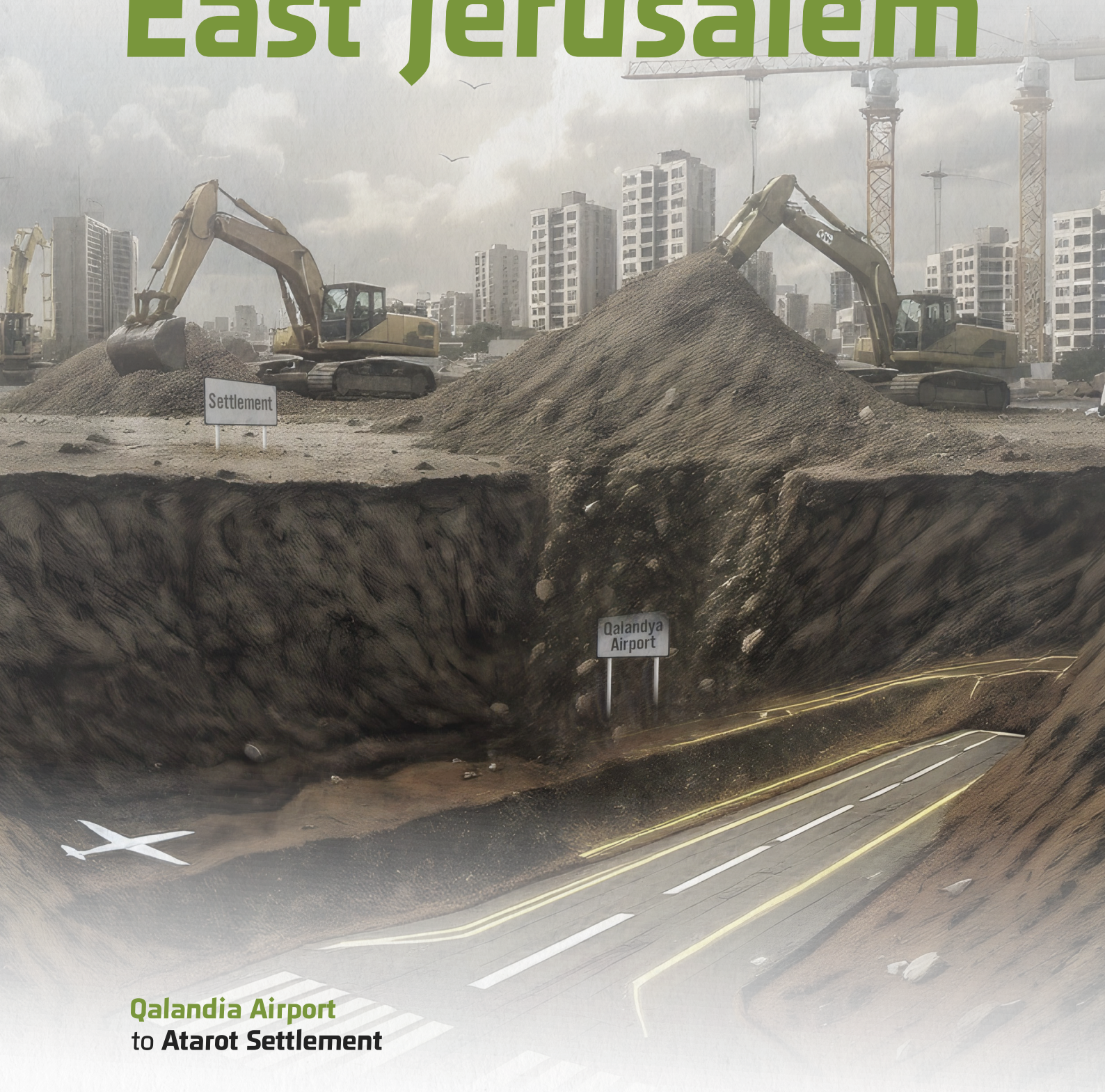


JULY 2025

A Case Study: "Atarot" Settlement
Plan No. 0764936 -101

Intensified Israeli Settlement Expansion in East Jerusalem



Qalandia Airport
to **Atarot Settlement**



المركز العربي للتخطيط البديل
The Arab Center for Alternative Planning
— המרכז הערבי לתכנון אלטרנטיבי —



Case Study | July 2025

"Atarot" Settlement Plan No. 101-0764936



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG

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Introduction

A. Acceleration of settlement Activity in East Jerusalem

Since October 7th, 2023, Israeli settlement activities in East Jerusalem (EJ) have significantly accelerated, indicating a notable shift in government policy. This intensification has coincided with an increase in the demolition of Palestinian homes within EJ, reaching record numbers and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis for Palestinian residents.

Simultaneously, the Israeli government has reactivated a long-standing project aimed at consolidating land control in EJ, potentially facilitating land expropriation and the displacement of Palestinian residents.

B. Recent Settlement Initiatives in East Jerusalem

Several significant settlement plans have been advanced in EJ, a few of which are briefly introduced hereinafter:

- **“Lower Aqueduct” Plan (Approved December 4 ,2023):** This plan involves the construction of 1,792 housing units south of EJ near Om Tuba Village. It represents the first major new settlement initiative in EJ since the “Giva’at Hamatos” plan in 2012.

