

KKL-JNF and its Role in Settlement Expansion

Settlement Watch, Peace Now

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Since Israel's conquest of the West Bank in 1967, [Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund](#) (KKL-JNF) has been involved in settlement activity. There were years when the role it played in settling the West Bank was central and relatively significant (mainly by land acquisitions and funding of different kinds to projects in settlements). In other years, its role was not pivotal to the development of the settlements. In recent years we see that KKL-JNF raised significantly its involvement in the settlement activity, allocating millions of shekels to the settlements and allowing the settlers use KKL-JNF to promote their agenda to take over Palestinian properties and to expand the settlements.

Main activities:

1. Land Purchase – allocating some NIS 88 million for dubious land purchases in the West Bank.
2. Taking legal actions to evict Palestinians from their homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (see the Sumarin Family case).
3. Funding for settlement projects

A. Millions for Dubious Land Acquisitions

In early November it was [revealed](#) that officials within the Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF) have secretly spent tens of millions of shekels in purchases of West Bank land over the past two years, and that this was done behind the back of KKL-JNF's board of directors, without obtaining approval as required. As Israeli journalist Raviv Drucker explained in his investigation on the subject, the settlers found themselves a convenient ["bank"](#) that enables them to maintain enormous budgets without supervision nor a need to fundraise for them to carry out controversial ideological activity.

Such purchases refer to 6 or 7 acquisition transactions for which NIS 45 million has already been paid, including a commitment to add another NIS 43 million (NIS 88 million total). **Among the transactions reported there are:**

- About 272 dunams in the Bethlehem area near the settlement of Elazar
- Approximately 100 dunams southeast of Ramallah in the area of Kochav Yaakov
- Territories in the Jordan Valley near the settlement of Hamra
- East of Qalqiliya near the industrial area of the settlement of Karnei Shomron.
- [The Bakri family house in Hebron](#), which settlers illegally seized and claimed to have purchased from its owners, but which the court rejected the purchase documents and ruled for the settlers to be evicted. Currently, legal proceedings in this case are still underway ([see here](#)).

It is important to emphasize that **land purchases in the West Bank is a dubious and often non-transparent business**. Because Israelis and Palestinians have a national dispute over land, over the years the sale of land to the other nation has been seen as a betrayal. Indeed, the Palestinian Authority prohibits it. Therefore, all real estate transactions between Israelis and Palestinians are done in the dark, without supervision, and [in many cases with forgery and fraud](#).

Transactions involving tens of acres of land are particularly suspicious because such large areas usually have many owners (tens and even hundreds of individuals) and it is hard to believe that so many can agree to sell.

Peace Now knows of at least 65,000 dunams of West Bank land purchased by KKL-JNF since 1967. These areas are or have already been used to build and expand settlements and to expel Palestinians with private property claims of their own.

Peace Now: *"The purchase of land in the Occupied Territories leaves an indelible mark on KKL-JNF's otherwise proud record. Apart from the fact that the area of purchases in question are occupied and disputed, land purchases for settlements harm the prospect of peace and a two-state solution, and thereby threatens the future of Israel as a democratic state and homeland of the Jewish people."*

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It should be noted that even without knowing about the alleged transactions, there has been an [increase in KKL-JNF activity in the settlements in the past two years, in particular involving the takeover of Palestinian land](#) (see explanation below). KKL-JNF had put [pressure to demolish a Palestinian house and restaurant](#) in the Bethlehem area; an [illegal outpost was established](#); and procedures for demolishing additional Palestinian homes were opened.

Behind the back of the Directorate - How the Land Purchase Method Works

[KKL-JNF budget book](#) for 2019 states that in 2018, a new unit was established in KKL-JNF under the name "Himanuta Jerusalem," which now turns out to be involved with the purchase of West Bank land. It may be that the name "Himanuta Jerusalem" was deliberately chosen to hide the real activity that takes place precisely in the West Bank and not in Jerusalem ([Himanuta's activity in Jerusalem](#) is done through the regular Himanuta Israel).

It is interesting to note that in KKL-JNF's budget book, the 2018 budget of the "Himanuta Jerusalem" unit was only NIS 600,000, and for 2019 was NIS 800,000. The millions of shekels that were poured into the transactions associated with purchases in Palestinian West Bank were hidden.

