



27 March 2022

Ateret Cohanim Break-In at the Little Petra Hotel

On the night of 26 March 2022, individuals with Ateret Cohanim broke into the Little Petra Hotel – a place of rest of Christian pilgrims for decades – as well as into a local money-changing shop owned by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and rented by Jerusalemite Hassan Said at the Petra hotel's entrance. This act of trespassing was done illegally and is an assault on local businesses and properties in the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem. The actors did not have an eviction notice and therefore took law into their own hands and subsequently committed a criminal offense. There are some reports that police officers have intentionally defended the radical group or turned a blind eye to the illegal activities of Ateret Cohanim at the Little Petra Hotel.

This act is extremely dangerous as it regards community relations on the ground. Acting in this illegally aggressive manner against a known Christian property and an Arab business – particularly ahead of Easter and Ramadan – could likely ignite local hostilities similar to what was witnessed last year in Sheikh Jarrah. Not to mention the timing that Mati Dan and his organisation, Ateret Cohanim, are choosing on the eve of Secretary Blinken's arrival in the region.

In response to this illegal activity, local residents, business owners, and priests are demanding definitive action. Patriarch Theophilos III has been consulting heavily with the Council of Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem and receiving counsel from all sides. The Church is doing all that it can to stop these actions, protect the tenants, and come to a lawful and peaceful resolution. However, there is tremendous pressure to address these actions in a powerful way. The Church fears certain actions could quickly escalate and ignite a very turbulent scenario in the Old City.

Given this was an illegal break-in without any legal procedure or due process, the Patriarch and the Heads of Churches call on the Jerusalem Police to act fairly and in accordance with their power. There have been reports that the Police do not want to get involved in the issue but standing idly by is not an appropriate response in the face of criminal activity, particularly that which is ongoing. The Patriarch requests that the police act to evict Ateret Cohanim and revert the position to what it was prior to the break-in, until the ongoing legal proceedings conclude and are finalised.

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