- **Giva’at Ha-Shaked” Settlement Plan (Approved February 14, 2024):** This new residential neighborhood includes 700 housing units, schools, and a synagogue. Strategically located on the western edge of the Palestinian town of Beit Safafa, it aims to tighten Israeli control and restrict Palestinian urban expansion. A proposed extension seeks to add 388 more residential units, potentially bringing the total to nearly 1,100 units, further entrenching Israeli presence and limiting space for Palestinian development and affordable housing.

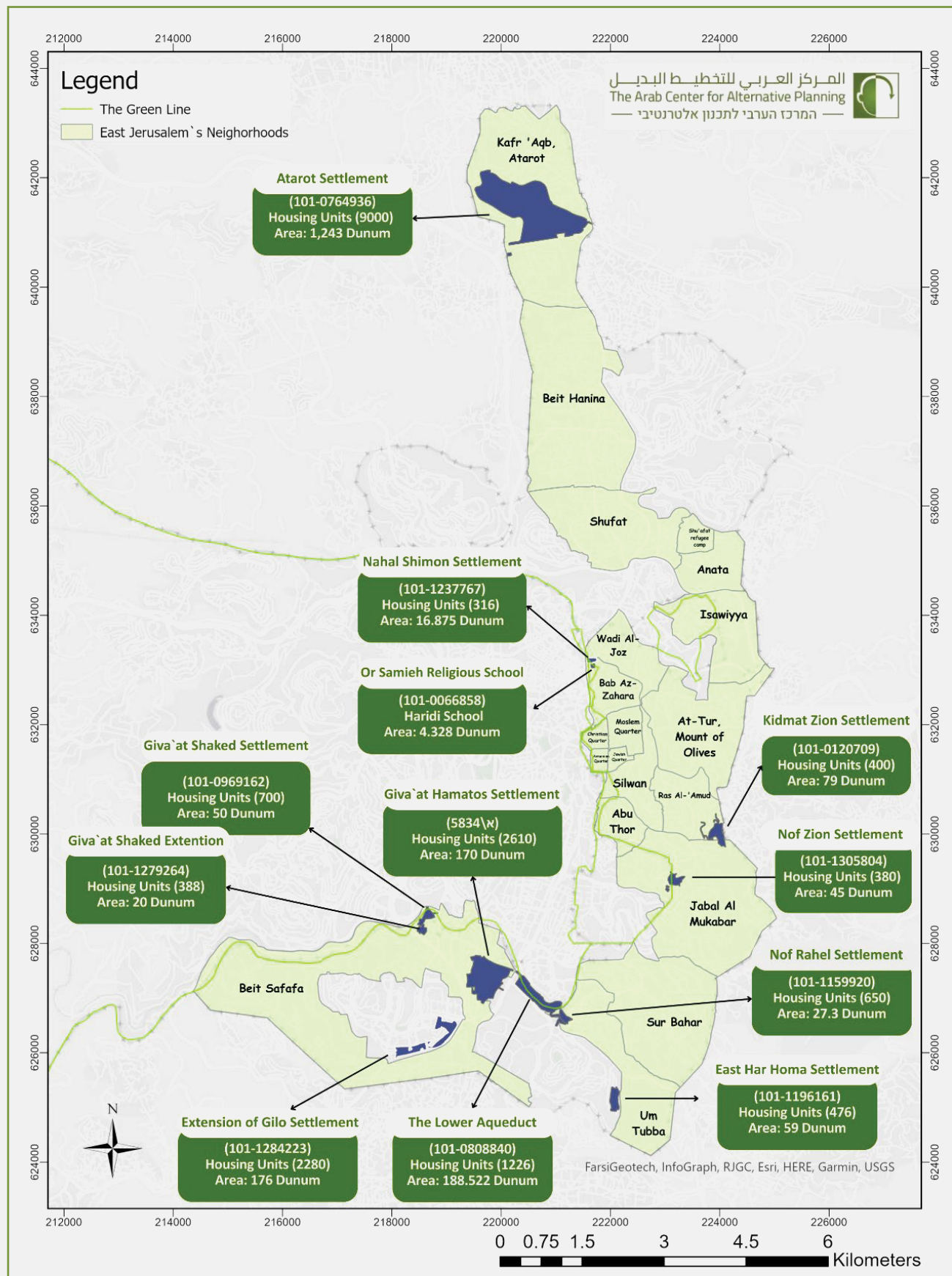
- **“Nahalat Shimon” Settlement and “Or Samieh” Religious School Plan (in Sheikh Jarrah):** A plan has been submitted to construct 200 housing units in this highly contested area by the “Nahalat Shimon” international settler organization. The project includes 15 residential buildings and an extension of Dalman Street. Adjacent to this, the “Or Samieh” yeshiva project proposes expanding an existing religious educational institution. These combined projects raise serious concerns about the potential displacement of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah, a key area of Palestinian resistance against forced evictions. Approval of these initiatives would significantly deepen Israeli control in a critical part of EJ, further solidify the settlement belt, and increase the fragmentation and isolation of Palestinian neighborhoods.

The approval of “Giva’at Ha-Shaked” and its extension, alongside the planned “Nahalat Shimon” settlement and “Or Shamieh” religious school, is leading to an increasingly comprehensive encirclement of Palestinian communities in EJ. This trend significantly restricts their future expansion and further entrenches Israeli sovereignty over the city.



Map 1 below shows the geographical distribution of the ongoing intensified establishment of Jewish settlement in EJ.

