

# “KIDMAT TZION”

A NEW SETTLEMENT ENCLAVE IN EAST JERUSALEM  
PROMOTED BY ATERET COHANIM  
SETTLER ORGANIZATION ON PALESTINIAN HEARTLAND



**J U N E 2 0 2 4**

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## ABSTRACT

This study delves into the controversial topic of the establishment of the "Kidmat Tzion" settlement in East Jerusalem by the "Ateret Cohanim" settler organization. The plan's location, sponsors, implications, and legal ramifications are thoroughly analyzed, shedding light on the intricate web of political and territorial challenges it presents. This study highlights the conflict with international law, violation of humanitarian principles, and disruption of the two-state solution, urging for strategic actions to oppose the project through legal objections and international diplomatic pressure. Ultimately, the "Kidmat Tzion" settlement plan underscores the complexities and tensions surrounding settlement activities in East Jerusalem and calls for concerted efforts to address its far-reaching implications.

## INTRODUCTION

Since mid-2023, the "Ateret Cohanim" settler organization and its affiliates have been promoting a plan to establish a new settlement enclave called "Kidmat Tzion" to be located on a tiny strip of land between the Ras al-Amud neighborhood in East Jerusalem and the Israeli separation barrier, with the Abu Dis neighborhood on the other side of the wall.

On September 11th, 2023, the Jerusalem Local Planning and Building Committee approved the onset of the "Kidmat Tzion" plan (No. 0120709-101).<sup>1</sup>

Soon after, on October 9th, the higher-ranking Jerusalem District Planning Committee approved the plan for deposition, only raising minor concerns about the new settlements' transportation accessibility and security arrangements.<sup>2</sup>

In essence, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Kidmat Tzion settlement plan, shedding light on its various dimensions and implications. Through a critical review of official documents, planning information, and media reports, the paper aims to offer a nuanced examination of the proposed development and its potential ramifications on the region.

It is the result of ACAP's thorough analysis of the plan's official documents, including guidelines and sketches that were made available online by the Planning Administration, a branch of the Israeli Ministry of the Interior.

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1. Israel Approves New, Heavily Fortified Settlement Enclave in East Jerusalem – "Kidmat Tzion". <https://fmep.org/resource/settlement-annexation-report-september-15-2023/>
  2. The plan's page on the Planning Administration website: <https://mavat.iplan.gov.il/SV4/1/1000254189/310>

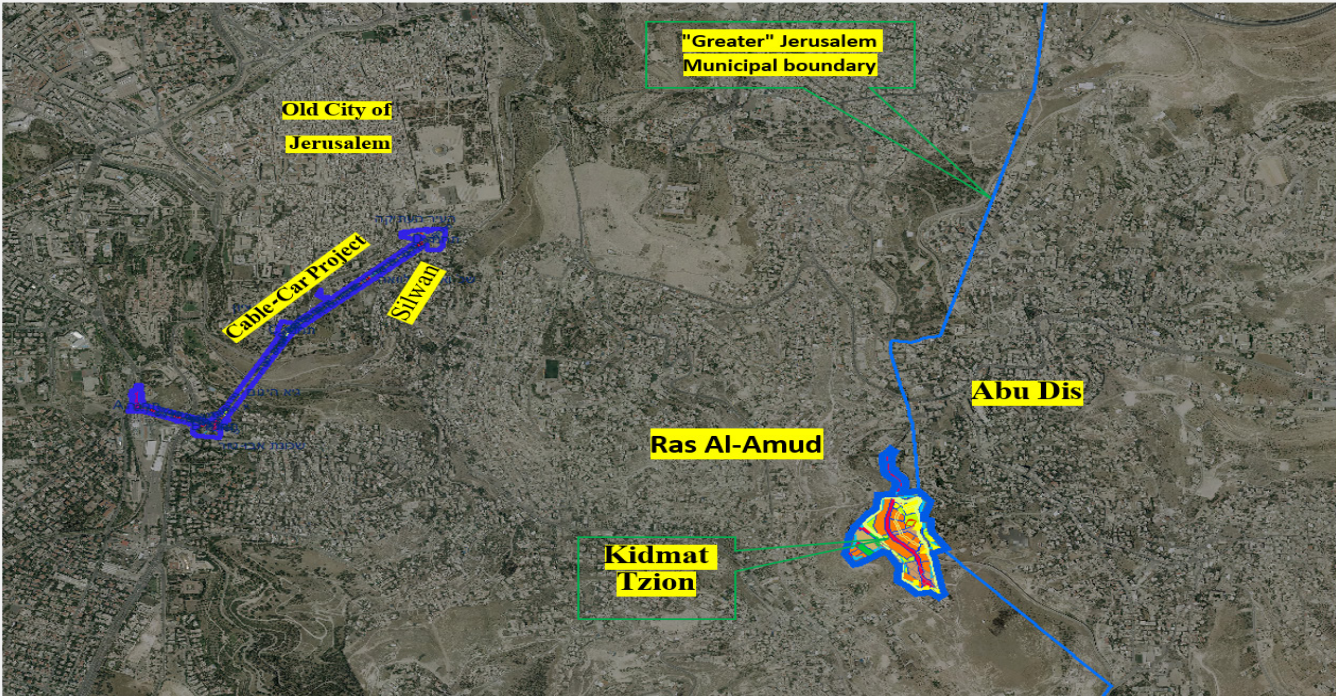
Additionally, the paper incorporates relevant information on housing and infrastructure projects in proximity to “Kidmat Tzion”, shedding light on their potential impact on the proposed settlement.

