

Hallisa Residents Struggle

Against Evictions of Protected Tenants

And Against Provocative Settlements

About Hallisa

Hallisa is a poor neighborhood on the Eastern entrance to Haifa.

Hallisa was built in the 1930s and 1940s as an Arab neighborhood, at the time of the British occupation. In 1948 almost all of Hallisa's residents, like almost all of the 70,000 Arab residents of Haifa, were forced into exile. By the Israeli "law of absentees" their property was transferred to the state, even if some of them stayed in other places as citizens of Israel.

After 1948 new Jewish emigrants were settled in Hallisa, most of them as "protected tenants" – paying initial "key money" to get the right to live there, and then paying a very low monthly rent. After years of neglect Hallisa was in a very bad physical condition and a well known poor neighborhood. In the 1970s and 80s more Arab people started to rent in Hallisa, most of them internally displaced refugees from towns and villages that were destroyed in 1948.

Now the majority of the Hallisa population is Arab. The Arab community of Hallisa has very strong communal links, with many extended families keeping together in harsh conditions, marginalized in the big city. The Jewish community in Hallisa is very mixed, with some old people left when their families moved to better neighborhoods, some Russian emigrants and some of Ethiopian origin.

Protected Tenants under Eviction Threat

The current problem is a result of uncertainty about the ownership of some building blocks in the center of Hallisa. Some 20 years ago, the protected tenants there revealed that the people that used to rent the houses and collect the monthly rent fee are not registered as the owners of those buildings. Naturally, they refused to pay the rent until the claimed owners can prove their ownership.

One of the claimed owners is now permanently abroad, the other passed away in 2001, and his son, Mr. Avraham Galanti is waging a legal campaign against the tenants. Most of the tenants lost all court hearings just because they didn't have proper legal representation. Others agreed to capitulation agreements where they give up their rights as protected tenants in order to stay in their homes as regular renters without any legal protection.

In the only case that was heard to the bitter end, the Hamdan family first won the court against their eviction, as Judge Ramzi Hadid in the Haifa low court was convinced that Mr. Galanti can't prove his ownership and though has no ground to sue the tenants. This verdict was abolished by Galanti's appeal to the Haifa district

court, as the court decided that according to the “Law for protection of tenants”, the question of ownership is not relevant to Galanti’s right to evict “his” tenants.

A major issue here is the position of “The Israeli Land Management Authority” (known as “Haminhal”), as it inherited the absentee Palestinian owners, and is registered as the legal owner of most of the disputed buildings. In 2001 there was an “ownership settlement” on those lands, which according to the law should finally settle all claims. Nobody claimed ownership. In 2004 the authority suggested to Galanti to ask for a special permission for a delayed appeal on the rights registry. In 2007, in spite of the fact that Galanti didn’t even tried to appeal, Haminhal backed his ownership claims in court in support of his campaign to evict the tenants.

In February 2009, the Abu Shamla family, mother and father to 9 children, was forcefully evicted from the home. The whole Hallisa area was closed by a huge force of more that 230 police and special units. Some hooded attackers beat the family members without any warning and dragged them to the police detention vehicle. All their personal belongings, including medicine for the father’s heart disease, the children’s school bags, books, clothes, was given by the state prosecutor to Galanti.

Broken negotiations and the settlement threat

After the shock of this brutal eviction, a popular committee was built to try to restore the rights of the tenants and to prevent farther evictions. The committee opened negotiations with the claimed owner. It offered several paths to agreed solution. It suggested a framework for the tenants to buy the ownership of their homes (if the issue of ownership will be resolved), as is the policy of the state with most protected tenants today. It suggested restoring the tenants to their protected status against payment of all their dues. At the last meeting the committee suggested a process of legal bridging between the two sides.

Lately Mr. Galanti told the negotiators that he is not interested any more to reach an agreed solution. He said he was preparing for an imminent eviction against some 5 families, with full police support. He also said that in order to prevent the families from returning to their homes he will settle on the spot Jewish families in the evicted homes. Taking into account that Hallisa is the poorest neighborhood of Haifa, the houses are in poor conditions and the area prone of daily violence, with its housing market broke much before the general depression, the only people that may agree to come and live in place of the evicted families are professional trouble makers.

Till now Arabs and Jews in Hallisa suffer together the perils of poverty, neglect and discrimination. Galanti’s settlement plan is a vicious provocation, trying to create a constant region of friction and hatred in order to serve his mean commercial interest to evict the tenants without any compensation.

The popular committee declared this as a threat to the whole of Hallisa, the whole Arab community in Haifa and a danger to the delicate relationship between Jews and Arabs in the city. In an emergency meeting on July 8 2009 it called on all the responsible institutions and leaders in Haifa to take immediate action to stop this danger before the damage is done.