



الحملة الأهلية للحفاظ على
مقبرة مأمّن الله المقدسية
Campaign to Preserve
Mamilla Jerusalem Cemetery

CONTACT: Jen Nessel, 212.614.6449, jnessel@ccrjustice.org
David Lerner, Riptide Communications, 212.260.5000

Palestinian Community Leaders Urge UN and UNESCO to Oppose Israeli Construction of “Museum of Tolerance”

CCR and Campaign Continue to Press UN Officials

July 21, 2011, New York, Jerusalem – Forty-five prominent Palestinians from Jerusalem and Israel, including Christian and Muslim religious figures, politicians, businesspeople and civil society activists, today addressed United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navenethem Pillay, and UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, urging that they take action to stop the continued destruction of Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem. The *Campaign to Preserve Mamilla Jerusalem Cemetery* – a group of 60 individuals with ancestors buried in the cemetery who originally petitioned the same two officials in February 2010 with legal counsel from the Center for Constitutional Rights – transmitted the letter to the Center for Constitutional Rights, which submitted it to the UN and UNESCO officials today.

The signatories span a wide political spectrum, including Israeli Arab members of the Knesset from various political parties and Jerusalemite Ministers and senior officials of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Prominent religious leaders have also joined the appeal, including Greek Orthodox Archbishop Attalah Hanna and Shaykh Akrama Sabri – President of the High Islamic Council, with inter-denominational support from Jerusalem community groups. (The list of signatories is attached).

The letter comes in the wake of the Israeli Interior Ministry’s approval on July 12, 2011 of construction plans for the U.S.-based Simon Wiesenthal Center’s “Center for Human Dignity – Museum of Tolerance” on the site of part of an ancient Muslim cemetery in the heart of Jerusalem, where thousands of human remains, gravestones and archaeological artifacts have already been desecrated and destroyed. This approval gives the final administrative green light for construction to begin immediately. It follows the Jerusalem Municipality’s razing of dozens of grave markers in the small part of the cemetery that remains intact, provoking outrage among the Petitioners and other Palestinians who consider the cemetery part of their cultural heritage.

In their letter, the community leaders expressed alarm at the official Israeli permission for construction work to begin on the site of the cemetery “for what they brazenly and unashamedly call a Center for Human Dignity – Museum of Tolerance! What humanity could this possibly refer to? And what dignity? And what tolerance?” Their letter appeals to the UN officials “for immediate intervention” by “sending a delegation to investigate the situation and putting pressure on the government of Israel, as was requested by the Human Rights Council Resolution of 2010.” It emphasizes the “sanctity, location and historical importance of this cemetery, and the fact that it is an exceptional archaeological site, which is no less holy than the Christian or Jewish cemeteries whose profanation is also prohibited.” The signatories also request that the international officials “give the necessary priority to the study of the Petition submitted...by a distinguished group of Jerusalemites...which includes thorough historical and legal documentation, and rightful and just requests that no reasonable person could refuse.”

“This is not an issue that will disappear, and we are determined to show that it is a cause that unites all religions, and people across the political spectrum. We need action to ensure that this outrage to human dignity and tolerance does not continue, and is not repeated,” says President of Al Quds University **Sari Nusseibeh**, one of 60 original Petitioners represented by CCR, and a signatory to the letter.

This eleventh-hour appeal follows the Center for Constitutional Rights’ recent efforts to prompt action by the UNHCHR and UNESCO, which have yet to act on Petitioners’ requests. “The pleas of people who are trying to protect the remains of their ancestors buried in Mamilla Cemetery have been largely disregarded by the international community, including the United Nations officials tasked with protecting their human rights,” says CCR Acting Legal Director, **Maria LaHood**. “We will continue to appeal to the conscience of the world to prevent construction of the Museum, which is an attempt to erase Palestinian history and cultural heritage in Jerusalem.”

The Petition, Addendum and other documents are available at www.mamillacampaign.org and <http://www.ccrjustice.org/ourcases/current-cases/mamilla>.

The Center for Constitutional Rights is dedicated to advancing and protecting the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Founded in 1966 by attorneys who represented civil rights movements in the South, CCR is a non-profit legal and educational organization committed to the creative use of law as a positive force for social change. Visit www.ccrjustice.org. Follow @theCCR.

