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# Petition Seeks Redress for Jews 'Illegally Evacuated' From Villages

High Court bid says 1958 Finance Ministry documents show evacuees in Lifta and other villages were entitled to keep homes.

Nir Hasson | Jun 04, 2012 1:21 AM

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A High Court of Justice petition submitted on Sunday claims that thousands of families were evacuated from Lifta, Shalem, Summyl and other villages in an illegal, discriminatory fashion to advance real estate deals.

The impetus for the claim was the discovery by a Lifta resident of a 1958 document which was allegedly hidden from residents in these villages, and which indicates they have rights to the homes.

Attorney Gilad Harish, who submitted the petition, says that for decades, the state concealed documents and decisions holding that the residents, most of them Jewish new immigrants, have rights to the dwellings, which were abandoned by Palestinians during the 1948 War of Independence. The documents were concealed, Harish maintains, so the residents could be designated as trespassers the properties re-allocated for real estate purposes.

The complaint has been submitted against the Ministry of Construction and Housing, the Israel Lands Administration and the state-owned Amidar public housing company.

The petition asks the court to issue an immediate injunction to halt evacuation procedures currently underway in Lifta, Shalem and other villages. Justice Yoram Danziger ordered the state to respond by July 15. The petition was submitted as a result of Lifta resident Yoni Yochanan's refusal to evacuate the home where he's lived for dozens of years to make way for a construction project. Yochanan conducted research about the history of Lifta and other local villages which previously belonged to Palestinians. In his research, Yochanan uncovered a 1958 Finance Ministry memorandum which held that "a resident who lacks a lease" but who can prove that he lived in a home in Lifta or other nearby village in April 1954 was

to their homes, and would now be entitled to compensation payments, the petition argues.

An additional 1958 document indicates that residents in Lifta and elsewhere were eligible for priority rights to purchase the dwellings where they lived.

"Priority - rights to purchase the homes - should be given to these residents," the second document states. The petition includes strongly-worded accusations against Israeli government bodies and their decision-making processes regarding the abandoned Arab properties. Harish maintains that the state created ethnic Jewish hierarchies in deciding who would get which abandoned Arab properties: grade A neighborhoods for people with ties to the state establishment, particularly those from European countries; and grade B locales for indigent Jewish immigrants from Arab countries. The second group was settled in relatively remote villages lacking adequate water and electricity infrastructure, Harish argues.



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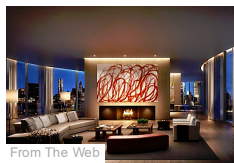
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