Moreover, the research paper delves into various press reports from media outlets to elucidate the explicit objectives of the settlement plan, the agencies pushing it forward, and the political, demographic, and long-term social implications associated with it.

## PLAN DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

The settlement, sponsored by “Ateret Cohanim” settler organization and its affiliates, is set to include 400 housing units for Jewish settlers on a strip of unregistered land of est. 80 dunums - allegedly purchased by Jewish agents in 1925<sup>3</sup> long before the establishment of Israel in 1948 - located between the Ras al-Amud neighborhood of East Jerusalem and the Israeli separation barrier, with Abu Dis town on the eastern side of the wall.

The following two sketches show the location of the proposed settlement within the general geographical context of Jerusalem:



“Kidmat Tzion” location on an aerial photomap within the general geographical context of East Jerusalem

3. <https://www.israelhayom.com/2022/08/10/east-jerusalem-land-purchased-by-jews-in-early-20th-century-reverts-to-state/>



Focused view of “Kidmat Tzion” plan boundaries near Abu Dis and the Israeli separation barrier

Due to its intentional location, as a settlers’ enclave within the Palestinian heartland and demographic contiguity, it will be accessible only through a road along the densely populated neighborhood of Ras Al-Amud. Also, it is planned to be heavily guarded, surrounded by an electric fence, a patrol road, and a concrete guard station at its entrance, as well as a security chief and an armored vehicle.

## “KIDMAT TZION” SPONSORS

As stated in the plans’ documents<sup>4</sup>, the registered initiator of the plan is the settler company BAHORIM Ltd., which was founded in Israel in 2013. The shareholders of BAHORIM Ltd. are the company “Between the Walls Contact Jerusalem Ltd.”, which is involved in land and property purchase transactions in the Old City of Jerusalem and in legal disputes with Palestinian residents. In fact, “Between the Walls Contact Jerusalem Ltd.” is owned by “Ateret Cohanim” settler organization.

4. <https://mavat.iplan.gov.il/f1241f77-41ea-447a-9629-e435169ae98a>

Also, Eldad Rabinowitz, a member of the "Noam" party, which is an extreme right-wing religious party and a member of the incumbent government, is involved in the promotion of the plan, as is Yondav Horowitz, one of the organizers of the traditional and provocative flag parade in East Jerusalem.

In conclusion, the sponsors and promoters of "Kidmat Tzion", through the planning and complementary bureaucratic institutions towards approval and implementation, are the familiar, well-known agents of settlement projects and the forceful seizure of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank in general. This explains the high-speed approval and green light bestowed by the planning committees for the proposed plan. It is no wonder that members of the committees who have the power and authority to review and approve plans internalize the wishes of the politicians who appoint them to their positions.

## MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS

### "Implications, and Ramifications of "Kidmat Tzion

"Kidmat Tzion" carries several characteristics, hidden goals, and significant political aspects that must be analyzed and understood to discover the true goals and political aspirations of the entities driving the plan. Without any doubt, there is a strong connection between the location of the planned settlement, the connection of the settlement with other housing and infrastructure projects in East Jerusalem and its surroundings, and the support provided by the Jerusalem Municipality and the Government of Israel to the institutions and settler groups whose main purpose is the establishment of settlements and the "Judaization" of East Jerusalem<sup>5</sup>.

A review and analysis of the aspects and characteristics of the "Kidmat Tzion" plan is detailed below:

## CONSEQUENCES OF The Location Of The Prospective Settlement

The location of the prospective settlement is the most controversial element of the entire ploy. As mentioned and seen in the sketches above, the settlement will cut off East Jerusalem from the Palestinian town of Abu Dis to the east, and create a considerable physical separation between East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

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5. The term "Judaization," as discoursed in the paper, refers to a spectrum of deliberate efforts aimed at altering the physical, demographic, and social fabric of a specific area. These efforts often involve displacement schemes to establish a Jewish majority, as well as the replacement of cultural symbols belonging to the original (Palestinian) population with those of Jewish descent.

Its role is geopolitical rather than merely providing a few housing opportunities for the settlers, i.e. interrupting the geographical and demographical contiguity between East Jerusalem and the adjacent occupied Palestinian territory.

Also, it will interrupt the geographical and demographic continuity of East Jerusalem's Palestinian neighborhoods, thus atomizing the Palestinian continuum and installing artificial and hostile boundaries that limit their expansion and natural growth.

From a sheer political perspective, the construction of this settlement could have significant geopolitical consequences as the settlers aim to complicate or even thwart any potential division of Jerusalem or share agreement in a future Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. In their planning documents, "Ateret Cohanim" highlighted the strategic importance of establishing this neighborhood to act as a buffer against Palestinian aspirations for East Jerusalem. The goal is to disrupt the continuity of the area and safeguard against the city's division, thereby protecting Israeli interests and thwarting the widely anticipated two-state solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Very eye-catching on the "Ateret Cohanim" website<sup>6</sup> is the straightforward explanation of the unspoken objectives of establishing "Kidmat Zion":

"Kidmat Zion has always been viewed as the last piece of an essential fabric of Jewish neighborhoods in the eastern part of Jerusalem that, when approved, will spell the end of a "Palestinian" state. It essentially blocks a potential corridor from Abu Dis to Jerusalem's Old City. Abu Dis is an Arab-occupied neighborhood or village east of Jerusalem and has long been seen as a potential political capital for the currently stillborn "Palestinian" state. All it needed was a connection to Jerusalem's Old City.

Up until October 9th 2023, "Kidmat Zion" was essentially a small outpost of Jewish families growing into a Jerusalem neighborhood whose mission has been to hold onto a historically Jewish hillside. On October 9th, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee reviewed amendments to the Preliminary Plan for the eastern neighborhoods of Jerusalem and approved 348 units for "Kidmat Zion" – a game changer.

Only with these changes can Israel not only ensure Jerusalem remains Jewish, but sends a message to Arabs thinking that they can wrest control over Jerusalem to think again – it won't happen." – end of quotation from Ateret Cohanim Website.

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6. <https://www.ateretcohanim.org/under-the-fog-of-war-kidmat-tzion-is-not-only-approved-but-gets-a-bus-stop/>



## “KIDMAT TZION” AND THE LAND REGISTRATION PROJECT

The interaction between the land registration and settlement process in East Jerusalem and the “Kidmat Zion” settlement plan is deeply intertwined and reveals a complex web of political, legal, and territorial challenges. The land registration process is being manipulated to assert Jewish ownership claims in East Jerusalem, as highlighted by the covert transfer of property ownership facilitated by the General Custodian. This manipulation puts Palestinian families at risk of eviction and serves to consolidate Israeli control over the area.

The settlement of land title procedures is being exploited in favor of settler expansion, as certain areas are targeted for settlement advancement based on state and settler interests. The “Kidmat Zion” plan exemplifies this exploitation, as it involves claims of Jewish ownership dating back to 1925, despite the sensitive location of the planned settlement, raising concerns about its impact on the geopolitical landscape.

