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AOHR UK Held Online Seminar on The Palestinian Struggle to Protect Their Human Rights

On Wednesday, September 8, 2021, Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK ([AOHR UK](#)) held an online [seminar](#) to take a deeper look into the case of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, where the Palestinians are under threat of eviction from their homes, with Israeli settlers poised to claim them as their own.

The speakers included **Jim Moran**, a former U.S. congressman, **Alaa Salayma**, member of [Sheikh Jarrah](#) neighborhood, whose family is threatened with dispossession from their home, **Zakariya Odeh**, Coordinator for the Civil Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem, **Aseel Barouq**, Palestinian human rights activist, and **Mariam Afifi**, human rights activist.

Nasim Ahmed moderated the seminar which started at 6:00 pm highlighting that the case of Sheikh Jarrah is very difficult to understand and is a perfect illustration of settler colonialism and the microcosm of the apartheid and the reality of Palestinians for over 70 years.

Zakariya Odeh stressed that in Jerusalem, Palestinians are facing a colonial [settler apartheid regime](#), not only an occupation, even before the Nakba of 1967

“After Jerusalem became under the Israeli occupation, the latter took various laws and decisions where it ended by the annexation of Jerusalem. The first decision was to expand the border of the city of Jerusalem from the surrounding villages. The second one was to expand the mandate of the Israeli municipality in East [Jerusalem](#). This was institutionalized by the Knesset resolution in 1980 when they declared that East and West Jerusalem are the united Capital of the state of Israel”.



During the last 2 years Jerusalem has been witnessing a big increase and escalation of the Israeli policies and practices like land confiscation, building settlements, and [home demolition](#), encouraged by the Trump administration which moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and stopped its funding to the UNRWA,” he added.

Odeh pointed out that it is important to know that Israel is using 87% of the land of the occupied East Jerusalem mainly to build settlements.

“Palestinians face many restrictions to obtaining building permits, which left the Palestinians with no choice but to build without a permit. 222 units were built without permits, and according to Israeli laws, all these buildings are the risk of demolition.

He stated that all these restrictions and policies of [home-demolish](#), land confiscation, and denying housing for the Palestinians are part of the demographic control policy that Israel has been implementing.

Odeh concluded saying that “We call this second Nakba for the Palestinians of Jerusalem because most of their properties will be taken and controlled by the Israeli government. This strategy will change the Arab Palestinian character of Jerusalem, while all this is happening under the eye of the [international community](#)”.

Alaa Salaymeh stated that she is one of those people threatened with ethnic cleansing as well as 28 other families in Sheikh Jarrah, where more than 500 people threatened to be homeless. She said, “I want to stay in my home. This is our history, land, homes, and our memories. I will fight for Sheikh Jarrah because it's mine and my people's”.

Salaymeh gave an account of history saying that “In 1956 UNRWA chose 28 families to give them refugee cards and benefits and place them in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, and an agreement was signed to give the 28 families a legal title to the property in 3 years, assuming that at that time they paid a nominal rent, yet we did not receive a legal title to the property from the Jordanian side.

She added that recently, “we used social media to make our voices heard by the international community that could stand in the way of Israel's crimes and violations of human rights in occupied Jerusalem, to hold Israel accountable for its eviction policy, and to ask all states to withhold their assistance to Israel.”



Jim Moran, a former U.S. congressman, started by highlighting that the state of Israel is becoming more right-wing, more nationalist, as more settlers are coming into the country from places like Brooklyn and the like; they are more orthodox, they are more extreme and they seem to be more arrogant in terms of their alleged right to take the land from the people who are legitimately living on it".

"Injustice should make us feel upset and angry and determined to do something about it, but the reality on the ground today is that injustice is going to continue and the only way that it is going to change is that the choir who are willing to listen to these facts of the history and what's happening on the ground today are empowered to make a difference. And the way you get power is through money and vote. It's a financial and political power".

Adding "I think that the fact that the Saudis and Emiratis have thrown the Palestinians under the bus solidifies that reality. So I think we need a different approach".

Moran stressed that the people of Sheikh Jarrah and the indigenous people of America, both suffered horrible injustice, they were slaughtered and ethnic cleansed".

He concluded, "The Palestinians are not united and they have to speak with one united voice, they will have to fight corruption from within."

Aseel Barouq started her speech by saying that she grew up listening to the story of her family and how they were ethnically cleansed from Palestine and throughout the years the only feelings she had were sadness, fear, helplessness, and every time they bomb [Gaza](#) all she was able to do was crying and praying for the martyrs.

"What happened in Sheikh Jarrah is a miracle because it awakened the Palestinian identity especially among the youths in Diaspora, a special sense of pride has sprung out of that crime that Israel is attempting on our people in Sheikh Jarrah.

Some people were ashamed to say that they are Palestinians because of the discrimination we face on a daily basis as refugees in Diaspora, however, now they became so proud to speak about their identity, about Palestine, and about the atrocities that the occupation is committing upon our people", she said.



“Empowerment comes from three things; money, votes, and knowledge”, Barouq highlighted, adding that knowledge is very important and the occupation has been working for years on separating Palestinians among Diaspora, Gaza, [48 territories](#), Jerusalem trying to hide and conceal the truth about what’s happening on the ground.

She added that social media is a very strong tool to amplify the voices of the Palestinians and to hold the governments accountable for what is happening.

In her speech, Mariam Afifi stated that “Our main struggle today as Palestinians in Jerusalem is to fight the ongoing Israeli efforts to erase our existence from this city, these efforts have been going since 1948 until today.

Afifi also highlighted the fact that in line with massacres and the use of force, Israel uses its biased courts as a powerful weapon in order to legitimize its policies of ethnic cleansing and forcible displacement.

She added, “Today, Palestinians in Jerusalem are 40% of the population, and the tactics to empty us vary in different forms. For example, they plan to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from whole neighborhoods using different methods and excuses”.

She affirmed that “Under [international law](#), this is all illegal but as you know it’s a legal case, it is a political case, it’s a colonial case”.

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK)