



# DESTROYING PALESTINIAN JERUSALEM, ONE INSTITUTION AT A TIME

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On July 22, 2020, Israeli police raided and looted the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, the Yaboos Cultural Centre, and the Shafaq Cultural Network in East Jerusalem under the pretext that the institutions were funding terrorism. The institutions' directors were also arrested and detained. These [attacks on Palestinian cultural centers](#) are not new and reflect the Israeli state's continued systematic destruction of Palestinian Jerusalem.

Jerusalem has historically been central to Palestinian social and political identity. But since its capture and division into an Israeli-controlled West and a Jordanian-controlled East in 1948, Israel has thoroughly obscured Jerusalem's Palestinian identity with [ethnic cleansing campaigns](#) and an ongoing occupation that renders life unbearable for the city's Palestinians. Indeed, since East Jerusalem was occupied in 1967, the Israeli regime has actively worked to erase the Palestinian presence in the city through the [construction of the separation wall](#), the imposition of unworkable residency requirements, [urban planning schemes](#) that demolish and replace Palestinian structures, and frequent closures of Palestinian cultural and political institutions.

The only Palestinian cultural and political institution which withstood the Israeli regime's destruction campaign the longest was the [Orient House](#) in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. Built in 1897 by the prominent Husseini family, the building served as an important space for archival preservation and political organization. Indeed, in the 1990s, the building served as the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Jerusalem. But in 2001, the [Israeli regime closed](#) the Orient House, effectively eliminating the only recognized Palestinian political authority in Jerusalem.

Since then, the Israeli regime has continued to prevent Palestinian political institutions from operating in Jerusalem. That is, the Israeli regime has shut down [more than 42 Palestinian institutions](#) in East Jerusalem since 2000 under various pretexts ranging from "illegal" political affiliation to unpaid bills. The recent attacks on the city's three Palestinian centers are thus part and parcel of the ongoing disruption of Palestinian cultural and political life in Jerusalem. However, they also constitute renewed and coordinated efforts to defame and destroy Palestinian civil society and human rights organizations. In this regard, NGO Monitor has played an important role. As a [government affiliated organization](#), NGO Monitor works with the Israeli Ministry for Strategic Affairs to have international funding withdrawn from Palestinian organizations, thus forcing them to close down.

NGO Monitor accomplishes this with two tactics. First, it accuses Palestinian organizations of supporting or working with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. The second is to accuse organizations or individuals of "terrorist affiliations," or of "funding terrorism." These [accusations are slanderous](#) and backed by little and tenuous research, and the term "affiliation" is deliberately left broad and loose. Consequently, virtually any act of Palestinian political expression can be considered "affiliation." Despite NGO Monitor's dubious claims against Palestinian organizations, many in the international community heed them, in turn further suppressing

Palestinian civil society by tightening, cutting, or even withdrawing funding. While the directors of the three cultural institutions in East Jerusalem have been released, the stigma of supporting terrorism will undeniably have damaging repercussions for them and their organizations.

The following are some recommendations for pushing back against the destruction of Palestinian cultural and political institutions in Jerusalem:

- Palestinians worldwide need to emphasize the importance of maintaining Palestinian institutions and organizations in the city through financial support and substantive and continuous solidarity efforts.
- Palestinians in the West Bank must push back against the undermining of Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital by actively rejecting the narrative of [Ramallah as the pseudo Palestinian capital](#).
- Third state actors should provide public and unconditional support for Palestinian institutions and organizations in Jerusalem, particularly those under attack from the Israeli regime.
- Third state actors should also recognize and emphasize the importance of having Palestinian political representation in the city. In this regard, they should support reinstating the Orient House as a home for such representation, [as the EU did in 2014](#), and to apply political pressure to do so.
- Third state actors and international organizations should neither use NGO Monitor nor the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs as legitimate sources of information on Palestinians or Palestinian organizations. Moreover, they should publicly recognize NGO Monitor as an arm of the Israeli state, with a particular agenda to demonize and criminalize Palestinian civil society.
- The international community must reject the Israeli regime's accusations of terrorist activities and political "affiliation" as illegitimate and unfounded, particularly as the definition of "affiliation" is purposefully broad so as to target any Palestinian.