The board of directors of the Himanuta WB consists of people working in KKL-JNF, and are not subject to the board of directors of the Himanuta company operating in Israel. According to what was revealed, the Himanuta WB board members acted under the guidance of two members of the KKL-JNF board of directors--representatives of two right-wing parties: **Arnan Palman**, deputy chairman of KKL-JNF for financial affairs (on behalf of the Likud), who apparently approved the budget transfers without informing the board, and **Noah Eyal**, member of the KKL-JNF board of directors for the HaBayit HaYehudi (Jewish Home) party.

Following the exposure of the story, the KKL-JNF legal adviser Judge (Retired) Sefi Alon, ruled that the transactions were illegally hidden from the board of directors and that they had to obtain board approval for each transaction. On Monday, November 4, 2019, the KKL-JNF Board of Directors decided to freeze the transactions and to appoint an external examiner for the conduct of Himanuta WB.

Some of the past purchases of Himanuta [were proven to have been based on forgery, fraud and extortion](#). For instance, in the following purchases in the Jericho area, Himanuta WB paid millions of shekels for purchases which were based on forgeries:

- December 5th 2000 - 267 dunams bought for \$717,335
- June 4th 2001 - 530 dunams bought for \$1,270,000
- February 18th 2003 - 208 dunams were bought for \$457,774

These transactions were exposed [as part of an indictment process](#) against the individuals involved in the fraud. Yet since the majority of Himanuta's purchases were made during

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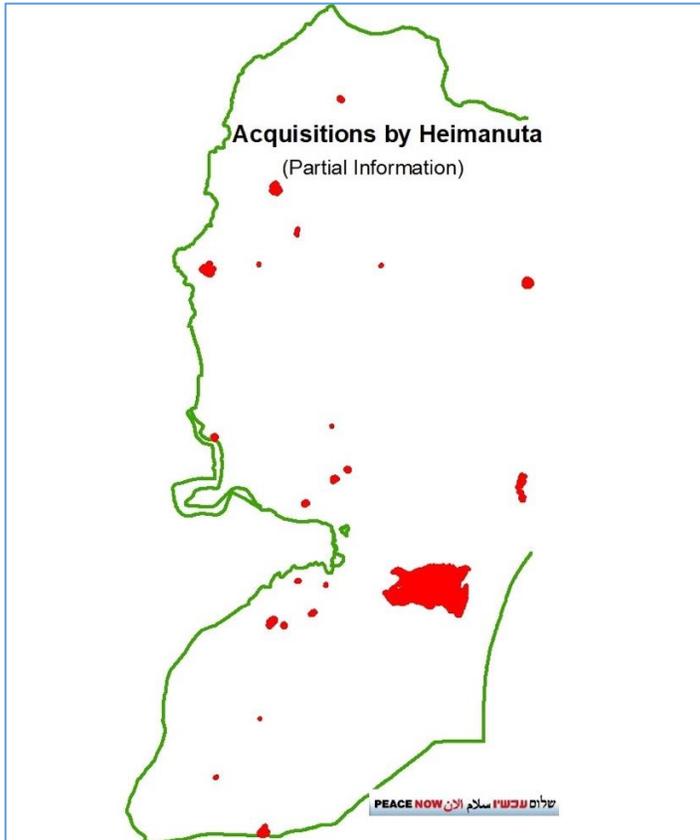
the 1970s and 1980s, they were not investigated and we do not have information regarding their legitimacy.

B. KKL-JNF Land in the West Bank - Tens of Thousands of Dunams

The role and involvement of KKL-JNF in establishing and expanding settlements in the West Bank remains far from the public eye. KKL-JNF makes an effort to downplay its activities in the West Bank out of the fear that this will negatively affect its positioning and its fundraising capabilities throughout the Jewish world. Yet KKL-JNF has played a major role in the development of settlements and until today it is active in their expansion. The majority of KKL-JNF's activities in settlements today include infrastructure development, tourism, educational facilities and roads. [A document published by journalist Raviv Drucker](#) several years ago, revealed that between the years 2002 and 2013, KKL-JNF invested close to 50 million shekels in different projects in the settlements.

As mentioned above, KKL-JNF is also involved in the acquisition of land in the West Bank. **KKL-JNF owns two companies called Himanuta which are engaged in land acquisition.** One operates within the borders of Israel and [East Jerusalem](#), and the other, registered in the Civil Administration, operates in the West Bank. We will call the latter "Himanuta WB" (aka *Himanuta Yosh*) to distinguish it from its Israeli credibility. Since 1967, Himanuta WB has been used as a tool by settlers (and the government) to do some of the "dirty work" involving purchasing lands from Palestinians in the West Bank. Criticism within KKL-JNF led to a reported halt to the acquisitions some 15 years ago.

The information on land acquisitions and ownership in the West Bank is not publicly available. Peace Now has been able to gather some information on land purchased by Himanuta WB over the years, and has found that at least 65,000 dunams across the West Bank were purchased by KKL-JNF through Himanuta WB, and settlements were established on some of those lands, among them the settlements of Itamar, Alfei Menashe, Einav, Kedumim, Givat Ze'ev, Metzadot Yehuda (Beit Yatir), Otniel and more.



Land Purchases = Settlement Expansion

Unlike with other KKL-JNF activities in West Bank settlements, such as projects of tourism, infrastructure, roads etc, many of them within existing settlements, land purchases are made in order to overtake new areas. KKL cannot deny that it acts there in order to provide services and development for settlers residing there. These are lands that were owned by Palestinians, and with the help of KKL are becoming lands for the purpose of settlements. **By purchasing lands, KKL-JNF contributes greatly to the expansion of the settlement enterprise, the entrenchment of the occupation and furthering Palestinians and Israelis from the possibility of a negotiated agreement.**

To illustrate this point, take as an example [Givat Eitam \(A-Nahla\)](#), also known as E2, an area located south of Bethlehem and east of the route of the separation barrier. Since the end of the 1990s, settler leaders have attempted to promote a new settlement of thousands of housing units there. In 2004 the state declared approximately 1,300 dunams in KHALLET A-Nahle as “state lands” to allow the promotion of the plan. The declaration of state lands was based on the argument that the lands were not cultivated for several years and thus, using a draconian interpretation of a law from the Ottoman period (1858), they should revert to the ownership of the sovereign, in this case Israel. However, Palestinian landowners began fighting this declaration through the courts, and the plan was therefore delayed for many years. As a result, the state outlined a new plan for another 800 housing units [on a plot owned by KKL-JNF \(Himanuta\)](#) in the same area. Meanwhile, settlers had

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established an illegal outpost on the KKL-JNF land, and eventually were granted a retroactive approval for the outpost ([click here for more](#)).

In the case of A-Nahla (“Givat Eitam”), the advantages of having the KKL-JNF land were significant, because what is possible for a private company is not necessarily easy for a government authority: Firstly, as mentioned above, the Israeli government started to take lands in the area through legal tools at its disposal, which take decades. Secondly, even when the land is already declared as “state land,” the automatic allocation of it to the settlers can be challenged. In 2019, Peace Now, together with Palestinian land owners, demanded in a precedent-setting case that the state lands in the area of A-Nahla be allocated to them and not to the settlers ([click here for more](#)). The authorities have yet to decide on the matter, and the planning of the settlement is still on hold. However, in the case of KKL-JNF, it is allowed to decide what to do with its land, and it decided to give it to the settlers, who have subsequently established an outpost, as mentioned above.

Another example is the **registration of large swaths of land in the Gush Etzion area** - In July 2012, Himanuta filed a lawsuit in the Jerusalem District Court demanding to register a large 522 dunam area south of Bethlehem based on a purchase of land made before 1948. The Palestinian landowners claimed to be the rightful owners and both parties presented to the court Kushans (Mandate-era ownership documents) indicating their ownership, in order to determine the extent and location of the land. Although the Kushan states that it is a 74-dunam land, Himanuta was able to convince the court that the real area it owns is 522 dunams, and the land has been registered to its name. Settlers and politicians on the right celebrated the victory and saw it as “[the expansion of Gush Etzion’s land](#).” Thus, KKL-JNF lands automatically became settlement land.

C. Increase in KKL-JNF Settlement Activity over the Past Two Years

Without knowing about the new acquisitions, over the past two years KKL-JNF's involvement in settlement activity has been evident, and it is abetting the operations of settler organizations.

In August 2017, KKL-JNF issued a post for “[Judea and Samaria Transactions Coordinator](#)“, and in response to Peace Now’s criticism of the intention to continue to purchase land in the Occupied Territories, it claimed that it was only due to the employment of a position of a retired employee and that there was no intention to renew the acquisitions. Few months later, KKL-JNF hired Mr. Ovad Arad, to work in Himanuta WB. Arad worked previously in [Regavim](#) which is an organization that works against Palestinian construction throughout the West Bank, and within Israel itself by filing petitions to courts and by public campaigns. It seems that he "imported" the methods of Regavim into KKL-JNF and was able to recruit it to the activity of dispossessing Palestinians in the West Bank.

Petition for demolition of Palestinian homes in Makhroun – In 2017, KKL-JNF hired the services of Attorney Avi Segal, who represents [Regavim](#), [Amana](#), and

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the [Elad](#) and [Ateret Cohanim](#) settler associations in East Jerusalem. Segal, who specialized in petitions calling for the eviction and demolition of Palestinian buildings, submitted a request to join as a party to the Cassia family file [demanding the demolition of their home and adjacent restaurant, because they lacked a construction permit](#). KKL-JNF claimed it bought the land from the owner in 1969. The Palestinian family claims to have bought the land from the same owner in the same year. However, unlike KKL-JNF, the Cassia family has been using the land for many years, built on it their home without anyone questioning their ownership. After KKL-JNF joined the demolition case, the family had to file a long and expensive court-case to determine the ownership, which is still pending. Eventually, following KKL-JNF's pressure, [the Israeli authorities demolished the house and restaurant](#).

Establishment of an illegal outpost in Makhrour - A few days after the demolition of the Palestinian house, [settlers established a new, illegal outpost nearby](#), claiming that they were renting the land from KKL-JNF (Himanuta WB). Establishing the new outpost 70 meters from the Palestinian house destroyed following KKL-JNF pressure removes any doubt: When KKL-JNF demanded the demolition of the Cassia family's house, it did not mind illegal construction on the land it claimed; it just did not want Palestinians on the land. Now it leases the land to Israelis who have erected an illegal outpost on this land.

Petition for demolition of Palestinian houses in Arab ar-Ramadin – In February 2017, the [Regavim Association](#) filed a petition to the High Court demanding the demolition of houses in the Bedouin village of Arab ar-Ramadin in the Qalqiliya area in collaboration with Himanuta (KKL-JNF's subsidiary). The demand to demolish the houses was based on the claim that the village houses were built on land owned by KKL-JNF (Himanuta). In those days, the right-wing people used the [petition as a tool to hamper the Supreme Court](#) on the pretext that the court discriminated against settlers. They [tried to argue](#) that while the court ruled to evict settlers who invaded Palestinian private land (in the [Nativ Ha'Avot outpost](#) and in Amona), it didn't order to evict the Palestinians invading Jewish-owned land. However, during the hearing of the petition, it became clear that Himanuta WB owns only a small portion of the land (only 6%) in partnership with many other owners (Palestinians), so that its rights are very limited. In April 2019, the [court dismissed the petition](#).

In an interesting anecdote, the court commented on the confusion made by Himanuta when it appeared in court as Himanuta Israel with regard to an operation in the West Bank (i.e. Himanuta WB should have appeared before court instead): **"Alongside these questions, further clarifications are required regarding Himanuta's status. We note that respondent 5 [Himanuta] is not the correct respondent to the proceeding, and, as stated, the Himanuta company operating in the area is a separate legal entity than that which operates in Israel."**

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D. KKL-JNF's Cruel Fight to Evict the Sumarin Family from its Home in Silwan

The Sumarin family has been living in its home in Wadi Hilweh in Silwan for decades, not far from the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City. In 1989, KKL-JNF initiated a move whereby the Custodian for Absentee Property declared the house as absentee property behind the family's back and without its knowledge. Following this, the property was transferred to KKL-JNF along with a host of other properties in Silwan to be declared absentee in a similar manner. As KKL-JNF attorney Abraham Hilleli testified at the time: "We have an interest for those properties to be under Jewish ownership."

Immediately after taking over the home's ownership, KKL-JNF filed an eviction suit against the Sumarin family in 1991. The lawsuit was dismissed, but KKL-JNF appealed and continued the proceedings repeatedly for nearly 30 years, until some of the original residents of the house had passed away. In September 2019, the magistrate court ruled to vacate the house, the appeal of the Sumarin family is planned to be heard in the District Court in June 2020.

The Sumarin house was one of a few dozen properties that were taken from Palestinians in the 1980's as part of a scheme between the settlers, governmental bodies and KKL-JNF. The scheme was exposed by the Government of Rabin in 1992 in a special investigative committee (the Klugman Committee) and was stopped. However, the properties were not returned to the Palestinian owners, and each Palestinian family had to face a long and expensive legal fight to try to prevent its eviction. The Sumarin family case is ongoing for almost 30 years.

While the Rabin Government decided to stop using the Absentee Property Law in order to take over Palestinian properties in East Jerusalem, KKL-JNF has never stopped fighting to kick the Sumarin family out of its home, based on the dubious system of declaring owners as absentees and then taking their houses to give to the settlers. KKL-JNF faced some pressures from Jews around the world, calling them to leave the Sumarin family alone, however, they continue to pursue the case in a [cruel manner](#).

[Read here for more on the Sumarin family case](#)

E. Collusion with the Elad Settler Organization for a Touristic Settlement in Jerusalem's Peace Forest

KKL-JNF's activities extend to collaboration with known far-right settlement organizations, including the Elad association. Elad has worked for decades to dispossess Palestinians in their homes primarily in the Silwan area of East Jerusalem and to build the Ir David archeological tourism site, which doubles as an Israeli sovereignty claim over

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the territory. In this way, [settlement tourism](#) is a means to break up Palestinian neighborhoods and to prevent the possibility of the Israeli territorial compromise necessary for a viable Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and by that measure the two-state solution. Its spokesman even [admitted](#) this, **explaining that the goal of the organization is "to Judaize East Jerusalem."**

Despite Elad's known extreme agenda, has KKL-JNF colluded with Elad to build in Peace Forest, a park run by KKL-JNF in the Green Line seam zone in Jerusalem, which had been expropriated by the Minister of Finance in the 1970s and which Israel occupies according to international law. Since 2004, Elad worked in agreement with KKL-JNF to take over a 15-dunam complex where Elad established a touristic settlement including the construction of some illegal structures. It is important to mention that the owner of the land, the Israeli Land Authority originally allocated it for an Israeli association for children with special needs. However, KKL-JNF, as the administrator of most of the forests in Israel, allowed the settlers of Elad to take over the place and to prevent the association from entering the compound. (Eventually, after several years, the Israel Land Authority agreed to allocate the land to Elad, and laundered their illegitimate takeover).

At the other end of the Peace Forest, some 800m away from Elad's compound, the Elad settlers managed to get a land lease for an old abandoned house, known as "the Shatz House" and started to plan an ambitious visitor center. After years of preparations, they managed to obtain a construction permit for a big compound and a zipline that may give Elad massive income from the business-driven touristic project.

In 2019, the Jerusalem municipality agreed to fund the project of the visitor center and the zipline with some NIS 6 million. At the discussion in the municipality, the budget of the project was presented and it was exposed that KKL-JNF is funding this controversial project to the tune of NIS 8 million.

תקציב	שנתונים
15,000,000	תיירות
8,185,000	בקשה תיירות צה"פ 2018
6,000,000	עיריית ירושלים
8,000,000	קק"ל
6,000,000	הר"י
3,185,000	עמותת אלנד
46,370,000	סה"כ כללי
38,370,000	סה"כ עלות מבנה
8,000,000	סה"כ עלות תוכן

[The budget of the project presented at the Jerusalem Municipality.](#)

[Read more on Elad and Peace Forest here](#)

F. List of Recommendations to KKL-JNF

KKL-JNF can stop its support to the settlement enterprise and return to be a Jewish organization involved with the support of the development of the State of Israel, rather than an organization hi-jacked by settlers to support their agenda. Here are a few things KKL-JNF can do today:

1. Stop all acquisitions of West Bank land and East Jerusalem properties, and refraining from completing transactions that have not yet been completed.
2. Stop and annul any transfer of assets to third parties or to settlement entities. To the extent that leases/lease contracts have been signed in recent years, these contracts should be cancelled, whether completed or not, and include the evacuation of new outposts established on KKL-JNF lands in recent years.
3. Stop all procedures initiated by KKL-JNF or Himanuta (Himanuta, Himanuta Jerusalem, Himanuta Yosh) to evict or demolish Palestinian homes beyond the Green Line, including the cancellation/withdrawal of proceedings that have already begun.
4. Transfer of the Sumarin Family House in Silwan back to the Sumarin Family - The Sumarin family house was wrongly passed into the hands of KKL-JNF, using discriminatory laws against a weakened population, and it is inappropriate for KKL-JNF to expel a family from its home under the circumstances. Alternatively, leave the Sumarin house and discontinue any proceedings in its legal case, and let the family continue to reside there.
5. Dismantle Himanuta WB, which operates in the West Bank. Until this dismantlement, replace the members of its board of directors with members of the Himanuta Israel or KKL-JNF board.