



Mapping department of Arab Studies Society reopened after brief closure

As recently announced, on Tuesday March 14 2017, the Mapping and Geographic Information Systems Department of the Arab Studies Society was forcibly shut down by Israeli forces in the occupied East Jerusalem neighborhood of Beit Hanina. Despite the [initial order](#) of a six month closure, today information was released that the Palestinian mapping institution has now [been reopened](#). Despite the success of the reopening of the Arab Studies Society, the Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem (CCPRJ) remains highly concerned about Israel's active efforts of the de-Palestinization of Jerusalem.

Israeli police and intelligence forces stormed the office of the Map and GIS Department in Dahiat Al Bared Junction, North of occupied East Jerusalem, and initially ordered its closer for 6 months. The order to close the department was issued by Israel's Public Security Minister, Gilad Erdan. Erdan claimed that the department was, "operating within Israel's municipal boundaries of Jerusalem and under the supervision of the Palestinian Authority, which is a violation of the 1994 Oslo Accords". Director of the department, Khalil Tufaki, during his interrogation explained to Israeli authorities that the office is located within the PA-controlled West Bank and that the office's research did not collaborate with the PA. In 1967 Beit Hanina was annexed and illegally placed under Israeli control, however the neighborhood of al-Balad remains behind Israel's separation wall and exists as part of the West Bank cut off from the municipality jurisdiction. The office files and computers were confiscated; however Director Tufaki confirmed that the office materials and equipment have now been returned. Tufaki commented on the raid and brief closure by stating that Israel, "does not want anyone to speak or show its violations to the world and takes advantage of international circumstances to silence the voice of Palestinians."

The arbitrary closure of the department office is not an isolated incident. Since August 2001, Israeli authorities have permanently or temporary closed at least 32 Palestinian public institutions and NGOs in occupied East Jerusalem,ⁱ including the PLO headquarters (Orient House), the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce, the Arab Studies Society, the Cultural Forum Society, the Agricultural and Industrial Chamber of Commerce, the Higher Council of Tourism, and the Small Projects Center

established by the European Union. The above canceled activities were all public events aimed to serve the Palestinian social, cultural, and economic development in Jerusalem.

Israel's policy of closing Palestinian institutions and banning Palestinian public activities has systematically undermined Palestinian freedom of expression and assembly, and stifled Palestinian political, social, cultural, and economic development in occupied East Jerusalem. It is a policy of persecution carried out against organized Palestinian society that continues to resist the myriad of arbitrary and discriminatory laws, policies, and measures whereby Israel seeks to permanently annex the occupied Palestinian city and transform it into a predominantly Jewish-Israeli town. Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Saeb Erekat, commented on the closure of Palestinian institutions as a process of, "systematic Israeli policies against a Palestinian presence in occupied East Jerusalem", while he then added that these actions can be understood as a means to, "consolidate Israel's apartheid regime in the occupied city, as well as in the rest of occupied Palestine, and aim to create a Palestinian demographic minority."

Based on the fact that the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people in occupied East Jerusalem is universally recognized, the Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem calls upon the international community to protect Palestinian institutions and Palestinian freedom of expression and assembly in occupied East Jerusalem. The right to freedom of expression and assembly are essential to ensure Palestinian self-determination and development in the city and a *sine-qua non* for peace.

The Civic Coalition calls upon the international diplomatic community: to take immediate and effective action in order to ensure that Israel will stop the arbitrary closure of Palestinian institutions and events.

We also urge the EU to adopt the relevant recommendations included in the annual East Jerusalem reports of EU heads of missions, to apply intensive pressure on Israel to allow the reopening of all Palestinian institutions, and to provide requested diplomatic protection for public activities of Palestinian official and civil society organizations in occupied East Jerusalem.
