

## Israeli court clears the way to evict Palestinian family from East Jerusalem home

**After a legal battle that has lasted around 30 years, the Sumreen family of 18 will be evicted and forced to pay \$5,800 to the Jewish National Fund, which has been deemed the legal owner of the property**

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An Israeli court rejected an appeal by a Palestinian family, allowing authorities to go ahead with plans to evict them from a building in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan in which they have lived since the 1950s.

The Jerusalem District Court ruled Tuesday that all 18 members of the Sumreen family have until August 16 to leave the premises and levied a charge of 20,000 shekels (about \$5,800) they must pay to the KKL-Jewish National Fund, which has been deemed to be the property's legal custodian.

The KKL-JNF received custodianship of the building on the basis of a law on property regarded as abandoned by Israeli authorities. The court determined that the house's legal heirs were absentees, as they resided in enemy countries at the time their father died.

The judges said in their decision that the family had failed to prove that it owns the building.

The Sumreen family's home is in the center of a national park called City of David that is run by the right-wing, pro-settler organization, Elad, which has been trying to get the family to move out for about 30 years. The first application for their eviction was filed in 1991 after the father of the family, Musa Sumreen, was declared to have abandoned the property. Under the Abandon Assets Law passed in 1950, the property of anyone living in an enemy country is transferred to the custodian as abandoned assets. In this case, as in others, the custodian registered the asset as abandoned without the family's knowledge, on the basis of an affidavit filed by an attorney for Elad and the KKL-JNF.

For years the KKL-JNF sought to evict the family via its subsidiary called Himnuta. The family won the first lawsuit but Musa's children were subsequently declared to be absentees. In 1999 the family's attempt to gain

recognition as owners of the building. Then, in 2005, the KKL-JNF again asked the family to leave the building and demanded that the family pay compensation of half a million shekels for its use of the premises. The KKL-JNF won the case, but in 2011 the verdict was overturned. In 2017, the KKL-JNF again renewed its claim and managed to prove that the three heirs to Musa Sumreen were absentees, and therefore the house belonged to the organization.

In September 2019, the Sumreen family lost an appeal to Jerusalem Magistrate's Court and appealed to the District Court. On Tuesday the judge overseeing the case held a session on the appeal and the three-judge panel, consisting of Aharon Farkash, Oded Shaham and Avraham Rubin, issued their decision to reject the family's appeal.

In recent weeks Israeli academics have launched a pressure campaign demanding that the KKL-JNF stop the expulsion process of the Sumreen family. Thirty-four Israel Prize laureates have written to the organization's head, Danny Atar, and executive board members, saying: "The expulsion of the family, as part of a campaign to Judaize Silwan which has been going on for many years, will stain the reputation of the KKL ... we beg of you to desist from taking actions that would be clearly immoral."

In addition, 150 graduates of the KKL-JNF's elite squads, joined by 125 academics and artists the world over have signed a petition against the family's eviction. Left-wing activists also held a protest against the family's eviction last week, where they projected slides with photographs from previous evictions in Silwan across the walls of the KKL-JNF's offices in Jerusalem.