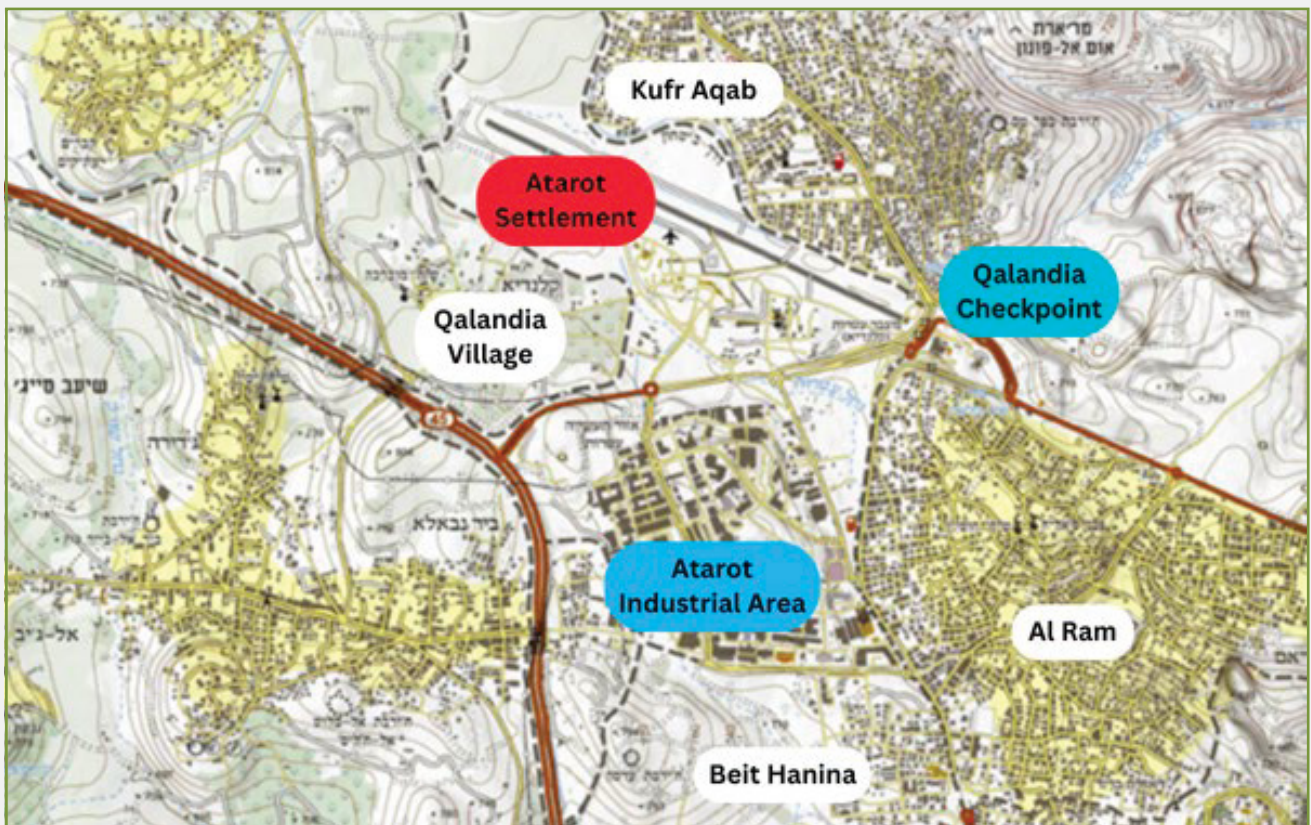
Israeli Settlement Plans in East Jerusalem



Map 1: The geographical distribution of Israeli settlement plans in East Jerusalem - 2025

The "Atarot" Settlement Plan

A large-scale settlement plan, known as the “Atarot” Settlement (No. 0764936-101), has been submitted for approval on December 3rd, 2020. This plan targets land in Qalandiya, the former site of the East Jerusalem airport, which is geographically contiguous with the “Atarot” Industrial Zone near the Palestinian town of Beit Hanina. The location of the proposed settlement and its geographical context are shown in *Map 2* below:



Map 1: : Geographical Context of the "Atarot " Settlement Plan

This report presents and critically analyze the “Atarot” settlement Plan as a crucial element of Israel’s broader strategy to consolidate control over EJ. By examining the plan’s spatial, demographic, legal, environmental, and socio-economic dimensions, this analysis aims to reveal its significant implications for the future of Palestinian communities in the city. The “Atarot” Settlement plan contributes to the fragmentation of Palestinian neighborhoods, villages and towns, exacerbates spatial inequalities, and accelerates demographic engineering against the right of Palestinians to remain and thrive in their historical urban environment, threatening the viability of EJ as the future capital of a Palestinian state and severely compromising the well-being and fundamental rights of its Palestinian residents.

