



Statement on Significance of the Armenian Quarter in East Jerusalem

Released on December 12, 2023

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention is deeply concerned by threats to the integrity of the Armenian Quarter in East Jerusalem. We call on the United States and other close allies of Israel to take it upon themselves to guarantee the Armenian community due process in this land dispute. The global Armenian community has already lost one important historical land this fall — Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), which was forcibly depopulated when Azerbaijan invaded, massacred Armenians, and terrorized almost the entire Armenian population into fleeing. The Armenian people cannot lose another.

The Armenian Quarter makes up about one-sixth of the city of Jerusalem. It is 1,600 years old, dating back to the reign of Roman Emperor Constantine. The first settlement of Armenians in Jerusalem predates Constantine even, with Armenians having settled in Jerusalem as early as the first century BCE when the Armenian Empire controlled nearby territories in Syria. Although the Armenian population in Jerusalem today is very small, the Armenian Quarter remains an important part of the Armenian Diaspora presence as the oldest remaining living diaspora of Armenians. The Quarter houses a diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

In July 2021, the Armenian Patriarchate signed an agreement to lease a significant plot of land (called the “Cow’s Garden”) to Australian developer Danny Rubenstein for 98 years at a low annual rent of a few hundred thousand dollars per year. Rubenstein planned to build a luxury hotel on the site, necessitating the destruction of many of the existing buildings. The deal came as a shock to the local community, the greater Armenian Diaspora, and Palestinian authorities, the latter of which felt as if the deal encroached on their own sovereignty. It also raised eyebrows due to its asymmetric rewards.

In response to this opposition, the Patriarchate announced on November 1, 2023, that it would be canceling the deal. However, Danny Rubenstein’s company, XANA, has refused the Patriarchate’s cancellation. It has brought bulldozers to the site and is beginning construction in the Cow’s Garden area.

Local Armenians have responded to the destruction of Cow’s Garden with peaceful protests in the form of public gatherings and a sit-in where construction had begun. Israeli police and civilians have met these protests with violence, using dogs and firearms to intimidate the peaceful protestors. Danny Rubenstein and George Warwar, Chairman and Director of XANA International, appear to be using force and intimidation to deter the Armenian community from attempting to protect its land.

The cultural heritage of the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem must be safeguarded from the developers and the armed settlers who are enabling them, ostensibly with the aim of creating a homogenized Jewish ethnostate in Palestinian territories. We stand with the Armenian community as they continue to resist the development of this land through peaceful demonstrations and by refusing to leave the premises. The

Armenian community has already lost one significant historical community in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh this year. It must not lose another.