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PNA de facto controls Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods: report

Xinhua

November 10, 2010 - 12:00am

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-11/09/c_13599001.htm ^[1]

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Media Outlet: Xinhua

Date: November 10, 2010

Source Link(s): http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-11/09/c_13599001.htm ^[1]

JERUSALEM, Nov. 9 (Xinhua) -- The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) is the de facto sovereign in Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods as Israeli institutions gradually sever ties with their residents, local daily Ma'ariv reported on Tuesday.

While senior officials in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government often pledge that Jerusalem will forever be united under the Israeli sovereignty, the PNA exercises its control in the Arab neighborhoods in its eastern sector, the report said.

Three Palestinian communities in north-eastern Jerusalem currently run by the PNA include the Shuafat refugee camp and the villages of Kalandia and Akeb, which were annexed by Israel in the aftermath of the 1967 Middle East war and placed under Jerusalem's municipal area of jurisdiction. All three are located outside the security fence built by Israel during the second Palestinian uprising earlier in the decade.

Though the 50,000 residents of these communities carry Israeli identity cards, it is the PNA which has invested millions of U.S. dollars in recent years to renovate the aging streets and road infrastructure.

Attesting to the chaos and confusion which characterize the daily life of Jerusalem's Arab population is Shuafat. About 70 percent of its residents pay taxes to the Jerusalem Municipality, but PNA policemen direct traffic in the camp throughout the day, the report said.

The population of Shuafat has nearly doubled in recent years as new houses were built without obtaining any authorization. Most of the new comers are Palestinians from the West Bank who immigrated here in search of a livelihood and decided to stay.

The PNA has channeled significant funds to Shuafat, repairing its roads, constructing a

women's center and clubs for local youth. Palestinian security agents are called to interfere in solving clan feuds and crimes. Medical services are provided by the Red Crescent.

"We don't know what the (Israeli) government wants. In reality, everything we get, asphalt and security, comes from the PNA," a local Shuafat leader told Ma'ariv.

"We aren't given any municipal services and the camp is full of drugs," he said.

The PNA, the report says, is filling the vacuum Israel has left in the Arab neighborhoods. The Jerusalem Municipality is barely providing services to Palestinian villagers and the Israel Police doesn't enforce the rule of law.

Yakir Segev, who holds the East Jerusalem portfolio in Jerusalem's municipal council, stated in a conference held in August that Israel is abandoning the Arab villages that were left on the other side of the security fence.

"The (Jerusalem) municipality has internalized the message which came from the Israeli government that these neighborhoods are not a part of Jerusalem, and is acting in accordance. The PNA is the one repairing the roads and is the one operating the social infrastructures," Segev said in an interview with Ynet news service in August.

"The (Arab) neighborhoods are outside the realm of the State of Israel, and certainly the municipality. From a practical standpoint, this is Ramallah. Beside the half-delusional Right, I don't know anyone who is really trying to enforce Israeli sovereignty in these areas," he said.

Asked why Israel is insisting on maintaining sovereignty in these villages, Segev said the security barrier was built for demographic reasons, to remove 50,000 Arabs from Jerusalem.

"The trend is becoming a permanent reality," Segev said, referring Israelis simply don't want to recognize they have given up part of the Jerusalem neighborhoods, "because people will then ask, 'if we already gave up parts, why not divide (the city)?'"

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