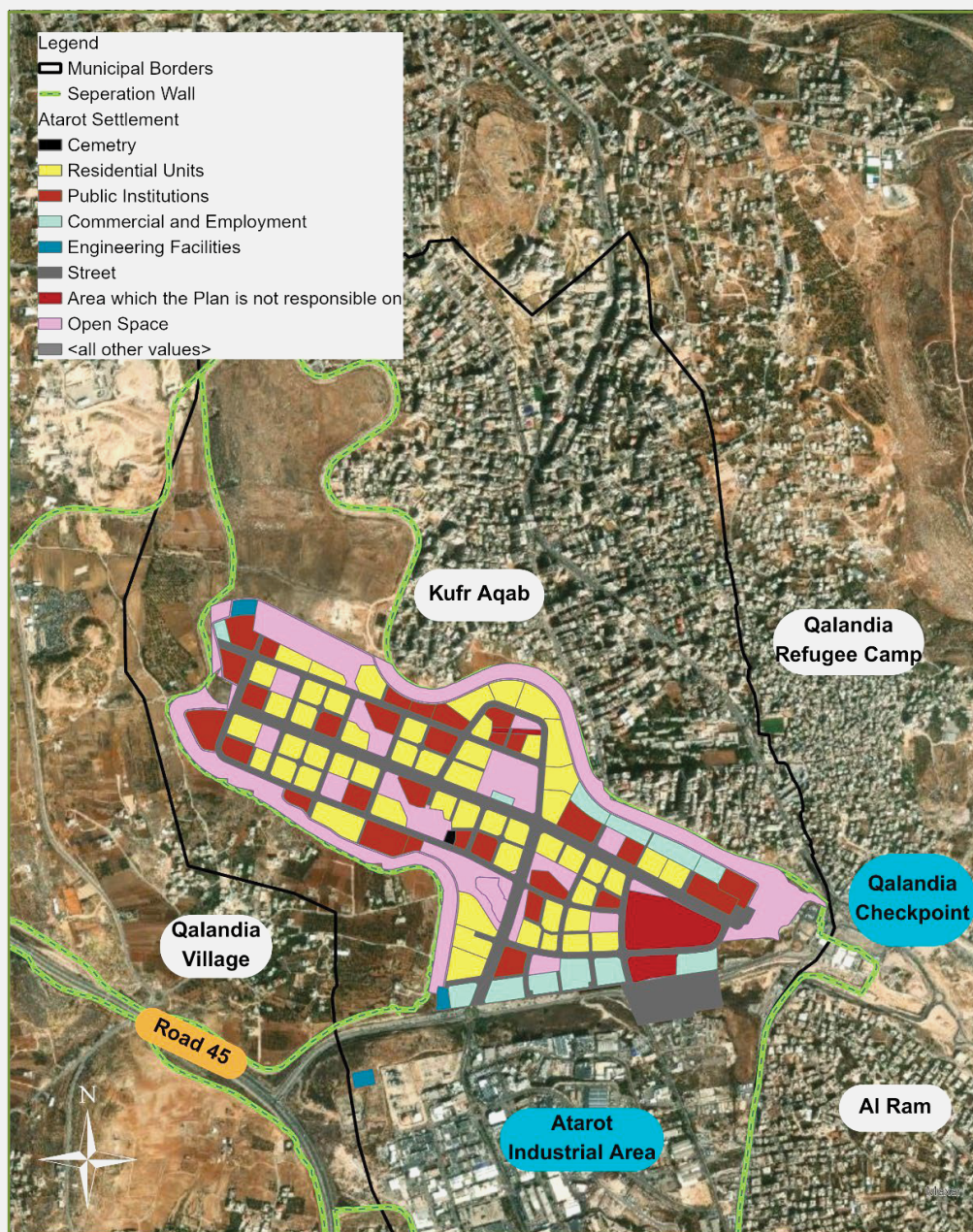
A. Details of the Proposed "Atarot" Settlement Plan

The "Atarot" Settlement plan is in its initial promotion stages (April 2025). It proposes the establishment of a substantial Israeli settlement in Northern Jerusalem on the site of the former "Atarot" (Qalandiya airport).

The plan outlines the construction of 9,000 residential units on 1,243 dunams of land, including 800 protected housing units primarily intended for the Haredi Jewish population.

Map 3 illustrates the proposed settlement's geographical location and details the land use scheme within the proposed settlement plan:

