



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

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Descendants File Protest with United Nations over Israeli Plans to Build on 12th Century Muslim Cemetery

Simon Wiesenthal Center Intends “Museum of Tolerance” for Site Despite Desecration

February 10, 2010, New York, Jerusalem, Geneva, Los Angeles – Today, parties defending a 12th Century Muslim cemetery and holy site from desecration by Israeli authorities and a U.S. developer brought their case to the United Nations and held press conferences in Geneva, Jerusalem and Los Angeles. The filing of the “**Petition for Urgent Action on Human Rights Violations by Israel: Desecration of Ma'man Allah (Mamilla) Muslim Cemetery in the Holy City of Jerusalem.**” took place in Geneva; the cemetery, Ma'man Allah (also known as Mamilla), is in Jerusalem; and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which has plans to build a Museum of Tolerance on the site, is based in Los Angeles. The **Center for Constitutional Rights** in New York is representing descendants, including 60 signatories from 15 of the oldest Jerusalem families with ancestors going back to the 12th century. The Petition may be consulted at www.mamillacampaign.org.

“The callous disregard for the most basic values of tolerance involved in building this museum in the most ancient and revered Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem is not just an affront by the Simon Wiesenthal Center to the many Jerusalemites whose families, like my own, have had ancestors buried there for many centuries,” said **Rashid Khalidi**, Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies Department of History at Columbia University in New York. “It is also a blatant violation of the ethical, moral and legal responsibilities of the Israeli government, which itself repeatedly protested the desecration of ancient Jewish cemeteries in Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967.”

The construction project has resulted in the disinterment and disposal of hundreds of graves and human remains, the whereabouts of which are currently unknown. **Frank Gehry**, the original architect for the museum, has withdrawn his designs and his participation in the project.

This will be the first known time Palestinian individuals have taken collective action against Israel to bring such an issue before a UN forum and comes after all remedies in Israel were exhausted. The

families, NGO's and attorneys argue the desecration of the cemetery violates international conventions protecting cultural heritage, the manifestation of religious beliefs, and the right to family.

Said **Maria LaHood**, Center for Constitutional Rights Senior Attorney, "Left with no recourse in Israel, families of people buried in Mamilla cemetery have come together to petition the United Nations to safeguard their international human rights to be free from discrimination, to manifest religious beliefs, and to have their cultural heritage protected. We call on the international community to denounce this shameful desecration of a historic Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem."

The plan to build a "Center for Human Dignity – Museum of Tolerance" on the remains of important Muslim figures and men, women and children buried there over the course of a thousand years has faced widespread opposition from Muslim, Christian and Jewish personalities in Israel, Palestine and around the world. Nonetheless, the Israeli Supreme Court has ruled in favor of construction of the Museum, and the Israeli government has refused to halt the disinterment of human remains and the destruction of the ancient cemetery.

The Center for Constitutional Rights and others are petitioning the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Religion and Belief and on Contemporary Forms of Racism; the Independent Expert on Culture; the High Commissioner for Human Rights; and the Director General of UNESCO on behalf of Palestinian families whose ancestors are buried in the cemetery. The parties are asking these international bodies to act urgently to demand that the government of Israel halt further construction of the "Center for Human Dignity – Museum of Tolerance" on the Mamilla Cemetery site, investigate human rights violations, document and reveal to petitioners the whereabouts of all human remains and artifacts, recover and rebury all human remains where they were originally found in coordination with the proper Muslim authorities, and declare the Mamilla Cemetery an antiquity to be preserved and protected.

The Mamilla Cemetery has been a Muslim burial ground and holy site since as early as the 7th century, when companions of the Prophet Muhammad were reputedly buried there. In addition, numerous Sufi saints and thousands of other officials, scholars, notables, and Jerusalemite families have been buried in the cemetery over the last 1000 years. The Muslim Supreme Council declared the cemetery an historical site in 1927, and the British Mandate authorities pronounced it an antiquities site in 1944. It was an active burial ground until 1948, when the new State of Israel seized the western part of Jerusalem and the cemetery fell under Israeli control.

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.

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