

Violation of Holy Sites in Jerusalem

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Abstract:

Jerusalem is a holy city to hundreds of millions of people around the world from different faiths(The Applied Research Institute Jerusalem, 2012). For Jews it is the site of Solomon's Temple, and the Jewish bond with Jerusalem has been maintained throughout the generations. Three times each day, Jews turn to face the Western Wall of the Temple when they pray. For Christians, Jerusalem is the city of Jesus' last days. Christians from around the world dream of praying at the Holy Places in Jerusalem. Muslims worldwide yearn for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, second in importance only to the pilgrimage to Mecca. The Dome of the Rock marks the site of the Prophet Mohammad's ascent to heaven. Local Muslims make a special effort to attend Friday prayers at the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan (Dumper & Larkin, 2009).

Key words: Human Rights, Freedom, Religion, Violations, Restriction, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, UNGA, UNSC, OIC, ICJ, NAM, Arab League,

Holy land

The term “*Holy Land*” is found to be related with Palestine, and historically it was originated during the 4th century, when the Byzantine period existed in the world. The precise holiness of this geographical area had been gradually attributed to the billions of sincere and staunch believers around the world. Although the holy land is not the possession of only one religion, still it had the most vital and significant influence on the Israeli-Palestinian never-ending conflicts and throughout the course of history, international involvement had been witnessed for peaceful solutions. Since most of the holy places had also been considered and accepted as archaeological sites in occupied Palestine, the holiness of these places had been maintained for many years despite ethnic, social, and religious differences. Even the differences in cultural norms could not shift the ideologies in weakening the composition of the holy lands’ population (Mack, 2016, p. 5).

In early times, the city of Jerusalem was known as ‘Yerushaláyim’ (or the ‘City of Peace’) in Hebrew language, and similarly in Arabic the word ‘Al-Quds’ means ‘The Holy’, and hence throughout the world had been referred to as ‘the Holy City’. In its historical background of more than 3000 years, Jerusalem had reflected its height of unique holiness due to numerous and countless religious places of three monotheistic religions, viz., Jews, Christians and Muslims. Today, Jerusalem is spread over an estimated area of 125,1 kilometers, whereas the Old City of Jerusalem covers a total area of only within 900 meters. It is surprisingly strange to know that most of the holy places, like Dome of the Rock, Western Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulcher, etc., are lying in the Old City. Keeping in view the kaleidoscopic nature of the multi-faith characteristics of the Holy City, the truthful sincerity and realistic beliefs of all religious followers of Jews, Christians and Muslims is worth noting. The Jews rush towards the Western Wall,

the Muslims move towards the Temple Mount and the Christians look forward to walk down towards the Via Dolorosa (Amari, 2009).

Significance of the City

Most amazingly we are convinced that Jerusalem is perhaps the only city in the world that had continuously drawn the attention of almost every international community. The followers and believers of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, especially tend to adhere to the holy sites of the city of Jerusalem. The centrality of its religious aspects could be attributed towards its controversial historical and political importance, which has been generated to provide its symbolic impression. The root of controversy evolved through religious trends focused mainly on the real entitlement of the city and to find out who had shown the actual and exact attachment to Jerusalem through keen interest and significant importance in religious, historical, cultural, and political aspects. As stated: "In all probability one would never be able to gauge the degree of attachment that an individual community feels toward the city, for attachment is psychological and thus highly subjective". The Muslims (especially Palestinian and Arab Islamists) on the other hand, for example, recognized the strong religious significance of Jerusalem for the Christians and Jews. They stressed on the Muslim characteristics and their entitlement, as well as their attachment to Jerusalem constituted as important part of their doctrine towards the city (Abu-Amr, 1995).

After the renowned Declaration in May 1948, when Israel had been created unlawfully on Palestinian land, the founders of the country provided assurance and made unambiguous promises and wrote that: "The Israeli state will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, education and culture", as well as "promises to safeguard the Holy Places of all religions". Although this promise was chalked down to divert world's

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attention and also to alleviate concern of international communities, towards security and protection of the holy places of only one religion, i.e., Judaism in the newly established Jewish state, whereas the other two existing monotheistic religions (Christianity and Islam), which preferred the Holy Land as their cradle of birth and land of their upbringing, were completely set aside.

