**PASSIA Meetings 2012**

**Date: 22/March/ 2012**

**Topic: Israeli Jerusalem Municipality: Policies and Practices toward Palestinians**

**Speaker: Dr. Meir Margalit, Founder of the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions (ICAHD) and Member of the Jerusalem Municipality (Meretz Party).**

**Moderator: Dr. Nida Shoughry, Researcher, PASSIA Team**

**Time: 17,00-18,30**

**Place: PASSIA, Jerusalem**

**Agenda:**

* Presentation: Control Mechanisms in East Jerusalem
* A General Discussion: Q&As.

**Proceedings:**

* Before conducting the presentation Dr. Margalit listed his reasons for working with the Municipality in spite of publicly opposing its policy saying that he believes that one can produce more change from within than from without.
* Presentation
* Q&As

**Presentation:**

* Thesis statement: The drive behind Jerusalem’s Israeli Municipality discriminatory practices and unjust policies towards Palestinians is the fact that Palestinians represent a fundamental challenge to Jewish Hegemony in Jerusalem.
* The presentation included the last population census conducted by the Ministry of interior in Jerusalem.
* Numbers showed that Palestinians in Jerusalem represent 37.7% of the Population.
* The total number of residents in Jerusalem is 933113, including 572231 Jewish residents, against 360882 Palestinians.
* The statistics change dramatically for younger generations as Palestinians represent 45.6% of 8 years old residents and 44.9% of 13 and 17 years old residents of the city.
* Dr. Margalit predicted that Palestinians will be a majority in Jerusalem by 2020 if the demographic trends continue to be so.
* The Israeli Municipality understands the threat of having a Palestinian majority in Jerusalem, and is fighting the possibility of having a Palestinian Mayor in Jerusalem in the future if the Palestinians realize that they are a majority and took over the municipal council through elections.
* The Municipality tries to change the demographics of Jerusalem through the following strategies and policies.
* The strategies aim for controlling and ignoring the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem.

**A- Ignoring Mechanisms:**

* Road signs that are installed by the Municipality are partial; they only mention Jewish neighborhoods, while the streets at times lead to both Jewish and Muslim neighborhoods.
* The sign pointing at Bab Al- Khalil (Jaffa Gate) only indicates the Western wall and the Jewish Quarter ignoring Palestinian Christian or Islamic quarters in the old city.
* The road signs designed and installed by the Municipality for roads that connect Western and Eastern Jerusalem carry names of military regimens and terms such as: Paratroopers Roads and Tsahal Sq. for example to constantly remind Palestinians who is the boss here.
* The graphics for Nof Zahav settlement (Golden View) in Jabal Mukaber. Portrays the Israeli settlers’ apartment buildings looking over a view of the so called Mount of Olives, Mount Scopus, City of David, etc. However, they only draw few Palestinian houses in the sight range, despite the fact that these areas are highly populated by Palestinians.
* Dr. Margalit said that the Municipality’s covert policy behind implementing such mechanisms is: If we can’t expel the Palestinians, we will ignore their existence.

**B- Controlling Mechanisms:**

* **Zoning, planning and Building permits:** By controlling the mechanism of building permits the municipality decides where Palestinians can live and the quality of life they are entitled to have.
* **Allocation of budgets for Municipal services:** By controlling the budget the Municipality decides their living standards.
* **417.767.470 NIS** of the Municipal Budget are allocated for East Jerusalem, representing only 9% of the 4.751.000.000 NIS overall Municipal Budget.
* **77% of Palestinians** in East Jerusalem live under **poverty line**. While 62% of Palestinians are identified as poor against 37% of the Jewish Population. However, Palestinians only receive 34% of the overall welfare budget, while the Jews get the remaining 66%.
* The Municipality views poverty as a tool of control as it is easier to control and contain poor people who are too busy with securing their basic daily needs which prevent them from demanding their rights.
* The Municipality has acquired the total amount of 221,994,201 NIS in illegal building fines from 2000-2010.
* Dr. Margalit said that the Municipality has no actual intention to solve the illegal building issue as it represents an additional source of income for the Municipality.
* The Municipality receives around 153 million NIS in Municipal fines (Arnona), 12 million NIS in betterment levy, and 14.3 Million NIS in Building Fines from Palestinians which totals to: 179.9 million NIS.
* A Municipality research showed that completing the current infrastructure in East Jerusalem to bring it to the level of West Jerusalem will cost 1.9 billion NIS, **which are more than 550 million USD**.
* According to Dr. Margalit the money will never be allocated for two reasons:

1- Lack of motivation

2- To prevent building and construction in East Jerusalem which represents another tool to limit Palestinian presence in the city.