The Campaign to Preserve Mamilla Jerusalem Cemetery was initiated by the Petitioners, and is a wholly civil, volunteer initiative with no political coloring. All 60 individual petitioners are descendants of 15 of Jerusalem’s most prominent and longest established families and have no relation with previous individual or institutional claimants in Israeli courts. The Petition was also supported by 16 human rights non-governmental organizations, based in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem.

[Signatories in Arabic alphabetical order, per Arabic original]

- Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsour – Member of Knesset Mrs. Ilham Salama – Social Department, YMCA Jerusalem.
- Mr. Ibrahim Matar – The National Christian Society.
- Mr. Ahmed Hashem al-Zaghayer – President, Union of Chambers of Commerce.
- Mr. Usama al-Sa’adi – Attorney.
- Ms. Ilham Salama, Social Department, YMCA.
- Mr. Iyad al-Masrouji – Businessman and Investor.
- Mr. Bernard Sabella – Member of Palestinian Legislative Council.
- Mr. Tawfiq Habash – Businessman.
- Mr. Jamal Zahalqa – Member of Knesset.
- Dr. Jamal Nusseibeh – Attorney-at-Law.
- Mr. Hatem Abd Al-Qader – Minister for Jerusalem Affairs, Palestinian Authority.
- Mr. Hana Siniora – Businessman.
- Mr. Hana ‘Amira – Member of the Executive Committee, Palestine Liberation Organization.
- Engineer Khaled al-Kaluti – Member of the Board of Trustees of the Welfare Association.
- Ms. Dina Zarina – Secular Committee in the Holy Land.
- Ms. Rania Elias – Director, Yabous Cultural Center.
- Ms. Randa Makhoulf – Secular Committee in the Holy Land.
- Engineer Zaki Aghbariya – President, Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Culture.
- Ms. Zahira Kamal – Secretary General Fida, Former Minister, Palestinian Authority.
- Dr. Sari Nusseibeh – President, Al-Quds University.
- Mr. Salah Atallah – Businessman.
- Engineer Adnan al-Husseini – Governor of Jerusalem District, Palestinian Authority.
- Mr. Azzam Abu Sa’ud – General Director, Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce.
- Dr. Afu Ighbaria – Member of Knesset.
- Archbishop Atallah Hanna.
- Shaykh Dr. Akrama Sabri – President of the High Islamic Council and Preacher of the Aqsa Mosque.
- Mr. Omar al-Alamy – Associate General Director, Jerusalem Cigarette Company.
- Mr. Francis Tamas – Financial Expert and Jerusalemite Activist.
- Engineer Fouad al-Daqqaq – Advisor, Jerusalem Holding Company.

- Shaykh Kamal al-Khatib – Vice President of the Islamic Movement in Israel.
- Engineer Mazen Sinokrot – Former Palestinian Authority Minister and Chairman of the Board of Jerusalem Holding Company.
- Mr. Muhammad Baraka – Member of Knesset.
- Dr. Muhammad Jadallah – Representative of National Forces in Jerusalem.
- Mr. Muhammed Zaydan - President, Arab Higher Follow-up Committee in Israel.
- Dr. Mohamed al-Masrouji – President of the Board of Directors, Businessmen’s Association.
- Rosary Sister’s High School.
- Mr. Mas’ud Ghanaim – Member of Knesset.
- Engineer Mustafa Abu Zahra – President of the Council of Islamic Cemeteries in Jerusalem.
- Dr. Mahdi Abd al-Hadi – President, Palestinian Academic Society for International Affairs.
- Shaykh Najih Bakirat – Head, Manuscripts and Culture Section, Al-Aqsa Mosque.
- Professor Nabil Mashhour – President of the Union of the Arab Orthodox Club.
- Ms. Hind Khoury – Former Palestinian Authority Minister and Ambassador.
- Mr. Hisham al-Kalouti – Jerusalemite Activist.
- Mr. Wasif Thahir – President of the Board of Directors, YMCA Jerusalem.
- Mr. Yusef Sanahir – Center for Church Relations.