Atarot Settlement Land Uses Map



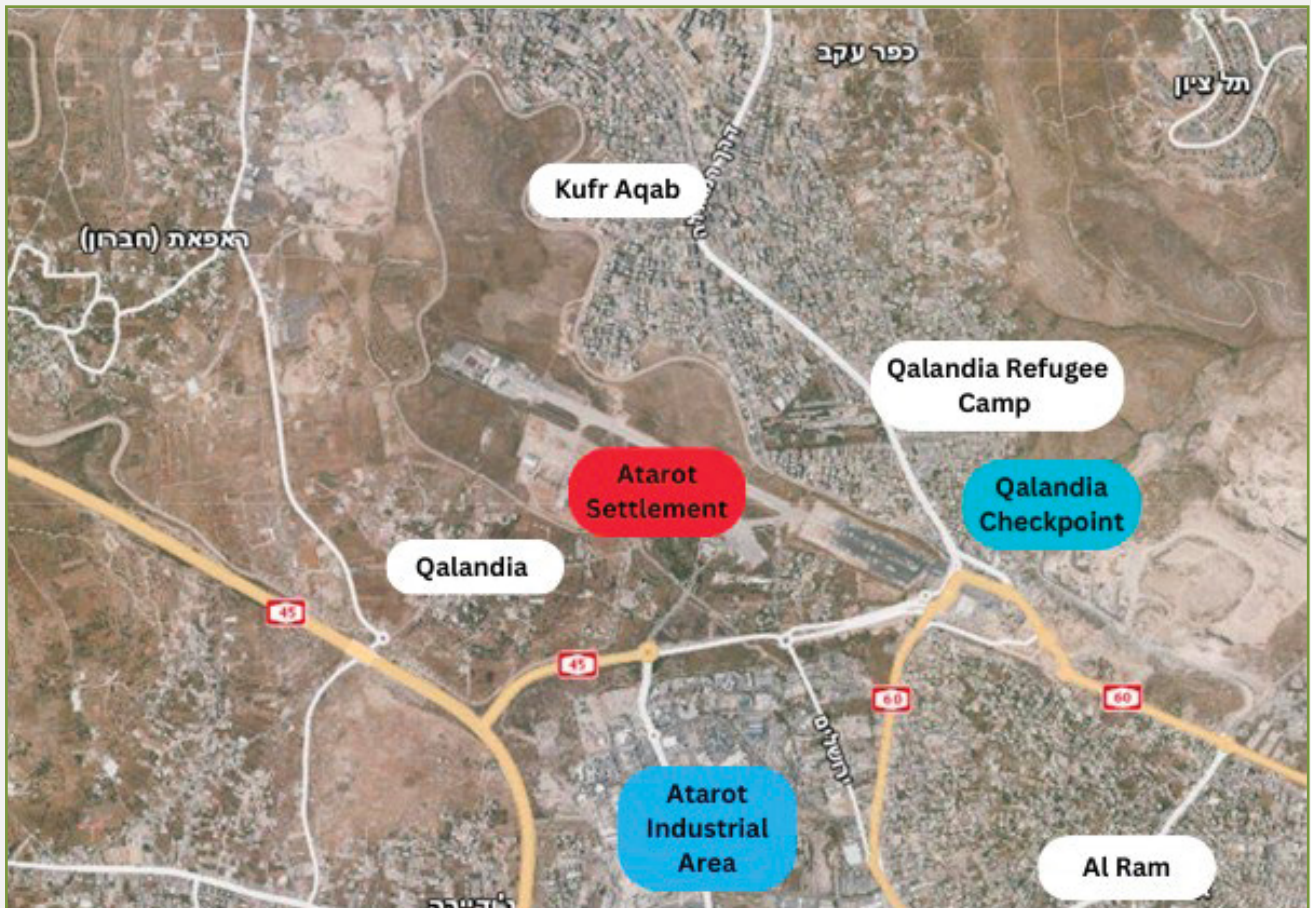
Map 3: Proposed Land Uses in "Atarot" Settlement

0 0.15 0.3 0.6 0.9 1.2 Kilometers

B. The "Atarot" Region: Geographical Context

The term "Atarot" in this report refers to the geographical area within the municipal jurisdiction of what is Israel calls "Greater Jerusalem"¹. Its southern edge borders the Beit Hanina town, its eastern boundary is adjacent to Al-Ram, and to the north, it is bordered by Kufr A'qab. Its western extent is defined by the rural village of Qalandiya and route 443. This region includes the "Atarot Industrial Zone", a significant industrial hub in the Jerusalem metropolitan area, and the former Qalandiya Airport, the designated site for the proposed "Atarot" Settlement. A Palestinian residential complex is located near the former airport, and its residents would be vulnerable to displacement if the "Atarot" Settlement plan is approved.

Map 4 illustrates the "Atarot" region and its urban components:

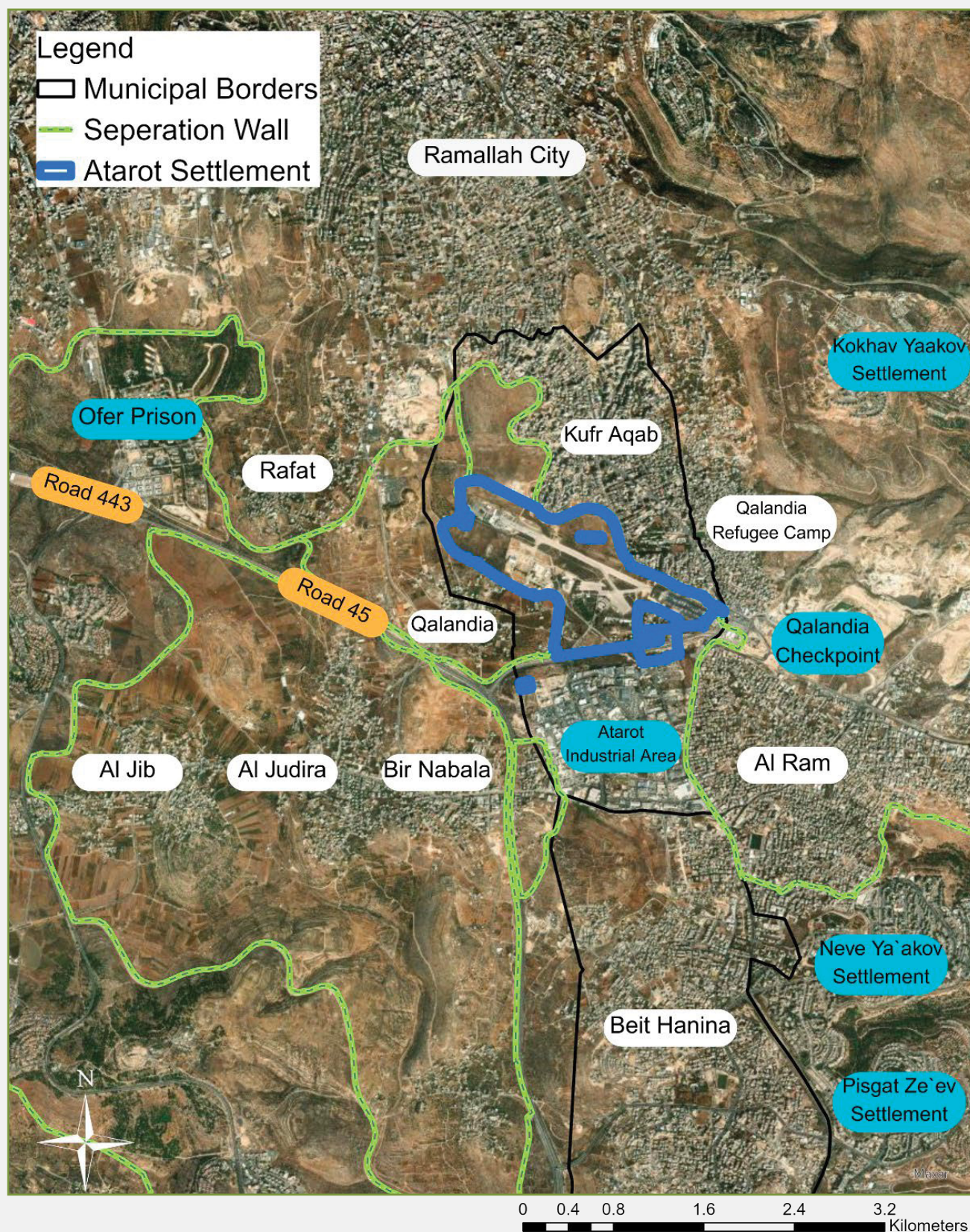


Map 4: Spatial Overview of Atarot's Urban Components

1. "Greater Jerusalem" refers to the expanded metropolitan area that includes Jerusalem's municipal boundaries and surrounding Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Its definition is politically contested, as it encompasses both the city and adjacent Palestinian areas affected by settlement expansion and planning policies.

Map 5 below further details the “Atarot” region, highlighting the proposed settlement’s borders and the route of the separation barrier, which irregularly surrounds and borders various areas.

Atarot Settlement Location to Surroundings



Map 5: "Atarot" Region – Proposed Settlement and Its Geopolitical Surroundings.

C. Current Land Use and Strategic Infrastructure

Map 6: Existing Spatial Land Use in the Qalandiya Airport Vicinity



Map 6 illustrates the current land use distribution around the former Qalandiya Airport area, a highly strategic zone located between East Jerusalem and Ramallah. The area includes a mix of residential, commercial, industrial and security-related facilities, reflecting the complex spatial and political dynamics on the ground. Notably, 25 Palestinian houses are situated in the southern part of the area, varying in the number of stories due to limited land and restrictive planning frameworks. Adjacent to these homes are several informal shops that sell vehicle parts, indicating localized economic activity despite a lack of formal infrastructure or zoning support.

A large bus parking area is located near the Qalandiya military checkpoint and serves as a vital transit hub for thousands of Palestinians who cross the checkpoint daily. The map also marks the former airport buildings, now abandoned, as remnants of the area's historical use. Of particular significance is the presence of an Israeli military-linked company specializing in drone parts, located on what was formerly considered a military base. This facility at the northern edge contributes to industrial activity, though it raises environmental and land use concerns given its proximity to residential zones.

D. Accessibility and Transportation Infrastructure

"Atarot" benefits from connections to major roads, including road 45, linking the industrial zone to central Jerusalem, and road 443, the primary route between Jerusalem and the West Bank settlements. Notably, road 443 is largely inaccessible to Palestinian from the West Bank, a discriminatory measure restricting their freedom of movement and access to essential services. The Qalandiya military checkpoint, a critical crossing point between the West Bank and Jerusalem, is situated on its eastern edge, making the area highly sensitive politically and in terms of security.

E. Existing Conditions and Plan Objectives

Despite the presence of Palestinian houses within the Qalandiya airport site (as shown in Map 6), Israeli authorities have restricted their expansion, isolating them from the urban development of northern Jerusalem's Palestinian towns and villages. The advancement of the "Atarot" Settlement plan on the entire area of the abandoned Qalandiya airport will lead to the demolition of this existing Palestinian village and the displacement of its residents.

The "Atarot" Settlement plan proposes the construction of 9,000 residential units on 1,243 dunams, including 800 housing units designated for the Haredi population (typically 3-4 rooms apartments).

The plan also incorporates commercial and employment zones, likely intended for Israeli business and employees, as well as public institutions such as schools, healthcare facilities, and parks, which will primarily serve the Israeli settlers rather than the Palestinian population.

F. Strategic Adjustments in "Atarot" Settlement Boundaries: Expansion, Exclusions, and Urban Implications

During ACAP's ongoing monitoring of settlement activities, significant updates to the land use boundaries of the "Atarot" Settlement plan were identified, as shown in Map 6. Notably, the settlement area has expanded southeastward, integrating additional parcels of land that have subsequently been subdivided, potentially indicating intentions for intensified urban development or specialized zoning activities. Concurrently, three distinct areas previously included within the settlement boundary – located near the northwest edge, centrally adjacent to the runway, and along the southeastern boundary – have now been excluded from the updated plan. The southeastern exclusion notably contains Palestinian residential buildings, indicating a strategic adjustment intended to bypass existing Palestinian-built structures.

Through continuous monitoring of these adjustments to the "Atarot" Settlement plan boundaries ACAP aims to assess their potential implications thoroughly. Specifically, the analysis will focus on how these strategic exclusions and expansions may influence urban planning dynamics, impact Palestinian communities in adjacent areas, and shape future political and legal contexts. This ongoing evaluation will provide clarity on the broader consequences and significance of these settlement planning decisions.



