

Is Dubai helping ethnic cleansing in Palestine?

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The government of Dubai recently allowed a major bankroller of Jewish settlement expansion in the West Bank to open at least two Jewelry stores in the Gulf emirate.

According to reliable sources in the United Arab Emirates, of which Dubai is a key member-state, Israeli billionaire and diamond magnate Lev Leviev is preparing to open two large jewelry stores in Dubai, a world's hub of Jewelry trading.

The first store will be opened soon at the Burj Dubai Mall (Dubai Mall Tower) while a second store is slated to be opened later this year in the new Atlantis Hotel on the Jumeirah Palm Island.

Leviev has already opened one store in Dubai in March, 2008, in the lobby of al-Qasr Hotel on Madinat Jumeirah.

The Dubai authorities were initially reluctant to grant the Israeli billionaire a license to do business in the oil-rich emirate. However, Leviev reportedly successfully lobbied "North American and European connections" to convince Dubai officials to reconsider their objections.

Leviev's companies, including Africa-Israel and Leader Management & Development as well as several other subsidiaries, have been quite active in displacing Palestinian villagers from their homes and land in several parts of the West Bank.

The two firms have built hundreds of settler units in at least five Jewish settlements constructed on land illegally seized from its Arab proprietors.

In recent years, a company called Leader belonging to Leviev built the settlement of Zufim on private Arab land seized from the village of Jayyous. Danya Cebus, a subsidiary of the Leviev-owned company Africa-Israel has built hundreds of settler units on land stolen from the village of Bilin. Numerous additional settler units were built in the two large settlements of Ma'ali Adomim, a few kilometers east of Jerusalem, and Har Homa, near the predominantly Christian Arab town of Beit Sahur."

Israel hopes that these settlements will cut off East Jerusalem from the rest West Bank, thus making the Palestinian dream of making the city the future capital of a prospective Palestinian state utterly unrealistic and outright impossible.

In addition to his intensive involvement in Jewish settlement expansion, including colonies defined by the inherently unjust Israeli justice system as "manifestly illegal," Leviev has

donated undisclosed but reportedly large sums of money to the Land Redemption Fund, a land-grabbing organization affiliated with Gush Emunim, the ideological group behind Jewish settlement activities in the West Bank.

According to the Israeli newspaper, Yedeot Ahronot, the Land Redemption Fund uses fraud and strong-arm tactics to seize land from Palestinians for settlement expansion.

Last year the Israeli group, Peace Now, and other settlement-watch groups, discovered that hundreds of settler units built in the settlement of Matityahu in the Salfit region, in the central West Bank, were actually built on private Palestinian land seized at gun point from its legal and rightful Palestinian owners.

However, despite the discovery, the Israeli government refused to dismantle the illegal settler units, with one Israeli official saying that “this problem will be discussed with the Palestinian Authority in the context of final-status talks.”

Leviev’s companies are actually destroying the lives of thousands of Palestinians by narrowing their horizons and dispossessing them of their livelihoods.

Abdullah Abu Rahma from the village of Bilin and Sharif Omar from Jayyous told representative of the human rights group Adala-New York (www.adalahny.org), which monitors Israeli theft Palestinian land, that “Leviev’s companies are destroying the olive groves and farms that have sustained our villages for centuries.”

“We call on people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied against apartheid South Africa.”

The mayor of Jayous, which suffered incalculable losses due to Leviev’s destructive rampage in the northern West Bank, told this reporter that “Leveiv is indulging in ethnic cleansing against our community and our farmers.”

“He is building settlements at our expense; he is destroying our land, our farms, and our orchards, and at the same time he is opening business in Dubai in order to finance his crimes against our people. Shame on Dubai and its government.”

Some Jewish organizations opposed to the Israeli policy of ethnic cleansing and apartheid have also called on the countries of the world to boycott Israeli businesses and firms involved in dispossessing Palestinians of their land.

“We call on the government and people of the United Arab Emirates to join the growing international campaign to boycott Lev Leviev’s companies due to their construction of Israeli colonial settlements,” declared Daniel Lang-Levitsky of Jews Against the Occupation-NYC.

“A major Israeli violator of Palestinian rights and international law should not be opening jewelry stores in Dubai,” said Issa Ayoub, a spokesperson for the Adala group. Adala organized eight boycott protests outside Leviev’s new Madison Avenue Jewelry store in New York City over the last five months.

The Palestinian Authority has refused to comment on the Dubai government decision to allow the settler bankroller Leviev’s to open business ventures in the oil-rich emirate.

One Palestinian official contacted by telephone said “I don’t know anything about this affair

and I have not heard of Leviev.”

A Hamas official in the Gaza Strip said “the Palestinian people were feeling embittered and betrayed by this scandalous behavior on the part of the Dubai government.”

“We were hoping that Dubai would stand with us against the genocidal Israeli regime and its unrelenting efforts to ethnically cleanse our people from their ancestral homeland. We had never imagine that a day would come when we had to appeal to an Arab country to refrain from harming us and undermining our cause.”

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