million—more than double the original.

We expect that Monday's meeting may include updates on the cable car initiative, as well as other Elad-led projects in the Historic Basin.

Emek Shaveh Condemns the Flag March Through the Muslim Quarter

Also on May 26, Jerusalem Day will once again feature the controversial "Flag Parade," in which thousands of national-religious youth—many from religious high schools—parade through the Old City, particularly via Damascus Gate and the Muslim Quarter.

To facilitate the march, police require Palestinian residents of the Muslim Quarter to remain indoors while marchers, accompanied by their educators, flood the narrow streets. Year after year, this event devolves into a display of supremacy, hatred, and violence. Non-Jewish residents and bystanders are subjected to racial slurs, spitting, and in some cases, physical assaults.

Marchers, often wearing school uniforms and carrying Israeli flags, have been documented chanting hate slogans such as "Death to Arabs" and vandalizing property. The march transforms Jerusalem's diverse and historic core into an exclusionary space.

Emek Shaveh joins educators, civil society organizations, and parents across Israel in **strongly condemning** this assault on the city's multicultural character. It is unacceptable that the Jerusalem Municipality not only permits the march in its current format but actively funds it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWt1LnH9f-k&t=11s>

Statement on Gaza

Emek Shaveh joined our civil society partners in Israel this week in calling for an immediate ceasefire and the urgent entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. The continued blockade and massive bombings have created catastrophic conditions, killing tens of thousands and placing millions at risk of famine while denying access to essential medical care. Israel's policy of using aid as political leverage must end. We demand the immediate opening of humanitarian corridors, the protection of civilians, and the full respect of international humanitarian law:

GISHA, HAMOKED – CENTER FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL, IR AMIM, ISHA L'ISHA, ITACH MA'AKI, JAHALIN SOLIDARITY, JORDAN VALLEY ACTIVISTS, LOOKING THE OCCUPATION IN THE EYE

YESH DIN, YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF, ZAZIM, ACADEMIA FOR EQUALITY, AKEVOT, BTSELEM, BIMKOM PLANNERS FOR PLANNING RIGHTS, BREAKING THE SILENCE, CULTURE OF SOLIDARITY, COMBATANTS FOR PEACE, EMEK SHAVE,

MACHSOM WATCH, MIZRAHI CIVIC COLLECTIVE, MOTHERS AGAINST VIOLENCE, NEVE SHALOM, OTHER VOICE, OSOT DEMOCRATIA, OZ VESHALOM, POLICY WORKING GROUP, PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ISRAEL

CEASEFIRE AND ENTRY OF AID NOW!

During the past several days, Israel has intensified its attacks on Gaza, following more than ten weeks during which it blocked all entry of aid and other goods to the Strip. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's statement last night that Israel will allow entry of "a basic amount of food for the population" in order to continue the war demonstrates that Israel has no intention to stop its unlawful use of aid as a lever of political pressure.

Every day, the Israeli army is killing and injuring hundreds of Palestinians in Gaza. All residents of the Strip are at risk of famine, while the healthcare system is collapsing due to severe shortages of medicine, medical equipment, and fuel. Israel is deliberately inflicting conditions that make life impossible in Gaza, with the declared goal of carrying out ethnic cleansing.

Israel must stop the attacks and allow immediate entry of aid!

The plan being formulated by the US and Israel for distribution of goods does not meet gaping humanitarian needs created by the blockade and widespread attacks. The UN and other international humanitarian organizations operating in Gaza have categorically rejected the plan on the grounds that it does not adhere to basic humanitarian principles.

Israel has openly declared that the plan aims to advance its goals of expanding its physical presence in Gaza and forcibly transferring the civilian population. Israel's commission of war crimes, which could also amount to crimes against humanity, must not be met with continued silence and inaction by the international community.

We call again for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages. Simultaneously, Israel must immediately stop its attacks, cease its policy of starvation, open the crossings for entry of aid to Gaza, and allow aid organizations in the Strip to carry out their work.

THE PARENTS CIRCLE – FAMILIES FORUM, THE SCHOOL FOR PEACE IN WAHAT AL-SALAM NEVE SHALOM, PSYCHOACTIVE, RABBIS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, THE ASSOCIATION FOR CIVIL RIGHTS IN ISRAEL, THIS IS NOT AN ULPAN