Map 7: Comparison of Past and New "Atarot" Settlement Borders

Statutory Committee Discussions: Key Considerations & Findings

This report summarizes information from official Israeli planning documents and the January 2025 meeting of the Jerusalem District Planning Committee, which addressed critical aspects of the settlement plan, including security, land ownership disputes, pollution, and demographic implications.

A. Security Measures

A primary concern examined by the committee was the security measures designed to ensure the maximum protection of future settlers. The security arrangements outlined in the “Atarot” Settlement plan documents were reviewed on January 2025, 20, and deemed adequate by Israeli standards. The committee concluded that the proposed security infrastructure was sufficient for the settlement’s residents. However, the potential impact on neighboring Palestinian communities was not addressed. Anticipated consequences to Palestinian residents include an increased military presence, violations of privacy, expanded surveillance systems, and further restrictions on Palestinian movement.

The security measures reviewed included limitations on construction distance from the settlement’s outer boundaries and the erection of substantial protective fences at significant heights and distances from residential buildings.

B. Pollution and Environmental Concerns

The “Atarot” industrial zone has long been a significant source of pollution in the region. The district committee meeting highlighted the following:

- *Air pollution*

The “Atarot” industrial zone and surrounding urban areas suffer from dangerously high levels of PM10². These elevated concentrations are primarily due to unregulated industrial emissions, heavy traffic, and ongoing construction. Measurements consistently exceed the World Health Organization’s (WHO) safety thresholds, posing serious risks to respiratory and cardiovascular health. Palestinian villages in vicinity, including Kufur Aqab, Qalandiya, Al-Ram, and Beit Hanina, are particularly vulnerable, facing direct exposure without adequate environmental monitoring, public health protections, or mitigation efforts. This disproportioned exposure and the lack of response from Israeli authorities reflect a pattern of systemic neglect, where resources are directed towards illegal Israeli settlements while Palestinian communities are marginalized, illustrating an

2. Particulate Matter (PM) refers to microscopic solid or liquid particles suspended in the air. PM10 includes particles with a diameter of 10 micrometers or less, which can penetrate the respiratory system and pose serious health risks.



environmental injustice that further deteriorates the quality of life for Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

During the meeting of the Jerusalem District Planning Committee, a detailed review of air quality data highlighted this disparity, showing consistently high concentrations of PM10 throughout the week, particularly at one monitoring site. This site recorded PM10 levels significantly above the regulatory threshold of 130 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, with daily averages peaking at 153 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ on Thursday. In contrast, levels dropped to 130 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ on Friday and further to 65 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ on Saturday, a reduction attributed to the closure of the "Atarot" industrial area over the weekend. Other monitoring stations in other places – likely representing better-regulated or less exposed areas – reported lower PM10 levels, such as 52 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ on Sunday and 61 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ on Friday. The data strongly indicate that the pollution is linked to industrial activity in "Atarot", and the temporary improvement over the weekend underscores the impact of this source.

- **Soil contamination:**

the land designed for the proposed settlement, previously an airport with associated facilities, suffers from significant soil pollution. The environmental inspection revealed significant contamination at four sampling points, with particularly alarming findings at a sample site, located near a sewage stream in the Kufr Aqab area. The cobalt concentration at this site reached 2275.38 $\mu\text{g}/\text{L}$, vastly exceeding the regulatory threshold of 23.45 $\mu\text{g}/\text{L}$, indicating a 97-fold exceedance. Additional heavy metals were also detected, including Manganese (1864 $\mu\text{g}/\text{L}$, standard: 1.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{L}$) and Thallium (0.78 $\mu\text{g}/\text{L}$, standard: 0.1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{L}$), pointing to a substantial and hazardous deviation from environmental norms. The severity of these results strongly suggests the presence of an industrial pollution source in the vicinity of Kufr Aqab and Atarot Industrial Area. These findings underscore the urgent need for further investigation, enforcement measures, and remediation efforts to address the environmental risks posed by this contamination.

- **Water supply and Shortages:**

the "Atarot" Settlement plan does not address the severe water shortages affecting Palestinian neighborhoods near the proposed site. Instead, the plan reallocates existing water resources to serve Israeli settlers, exacerbating the existing inequalities in resource distribution. Kufr Aqab is particularly affected, experiencing increased water demand due to the influx of Palestinians seeking to maintain their Jerusalem residency. Despite this population growth, infrastructure upgrades and basic service expansions have not occurred, straining the fragile water supply system. Consequently, residents frequently experience water outages lasting four to five consecutive days, especially during summer, forcing them to rely on expensive private water tanks.

3. Palestinians in East Jerusalem hold a temporary residency status by Israeli authorities, which can be revoked if they fail to prove continuous residency or sufficient connection to the city. Consequently, Palestinians often take measures, such as maintaining property or documented presence in Jerusalem, to protect this residency status.



Comprehensive Assessment and Analysis of the "Atarot" Settlement Plan

A. Neglect of Palestinian Housing Needs

The proposed "Atarot" settlement plan fails to address the urgent housing needs of Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem (EJ). Instead, it reflects a broader Israeli strategy aimed at reshaping the demographic and geographic realities of EJ in favor of Israeli settlers. This strategy includes the displacement of Palestinian communities from their lands and the establishment of new Israeli residential zones in their place.