* The Municipality imposes numerous obstacles in the face of Palestinians to limit their presence in the city such as:

1. Shortage in zoning plans
2. Shortage of infrastructure
3. Proof of Ownership
4. Lack of plots border registration
5. Specific obstacles (The Holly Basin, the Separation Wall, The Eastern Ring road*)*
6. Professional & bureaucratic Obstacles (permits are not given for detailed plans until the zoning plans are approved)

* The Municipality has a new zoning plan that allots Palestinians additional 4000 Dunams and was presented to the Ministry of Interior for approval in 2010. However, the plan was not approved by the Ministry of Interior under the justification that 4000 Dunams is too much land to be allotted for Palestinians in Jerusalem.
* Although Palestinians and Jews pay the same amount of fee for Permit extraction. However, socioeconomic factors differ: for each permit Palestinians build a restricted number of residential units, while the Israeli build massive apartment buildings.
* Building Permit costs are: 109.492 NIS.
* Dr. Margalit concluded that the discriminatory Israeli Municipal policies can be described as systematic and not arbitrary.

**Discussion:**

* **Q1: What will happen to the residents of Jerusalemite villages that were left outside the Apartheid wall?**
* After constructing the apartheid wall, the Israeli Municipality invented the concept of “Center of Life” which constituted that if a Jerusalemite goes to school, works, or spends most of his day in the West Bank territory his center of life is the West Bank even if he owns a house or resides in Jerusalem. The Municipality also wants to hand over these villages to the PA under the claim that they can’t provide these areas with services. The total 55000 Jerusalemite ID holders used to live outside the wall, the Municipality thought that the majority of their IDs will be revoked; however, Jerusalemites countered that scheme by moving back to Jerusalem instead of moving out, a big Jerusalemite family now manages to live in any available house they can find inside Jerusalem no matter how small it is.
* **Q2: Do you think that other Israelis see things the way you do in terms of the violations committed through Israeli policies? And do you think that establishing an Arab Municipality that works in parallel with the Israeli Municipality is possible?**
* First of all I think Palestinians in Jerusalem need to form a shadow municipality; otherwise they must think of infiltrating the Israeli Municipality through elections and try to affect the internal policies through casting their votes. On the other point, more and more Israelis now realize that these policies might leads to our loss of Jerusalem, and are more willing to accept dividing the city for the two state solution. It is also important to speak to each Israeli Sect with a language that they understands when I debate the question of Jerusalem with right wing politicians I never use terms such as human rights, pluralism, or international law because they don’t understand this language and don’t care for such things. I tell them that East Jerusalem costs us 500,000,000 NIS, imagine what we can do with 500,000,000NIS to the Israeli community if we give East Jerusalem back to Palestinians!
* **But an expert’s study showed that even if the Palestinians participated in the elections they will not be able to win a majority and will in the best case scenario secure nine seats out of 39 seats in the council which cannot change anything!**
* I am not sure if that study is accurate, and even if it was accurate Palestinians can gain political momentum inside the municipal council by lobbying with leftist Israelis, i.e. Meretz party has 3 seats. Noting that only 11 religious Jews are members of the Municipal council and they get things done their way most of the time.
* **As Palestinians we are afraid that democracy in Israel only works if you are Jewish?**
* Even if this was the case, if Palestinians were members of the Municipal council and acquired majority and their needs and demands were overlooked then this puts a question mark over Israeli democracy and would make it look bad in front of the international community.
* **We don’t want to take part in the Municipal elections because we don’t want to legitimize the Israeli occupation or annexation of the city, we don’t want to be part of Israel or melt in the Israeli system, we can’t afford to engage in the system when we are actually occupied?!**
* But you can do more from within. The municipality understands that Jerusalem might be a Palestinian city within ten years if the demographic trends highlighted in the presentation continue. That’s why Israelis are working in the underground to fight and change that possibility. They are taking your city Palestinians need to be more Pragmatic, Pragmatism is the key word here to make new history.
* **What do you expect the current mayor will do to be reelected?**
* I expect to see more house demolitions and strict measures taken against the Palestinians in Jerusalem during election’s year because the mayor is trying to cast votes among extremist Jews. However, a study showed that the mayor also needs to cast 10000 votes from the Arabs to win the elections. Only 6000 Palestinians voted in the last municipal election, which means that 4000 Palestinians can use their votes to pressure the mayor and influence his policy.

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| Meeting Adjourned | 18:30 PM |
| Next Meeting | Not Scheduled |