Thus, the interaction between the land registration process and the “Kidmat Zion” settlement plan underscores how legal procedures are being leveraged to advance settler interests, reshape demographics, and assert control over territories in East Jerusalem. This dynamic interaction reflects the broader complexities and tensions surrounding land issues, settlement activities, and the political future of the region.

In conclusion, the land registration process is being manipulated by the Israeli authorities to consolidate their control over East Jerusalem and expand settlements in areas of strategic importance to them. This exploitation further exacerbates tensions in the region and undermines the prospects for a just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## REMARKS ON The Land Settlement And Registration Project

The settlement of land title process, intended allegedly to benefit Palestinians, is being manipulated to facilitate settler expansion and new settlements' construction. It carries inherent risks for the Palestinian community in East Jerusalem, and Israeli authorities are exploiting it as a new tool for land grabs.

- It is run by an Israeli system that views Palestinians as a threat and seeks to marginalize and displace them as part of the overall Israeli policy to maintain the demographic balance in the city and stem the increase of Palestinian residents beyond their current ratio of %38 of the city's population (the original goal was to maintain this ratio at %30-70).

- The process is also conducted in Hebrew, according to a legal system that is unfamiliar and inaccessible to Palestinian residents, and which the authorities have done very little to mitigate; in fact, most neglect their basic legal duty to inform the residents of the planning and registration processes in their area.
- More severe still, the documentation necessary for proving ownership for land registration is not always available or accessible for the residents, and the Israeli system rejects traditional and customary Palestinian land claims.
- The registration process is also accompanied by prohibitive taxation, as the registration process also requires paying property taxes from 1967 until today.

## THE DISTRUSTFUL ROLE OF The Custodian General In East Jerusalem

In recent years, the Custodian General has actively engaged in or collaborated with settler organizations to initiate various housing projects for Jewish settlers in Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. This involvement represents a significant deviation from the Custodian General's official mandate and constitutes an overreach of his/her authority. The primary role of the Custodian General is to manage properties whose owners are unknown, with the responsibility to periodically search for these owners and return the properties to them. Promoting housing solutions for settlers does not fall within this purview. A notable instance of such overreach is the "Givat Ha-Shaked" project in the western part of Beit Safafa, a Palestinian neighborhood in southeast Jerusalem.

The Custodian General's actions in these projects reflect a deliberate political strategy aimed at bolstering settlement activities and advancing the Judaization of East Jerusalem. This strategy aligns with broader government policies focused on altering the demographic and territorial landscape in favor of Israeli settlers. The Custodian General's involvement is conspicuously limited to benefiting the Jewish population, particularly settler communities, further highlighting the political motivations behind these initiatives.

The impact of these policies exacerbates the already severe land and housing shortages faced by Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem. The use of land managed by the Custodian General for settler housing projects, rather than addressing the housing needs of Palestinian residents, aggravates the existing disparities and tensions. This approach not only contravenes the intended responsibilities of the Custodian General but also perpetuates the cycle of dispossession and marginalization experienced by the Palestinian community in East Jerusalem.

## THE INTERACTION BETWEEN The Eastern Ring Road And The “Kidmat Tzion” Plan

The interaction between the Eastern Ring Road and the “Kidmat Tzion” plan is characteristic of the broader strategic objectives underlying Israeli urban planning and settlement expansion in East Jerusalem. Both projects are designed to serve overlapping goals of enhancing Israeli territorial control, fragmenting Palestinian communities, and undermining the viability of a future Palestinian state.

Following is an in-depth examination of their interaction:

### THE EASTERN RING ROAD

The Eastern Ring Road, also known as the Eastern Bypass Road or the "American Road," is a major infrastructure project aimed at creating a seamless transportation link for Israeli settlers. This north-south highway is designed to connect settlements in the northern and southern parts of East Jerusalem, allowing settlers to bypass Palestinian neighborhoods and travel more efficiently across East Jerusalem. The road is part of a broader strategy to entrench Israeli settlements and facilitate their integration into the urban fabric of "Greater" metropolitan Jerusalem.

