



RFA - Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem

Released on April 6th

The Lemkin Institute is dismayed by the recent assault on and incursion into the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem by Israeli police and settlers. In January 2024, the Lemkin Institute published a [statement](#) condemning the attack on the Armenian Quarter in East Jerusalem by armed mobs associated with an Israeli-Australian businessman, Danny Rubenstein.

This recent assault follows the Israeli state's repeated attempts to evict indigenous Armenians from the Quarter. Amid the ongoing provocations by Azerbaijan against the Republic of Armenia in the South Caucasus, this attack represents another effort to compromise Armenian autonomy and sovereignty. The disturbing level of Armenophobia present in genocidal regimes from Azerbaijan to Israel is alarming and places Armenians in a state of constant peril.

Expansive settler raids and government demolitions have characterized Israel's posture toward Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem, The Armenian Quarter in the Old City has not been spared. The Armenian community in Jerusalem, specifically the Patriarchate, acts as a crucial custodian of Christian holy sites in the city, representing both Christian and Armenian culture in Jerusalem. Attempts to buy land at the heart of the Quarter mirror a past scandal involving the [Greek Orthodox Church](#), in which the Church sold two Palestinian-run hotels to foreign companies acting as a front for Jewish settlers. The sale generated uproar and concern around the globe, resulting in the ousting of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch [Irenaios I](#).

We highlight that the 1,600-year-old Armenian community residing in the historic Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem has been [embroiled](#) in a tense standoff against armed settlers since last summer. The conflict escalated following the revelation that the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem had struck a previously undisclosed land lease deal with Xana Gardens, a real estate company [allegedly associated with settler interests](#), to develop a luxury hotel in the "Cows' Garden" area, which encompasses crucial parts of the Armenian Quarter. The community,

already grappling with a significant decline in population over the years, reacted with outrage upon learning about the details of the deal.

On 26 October 2023, the leader of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem announced the cancellation of the land lease deal. Yet, tensions at the Cows' Garden continue to remain high. Representatives from Xana Gardens have sent contractors, armed settlers, and bulldozers to seize the land – which, along with the parking lot, includes Armenian Church property and the homes of the Nalbandian family as well as four others. These provocations have led to numerous confrontations, including altercations between armed settlers and Armenian residents. For months, Armenian community members in Jerusalem have peacefully camped in the Cows' Garden to protect the Armenian Quarter from settler incursions. The peaceful protestors have often been met with violent force by Israeli settlers and police, with Armenians frequently being injured or arrested. In February, the Armenian community of Jerusalem officially launched a lawsuit to invalidate the real estate deal negotiated by the Patriarch.

Wednesday's assault took place at 11am with an incursion by Israeli police and settlers into the Cows' Garden. No permits or court orders were shown. Subsequently, there were illegal evictions and damage inflicted on Armenian Patriarchate assets, as well as attacks targeting religious figures and native Armenians. Assaf Harel was the commanding officer overseeing the eviction.

The Armenian community, deeply rooted in the Old City for centuries, sees the attempted land takeover as an existential threat to its cultural heritage and identity. Residents fear that losing control over the Cows' Garden area would jeopardize their homes and undermine the historical significance of the Armenian Quarter, which has served as a refuge for Armenians for centuries.

The Armenian community's determination to safeguard its land and heritage has garnered widespread local and international support. In response to ongoing demolition attempts and intimidation tactics by Xana Gardens and its associates, the Armenian residents have demonstrated remarkable resilience and solidarity while organizing protests, maintaining a constant presence in the disputed area, and refusing to back down despite facing arrests and threats from Israeli authorities and settlers.

We at the Lemkin Institute call for the protection of historically and culturally Armenian land and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. The continued effort to dispossess the Armenian community from their ancestral and historic lands in Jerusalem is fueled by the same eliminationist and settler-colonial process we see throughout the West Bank. The Lemkin Institute calls on Israeli courts to immediately invalidate any deal between the Armenian Patriarchate and Xana Gardens. Further, we demand the Israeli authorities respect the minority rights of Armenians and Christians throughout Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Israel. Whether the targets are Palestinian Muslims or Armenian Christians, Israel must cease all efforts to expand Jewish settlements at the expense of non-Jews and commit to the protection of all peoples and faiths throughout the region.