This report will not only show the factual evidence regarding Israel's intervention during the last 56 years, but will also present many other unlawful activities. Israel intentionally overlooked all the promises and its authorities in practice, actively supported the destruction of holy places belonging to followers of Christian belief and Muslim faith. A research by the Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA) in Nazareth provided a detailed report which revealed every injustice brutally committed by the Israeli authorities from the time of its inception. Amazingly, a long and authentic list of destroyed mosques and churches by Israel during and after the 1948 war, within occupied Palestine are part of the report, whereas many of the buildings, once used by the local Arab population are now absolutely made inaccessible to them. The report also showed that almost 250 places of worship had been damaged or underwent severe abuse at the hands of Israel (The Electronic Intifada, 2004).

Access to Worship

Israeli authorities have crossed all limits of international human rights, as well as of natural laws, by declaring many places of worship as "closed zones", which are only accessible with special permissions and permits. The process to acquire these permits is quite complicated and Arab citizens are never issued such permits. Similarly, doors and windows of some other buildings are bricked up, whereas fences and barriers are also placed around some of them. It is a pitiful site to see that a strong steel fence had been erected around a 900-year-old mosque at Hittin, so as to make it unreachable for

worshippers. Again, the main gates of one of the Great Mosque of 'Bir-al-Seba' (Beersheva) had been padlocked, though great Muslim population thrived in the city, besides there was no other place to worship for them.

Although it is not a good omen to disallow the accessibility to worship to a person of any religion in the world, but in Jerusalem, it is assumed to be an exceptional case. For example, Muslims residing at a few miles from the al-Aqsa Mosque are strictly disallowed and totally prevented from praying there. Since the access to the city was denied to the Muslims during the recent month of Ramadan, they bowed and knelt in prayers at the checkpoints around Jerusalem. Even the Palestinian Christians are not allowed to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (holiest site for Christians) since they are strictly prevented from entering into the city. During the recently commenced Easter celebrations, many Palestinian Christians were entirely refused permits for entry into Jerusalem. The checkpoints and barriers around and within the city also caused a serious hindrance in providing access to another holiest place for them, viz., the neighboring Bethlehem. To be more precise, the little town of Bethlehem would be entirely encircled by barbed wires and completely surrounded by concrete walls, with the completion of the barrier plan (BTSELEM, 2006, p. 30).

When the Christians are being strictly denied the right to worship in their most sacred and holy sites within the Holy Land, would obviously lead to extreme decline in their population in the region. According to Catholic priests, Khader and Kasis, main cause of evacuation of the Christians from the Holy Land could be attributed to the illegal occupation of Palestine by Israel. Khader described the sacred Church of the Holy Sepulcher, wherein Jesus' death, crucifixion and resurrection is considered to be the most central site (now resembled military barracks), during Easter celebrations, being one of the most holiest times for Christians,. The barriers and blockades had been set up in the

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early morning hours in order to keep the people away from the Church courtyard. To surprise Israel's further aristocracy, the Israeli army officers had been deputed around the gates of the Old City and within different passages, leading towards the Holy Sepulcher. Even the armed forces were placed on roof of the Church, as well as inside it. These activities and steps restricted the freedom of movement of the Palestinian Christians and caused a hitch in their worships in the Church during such auspicious festivals. Even the priests had no freedom to move around freely. Khader said that Palestinian Christians living in the small city of Bethlehem (the city of Jesus' birth), lying just ten kilometers from Jerusalem, had to acquire special permits to enter Jerusalem for worship, from Israeli authorities. Moreover, Christians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip were not allowed to enter Jerusalem without a permit from Israeli authorities. Besides taking control of Palestinian land, Israel had also confiscated the land owned by the Christian just to make adjustments for illegal Israeli settlements (IOL, 2018).