## THE INTERACTION BETWEEN The Two Plans and Strategic Implications

### 1. Geographical Overlap and Fragmentation

- **Location:** The “Kidmat Tzion” settlement is strategically placed near the planned route of the Eastern Ring Road. This proximity is no coincidence, as both projects aim to create physical and demographic barriers between Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

- **Fragmentation:** The construction of “Kidmat Tzion”, coupled with the Eastern Ring Road, would further isolate Palestinian neighborhoods such as Ras al-Amud and Abu Dis. The road would act as a barrier, enhancing the physical separation initiated by the settlement.

### 2. Transportation and Accessibility

- **Bypass Routes:** The Eastern Ring Road is designed to provide settlers with a direct and secure route that avoids Palestinian areas. This ensures that settlers in “Kidmat Tzion” and other East Jerusalem enclaves can travel to and from their homes without passing through Palestinian neighborhoods, enhancing their sense of security and normalizing the presence of these settlements.

- **Access Restrictions:** While the road will be technically accessible to Palestinians, its primary function is to serve the needs of settlers. This dual-use narrative is often employed to justify such infrastructure projects, but the reality is that they primarily benefit settlers and entrench Israeli control.

### 3. Security Concerns

- **Fortification:** “Kidmat Zion”’s heavy fortifications, including electric fences, guard stations, and constant patrols, reflect the security concerns inherent in placing a Jewish settlement in a predominantly Palestinian area. The Eastern Ring Road, by providing a secure route for settlers, complements these fortifications by reducing potential friction points between settlers and Palestinians.

- **Militarization:** The interaction between the settlement and the road underscores the militarization of urban planning in East Jerusalem. The involvement of the Israeli forces in designing security measures for “Kidmat Zion” and the construction of security infrastructure around the road highlights the extent to which military considerations shape urban development in the area.

### 4. Political and Geopolitical Ramifications

- **Demographic Impact:** The combined effect of the “Kidmat Zion” settlement and the Eastern Ring Road would be a significant alteration of the demographic balance in East Jerusalem. By increasing the Jewish population and facilitating their movement, these projects aim to solidify Israeli claims over the city.

- **Two-State Solution:** The fragmentation caused by these projects poses a severe challenge to the viability of a two-state solution. By disrupting the territorial contiguity of Palestinian areas, they make it increasingly difficult to establish a viable and contiguous Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

### 5. Legal and Administrative Maneuvers

- **Land Registration and Expropriation:** Land Registration and Expropriation: The use of formal land registration procedures to assert Jewish ownership claims in areas like “Kidmat Zion”, and the expropriation of land for the Eastern Ring Road, demonstrate a coordinated effort to legally and administratively consolidate Israeli control. These maneuvers often occur with little transparency and are aimed at preempting Palestinian claims to the land.

In conclusion, the interaction between the Eastern Ring Road and the “Kidmat Zion” plan clearly illustrates how infrastructure and settlement projects are used in tandem to advance strategic objectives in East Jerusalem. By facilitating the movement and security of settlers while fragmenting Palestinian territories, these projects work together to reshape the urban and political landscape in favor of Israeli control. The broader implications of this interaction highlight the challenges to achieving a negotiated settlement.

## "KIDMAT TZION" DEPLETES LAND RESERVES For Palestinian Housing Needs

The establishment of the "Kidmat Tzion" settlement poses a direct conflict with the housing and land critical needs of Palestinians in East Jerusalem. This conflict arises from several key factors:

**1. Limited Land Availability:** The allocation of land for the "Kidmat Tzion" settlement reduces the already limited land available for Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem. The settlement's construction on occupied Palestinian territory not only restricts the potential for Palestinian housing development but also further exacerbates the already intense competition for land resources in the area.

**2. Accessibility and Infrastructure:** The focus on building housing units for Jewish settlers in the "Kidmat Tzion" settlement diverts attention and resources away from addressing the pressing housing and infrastructure needs of the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem. This diversion hampers efforts to provide adequate housing, utilities, and other essential services to Palestinian communities.

**3. Territorial Disruption:** The physical location of the "Kidmat Tzion" settlement threatens to disrupt the territorial contiguity between East Jerusalem and the West Bank, potentially undermining the prospects of a future contiguous Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. This disruption further complicates the housing and land critical needs of Palestinians in East Jerusalem by fragmenting the region and impeding their ability to access and develop land resources.

**4. Political Interests versus Housing Needs:** The establishment of the "Kidmat Tzion" settlement reflects political motivations aimed at asserting Jewish ownership claims rather than addressing the genuine housing and land critical needs of the Palestinian population. This prioritization of political interests over housing needs contributes to the marginalization and displacement of Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem.

In summary, the establishment of the "Kidmat Tzion" settlement directly conflicts with the housing and land critical needs of Palestinians in East Jerusalem by limiting land availability, diverting resources from essential infrastructure development, disrupting territorial continuity, and prioritizing political interests over addressing genuine housing needs of the Palestinian population.

## “KIDMAT TZION” CONSTRUCTION Defies International Law

The establishment of the “Kidmat Zion” settlement plan in East Jerusalem poses several challenges from the perspective of international law. Here are ways in which the plan defies international law:

**1. Violation of International Humanitarian Law:** The settlement initiative in East Jerusalem, including the “Kidmat Zion” plan, violates international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of an occupying power's civilian population into the territory it occupies. By establishing new housing units for Jewish settlers on occupied Palestinian land, the plan contravenes this fundamental principle of international law.

**2. Disruption of Territorial Contiguity:** The planned settlement's location, cutting off East Jerusalem from the Palestinian town of Abu Dis and creating physical separation from the West Bank, disrupts the territorial contiguity necessary for the establishment of a future Palestinian state. This fragmentation of territory runs counter to international efforts aimed at promoting a coherent and contiguous Palestinian state.

**3. Uncertainty of Land Purchases:** The claim that the land for the “Kidmat Zion” settlement was bought by Jews in 1925 raises questions about the legitimacy of such transactions, especially in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To avoid disputes and conflicts, international law emphasizes the importance of fair and transparent property dealings in occupied territories.

**4. Undermining the Peace Process:** New settlements like “Kidmat Zion” established in sensitive East Jerusalem areas contribute to further destabilizing the already “unsustainable” peace process. A unilateral action like this complicates negotiations, creates obstacles to achieving a lasting peace agreement, and perpetuates tensions on the ground, all of which counter international calls for peaceful solutions.

**In summary,** the “Kidmat Zion” settlement plan in East Jerusalem defies international law by violating principles of international humanitarian law, obstructing the two-state solution, disrupting territorial contiguity, raising concerns about the legitimacy of land purchases, and undermining efforts towards peace and stability in the region.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The commencement of the process to establish the “Kidmat Tzion” settlement in the Palestinian heartland raised concerns and contentious responses by various stakeholders, including the Arab Center for Alternative Planning (ACAP), Palestinian communities, democratic public opinion<sup>7</sup>, and international stakeholders in East Jerusalem. The plan has sparked significant debate and concern regarding its implications on the political landscape, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Opposition to the “Kidmat Tzion” plan in East Jerusalem faces challenges despite efforts by Palestinian civil organizations and Palestinian residents. Past experiences suggest that these actions alone may not deter Israeli planning institutions from proceeding with the plan. Therefore, it is imperative to explore additional strategies to halt the project.

One approach involves following the established legal process, which includes lodging objections in accordance with the law and garnering support from civil society groups within Israel and internationally. Furthermore, engaging foreign diplomatic missions stationed in East Jerusalem, such as the American and European missions, can exert pressure on the Israeli government to reconsider the plan. These diplomatic missions could play a pivotal role in advocating for a cessation of the project due to its potential civil and political ramifications.

Educating foreign missions about the adverse effects of the “Kidmat Tzion” plan is crucial.

Organizing workshops, seminars, and site visits to provide detailed insights into the plan’s motivations, characteristics, and implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the future of Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem can help raise awareness and garner support for halting the project. By involving international stakeholders in the discourse surrounding the plan, there is a greater likelihood of influencing the decisions of the Israeli authorities.

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7. Israeli civil society organizations that are widely involved in watchdog activities regarding intrusive planning in East Jerusalem against the Palestinian population such as “Bimkom”, Ir Amim”, “Emek Shaveh” and few others, as well as political parties and organizations who reject the occupation of East Jerusalem..



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