Palestinian villages in EJ already suffer from overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and limited space for expansion – conditions largely caused by restrictive Israeli zoning laws and planning policies. The "Atarot" settlement plan continues this trend by allocating resources and land for Israeli settlement expansion while offering no provisions for Palestinian housing.

The location of the proposed settlement, on land occupied by Israel since 1967, further exacerbates existing inequalities. It places additional pressure on surrounding Palestinian communities such as Beit Hanina, Qalandiya, and Al-Ram by limiting their access to land and resources while physically separating them from each other through new settlement infrastructure and barriers.

Palestinians have long faced systematic challenges in obtaining building permits, often resulting in unauthorized construction and subsequent home demolitions. In contrast, Israeli settlements, illegal under international law, receive full planning support and infrastructure development, widening the gap in living conditions between the two populations.

B. Socioeconomic Exclusion and Disparities

The "Atarot" settlement plan includes commercial zones, public buildings, and transportation infrastructure – but these are exclusively designed to serve Israeli settlers. This exclusion reinforces economic and social segregation, preventing Palestinian residents from benefiting from new development in their city.

Palestinians already face systemic barriers to employment and economic participation in EJ.

The creation of new commercial hubs under Israeli control consolidates this economic dominance and marginalizes Palestinian businesses and workers. The transportation network proposed in the plan will further this divide by connecting only Israeli-controlled areas and bypassing Palestinian neighborhoods, limiting Palestinian mobility and access to services.



C. Environmental and Territorial Impacts

The development of the “Atarot” settlement will have significant environmental consequences. Palestinian communities rely on the area’s natural resources – such as open land, water sources and agricultural space – for their livelihoods. The settlement’s construction will fragment the landscape, disrupt ecosystems, and further isolate Palestinian neighborhoods from each other.

In addition, the development violates international law, including prohibitions against transferring the civilian population of an occupying power into occupied territory. Despite repeated international condemnation, Israeli continues to promote settlement expansion in EJ, undermining both environmental and legal norms.

D. Land seizure and Property Rights Violations

During the planning committee’s review of the “Atarot” settlement plan, a Palestinian landlord raised objections to the expropriation of his legally registered (Tabo) land without consultation. Other landowners within the project boundaries face similar circumstances.

Although compensation was promised, the coercive nature of such land seizures violates international property laws governing occupied territories and reinforces the pattern of dispossession experienced by Palestinian landowners.

E. Strategic and Political Consequences

The proposed “Atarot” settlement poses a significant threat to the viability of EJ as the capital of a future Palestinian state. Strategically located between northern EJ and the rest of the West Bank, the site plays a critical role in maintaining Palestinian territorial continuity. Its development as a major settlement and transportation hub would deepen the physical and political fragmentation of Palestinian communities.

The plan also erases the historical and logistical role of the former Qalandiya Airport, which once served as a key transportation facility for Palestinians. Transforming this site into a Jewish-only residential area removes the possibility of reviving the airport to serve East Jerusalem and a future Palestinian state – undermining both connectivity and sovereignty.

The “Atarot” settlement is not an isolated initiative; it is part of a broader policy to assert Israeli control over all parts of EJ. This includes the displacement of Palestinian communities, systemic land confiscation, and the reinforcement of Israeli dominance through urban planning tools.



F. Violations of International Law

The “Atarot” settlement plan violates multiple international legal principles:

- *The advisory opinion by ICJ, July 2024*: the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Israeli's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt), including East Jerusalem, is unlawful.
- *Fourth Geneva Convention (1949, Article 49)*: Prohibits the transfer of the occupying power's civilian population into occupied territory.
- *UN Security Council Resolution (2016) 2334*: Declares all Israeli settlements in the occupied land Palestinian territories illegal.
- *International Criminal Court (ICC) Statute*: Identifies Israeli settlement activity in the oPt as a potential war crime.
- *The Hague Regulations (1907)*: Forbid the exploitation of occupied land for the benefit of the occupier.

These violations compound the moral and legal concerns regarding the plan's implementation and highlight the urgent need for accountability.



Conclusions and Call for Action

The “Atarot” settlement plan exemplifies a broader strategy of Israeli territorial expansion and demographic engineering in East Jerusalem. It neglects the fundamental rights and needs of the Palestinian population while advancing infrastructure and housing exclusively for Israeli settlers.

Beyond its immediate negative effects – land confiscation, environmental harm, economic exclusion, and housing inequality – the plan poses a serious threat to the feasibility of a two-state solution. By erecting physical and social barriers, it systematically undermines Palestinian claims to East Jerusalem as a future capital and erodes the possibility of a resolution to the conflict.

These settlement initiatives require urgent international attention. Without intervention, the continued expansion of Israeli settlements will cement a reality of permanent inequality, deepen territorial fragmentation, and eliminate any remaining pathways towards a just peace. Equally important is the need to increase the involvement of the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem in confronting settlement initiatives in general and the current plan in particular.

Residents of Palestinian communities adjacent to the proposed settlement, such as Beit Hanina, must be mobilized. Also, political actors as well as civil society organizations in East Jerusalem should be mobilized to support and participate in opposing the settlement plan in order to guarantee their right to a decent living and development aspirations.

Ultimately, Israeli settlement activities, including the “Atarot” settlement plan, constitute clear violations of international law, relevant UN resolutions, and previously signed agreements.

These actions undermine international efforts towards achieving peace and significantly obstruct the realization of a viable and just two-state solution.

The international community must reassert its commitment to international legality and hold accountable those responsible for settlement expansions in occupied territories.



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