Atmosphere of Intimidation

The Christians living in the Old City of Jerusalem internally feel their presence within the region as an aggressive threat and severe pressure to their life and property at the hands of Jewish settlers. According to the statements from Church leaders, priests had been abused verbally and even sometimes beaten up. The main tension among the Christians and Armenians quarters erupted because of the one square kilometer ancient walled city, which included the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Christians considered this Church as their holiest place, with firm beliefs that Jesus was crucified and resurrected at this site. Usually the churches are of the view that they are continuously and simultaneously facing assaults from three different fronts: (i) a war of slow destruction and erosion from uncompromising Jewish settlers; (ii) an unprecedented

demands for undue taxes by city council of Jerusalem; and (iii) a proposal to sale off of church land to private developers (Sherwood, 2018).

In many other similar cases, the Arab citizens are often discouraged very effectively from having access to their holy places, as they are now completely placed in the middle of the land under Jewish control. An atmosphere of severe intimidation and non-stop enmity still prevails between Israel and Arabs, who are trying to enter these areas. Looking at a simple example in this regard, the church and mosque in the destroyed village of Suhmata are being utilized as car parking for visitors just near the gate, at the entrance into a field of Jewish cattle farm and then walk further on foot. However, local Arab residents usually report that their license plates are well checked and recorded before cars are stopped by the gate and at the same time, the owners sometimes are at the risk of prosecution.

Various measures, like installation of metal detectors, electronic gates, and other new precautionary steps in the Old City and within the compound of Al-Aqsa Mosque are in fact, simply the continuation of Israeli policies that it had been attempting to pursue, during the past 50 years of its aggressive and violent military rule over the Occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The main aim of such atrocities by Israel was intended towards the expansion of political, economic, social, and demographic control over the city under Jewish policies, and at the same time, make attempts for further eviction of the Palestinians and dispossessing them to the lowest stages.

It had been very rightly and precisely quoted that: “These policies have included the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem and its isolation from the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, discriminatory urban and zoning policies, home demolitions and settlement expansion, residency revocation, and shutting down of Palestinian

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institutions. All of this is within the context of the growing messianic fanaticism and government support to groups, like the Temple Institute which aims at building a temple in the Noble Sanctuary, just to replace the Al-Aqsa Mosque (Buttu, 2017).

Holy Sites in Jerusalem Taken Over by and Under Israeli Extremists

It is amazingly strange to find out that Israeli authorities had allowed settlers groups, generally comprising of atrocious religious extremists, to freely take over mosques and shrines to be converted into synagogues (the Jewish places of worship). The religious Muslim authorities had never attempted to deconsecrate these sites. For example, the tomb in al-Nabi Rubin Mosque squarely placed on the Tel Aviv-Ashdod Highway had now been covered with Hebrew scripts to be used for worship by Jewish population. Again it had been reported in June 2004 that Jewish extremists (settlers group) forcibly broke into the shrine of Sheikh Sima'an, near Kofr Saba. They replaced all the Islamic symbols with Jewish scripts and signs, redesigned the grave in accordance with their own religious customs and trends, and eventually padlocked the site so that they themselves could only have its sole and exclusive access. In order to attract more and more worshippers, the Israelis finally put up sign boards on neighboring roads to determine the accurate location of this new place for worship.

Demolition of Mosques and Shrines as an Act of Vengeance

The religious worshippers struggled hard and repeatedly pressed to reclaim their holy sites but despite all anomalous and odd obstacles, they had to face the ultimate retaliation from the extremists. A factual example of such incident pertains to the former inhabitants of Um al-Faraj (a small village north-east of Acre), had been expelled in 1953, They continued to campaign for many years to regain access to their mosque and even enjoined with local Jewish farming community, Moshav Ben Ami, for using it as a

storage barn. However after some time, in December 1997, the mosque was destroyed completely and no one had ever been prosecuted or held responsible for this incident. But the former villagers had a vague feeling that the Moshav Bin Ami was behind the plan of destroying the mosque. It was again a pity to see that the members of Moshav Yashin destroyed a mosque in Wadi Hawarith in February 2000, just after two weeks when the Muslims had completed its renovation. Similarly, a mosque in Sarafand was altogether destroyed in July 2000 but soon afterwards it had been repaired for worship by the former villagers. The main aim to demolish the places of worship unofficially had been intended to persuade against Muslim and Christian worshippers, who had been pressing their claims for possessions of holy sites, as could be witnessed from the fact that no one faced prosecution nor had been even penalized in any of these cases.

Since the time that Israel had taken over the control of Jerusalem, it had been severely engaged in mass destruction and demolition of sacred sites and entire renowned historical monuments within the adjoining neighborhoods. The Israeli authorities strictly intended to displace local residents who attempted to trace their roots within the city for their generations, and unduly imposed widespread limitations and restrictions on Muslim and Christian worshippers to get any access towards their holy sites, besides usurping many of their natural laws and human rights (Balousha, 2018).

Moreover, the Israeli authorities have separated the city from its Palestinian hinterland through the imposition of a complex system of military checkpoints and permits, preventing their access to the city and thus, isolating these holy sites from every community whose identities are based and grounded on those holy places. As a result, the majority of Palestinians, Muslims and Christians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are not allowed to have access to the city and its holy sites. The Israeli restrictions on Palestinian freedom of worship had been loudly decried in a report

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submitted by the US State Department, and precisely noted that: "Strict closures and curfews imposed by the Israeli government negatively affected residents' ability to practice their religion at holy sites, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, as well as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem" (Shams, 2017).

As a repercussion of the Israeli restrictions, many holy places of worship and historical monuments are facing severe conditions of disrepair and are being led towards critical deterioration. For example, second floor of the Catholic Church in al-Bassa had already fallen whereas the remaining part is on the verge of a near collapse. Again, in Suhmata (in the northern Galilee), a church and a mosque are almost roofless. Surprisingly, nothing is being done for the prevention of the on-going vandalism and recurring destruction inflicted baselessly on these holy sites. Even the State officials do not seem to be interested in protecting these sites for worshippers, whereas the police and military forces do not attend to prosecutions.

Some arsonists had set the Forty Mosque in Beit Shean on fire in March 2004, causing extensive and much damage all around, including the collapse of the roof, which had now been placed under the administrative control of the Public Parks Authority. When Muslim officials tried to publicize the damage through photographs, the police confiscated their identity cards. Many Israeli settlers and militant groups had even sprayed and painted across the walls with very typical and critical wordings: "DEATH TO THE ARABS" as a threat for the Muslims. It was also critically reported that a person residing in Tiberias attempted to set on flames in June 2004, the Al-Omery Mosque (in the center of the city) with a Molotov Cocktail and raised his voice loudly while shouting: "I don't want to see Arabs or Muslims before my eyes..... I will burn the lot of them!" Moreover, during the course of critical times many attempts had been

repeatedly made to set ablaze Al-Omery Mosque along with the neighboring al-Bahar Mosque within the city of Tiberias.

Conclusion

The Holy City of Jerusalem is undoubtedly under severe and grave danger when the Judeo-Zionists are attempting to deepen their control over the Holy City of Jerusalem. The so-called Trump Declaration imposed on Jerusalem and establishment of the Israeli Nation State laws are further exposing the apparent Zion-Fascist Nazi characteristics evolved earlier for the occupation of Palestine. The whole world had condemned Israel and US for refusing to stick to the International laws and for not adhering to the UN Resolutions. As a result of such negated activities, the policies of both the Imperialist Nations have been exposed and they both stand isolated, as well. But still the Israeli occupation gradually continued so as to deepen its existence in showing the presence of Israel in West Jerusalem, despite the fact that they have started the eviction of Palestinians from East Jerusalem. The Zionist plans are quite clear since they intend to take over all the historical places in Palestine and apparently show no keen interest in creating a peaceful atmosphere in the region nor seem to be inclined towards taking viable steps for some justified solution. The ethnic cleansing of Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli authorities continued unabated and with sheer force. On the other hand, the world kept on looking at the matter with closed eyes. Despite all the odds, hardships and sufferings, the Palestinian people continued to carry on their struggle to resist the illegal occupation of their land by Israel. Currently, the matter of great urgency leads towards the defense of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and eventually, to defend all segregated Holy Sites of Christians, Muslims and Jewish people from destruction and complete collapse should be considered as a matter of high priority.

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The Muslims respect all three great Abrahamic religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam and simultaneously feel it our responsibilities to respect and keep reverence of all Holy Books and Prophets. Today Zionism, which shows an ideology of ethno-religious supremacy, poses severe threats to the entire Western Asia, as well as the entire world. An immediate check and viable steps for prevention must be taken so as to hinder the consequences for the sake of humanity. It is being clearly witnessed that Judeo-Zionists set-up have severe intentions of destroying the Holy Al-Aqsa and Qubat-us-Sakhra, since their announcement to rebuild the Third Temple within the Haram-Al-Sharif, after destroying the holy and revered Islamic Mosques. Moreover, the Zionists also have plans to destroy the Holy Church of Sepulcher (holiest Christian site), since Netanyahu had already threatened that Al-Qaeda had serious plans to demolish it. All are well aware that Israeli secret service, Mossad had deeply penetrated into these networks of terrorists. Thus, the recently operation undertaken under the name of False Flag Terror, intends to target the Holy Mosques and/or Churches, will eventually be carried out by Mossad agents, posing as Al-Qaeda or ISIS terrorists.

The attention of the world must also be diverted to take note of the foundations of two Holy Mosques had been heavily damaged and considerably weakened, because Israelis had almost removed bulk of the soil from under the foundation of Haram-Sharif. Both the Al-Aqsa and the Qubat-us-Sakhra can easily be grounded and destroyed by minor tremors. The plans are well in place and Israel is only waiting for the right strategic time for an operative action for the collapse of these two mosques. Even in Hebron, the Holy Ibrahimi Mosque is also under attack by Jewish fanatics. Setting aside the Muslims, the Palestinian Christians of Gaza Strip are not being permitted to travel to Bethlehem for Christmas prayer at the Church of Nativity (birthplace of Jesus Christ). Today, most

Holy City of Bethlehem for all Christendom, stands surrounded by the huge and monstrous Apartheid Wall.

The Christendom of Western countries are standing as silent observers on this matter. Although Christian Zionism is guilty of collaborating with the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and the destruction of Christians, as well as Christianity completely from the land of their inheritance and the birthplace of Prophet Jesus Christ. However, it is surprisingly unfortunate that some Muslims of certain Islamic regimes are still today collaborating with Israel. They have nearly abandoned the cause of Jerusalem and hardships of Palestine for their selfish petty interests, which should be condemned by all Muslims. The global forces must stand united to resist and make severe attempts to defeat the nefarious designs of the Imperialist Zionist.

The World has consequently witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem, wherein the great religions are suffering severely and its unique place in the history of humanity is gradually fading out. Almost many great Prophets and Saints had not only walked across the land of Palestine, but had also delivered their message about the One and only Merciful Loving God. Their messages comprised of universal compassions pertaining to justice, equality, love and peace for all humanity. It is unfortunate today that the Land of Peace stands almost occupied by the evil forces of hatred, violence, terrorism, conflicts, etc. Being the sacred city for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Jerusalem is now under grave hardships and surrounded by severe aggression. It is now high time for the world to rise in oneness for the cause of humanity and protect our common civilization and traditional heritage.

The Zionist plans to destroy the holy sites of Muslims and Christians could obviously lead to conflicts and the repercussions might lead to wars among nations. These plans are undoubtedly based on Apocalyptic visions, which could be a serious

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threat of Third World War, leading towards death and destruction of ARMAGEDDON, killing billions of innocent civilians, besides human genocide beyond proportions. It becomes our thorough responsibility as good human beings and peace-loving Muslims to make the world well aware of the endangered threats that are being planned by Zionism's fanaticism and extremism to the world peace, and we must accordingly attempt to save Jerusalem and Palestine, and in a broader sense, also save the world.

As a remedy against all odds, it is suggested that some High Powered Committee must be constituted, comprising of leading citizens and renowned personalities from various religions and across the world, but they should stand with the Palestinian cause. The Committee must probe into every aspect of the matter and undertake detailed study of the present danger that Zionism plans to cause in very existence of holy sites of Muslims and Christians Holy Sites. It should further look into various reports presented in UNGA, UNSC, OIC, NAM, Arab League, International Court of Justice, and all other major international institutions and forums for confirmation and authentication. This committee should become operational at once so as to expose Israel and its nefarious plans. It is the duty and responsibility of every Muslim in the world to defend the Holy Land of Palestine, besides defending the holy sites in Jerusalem. It is our firm belief and strong hope that the day is not far when Palestine will be free from all atrocities.

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