# ARMENIAN QUARTER OF JERUSALEM THREATENED

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In July 2021, the Armenian Patriarchate signed a deal with Israeli real-estate company Xana Gardens to build a hotel on 25% of the land that comprises Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter. This portion of land is known as *Goverou Bardez*, or, the Cow's Garden. It has historically served as a sanctuary for Armenian refugees following the Armenian Genocide. The Cow's Garden is also home to an Armenian church and five family residences.

Following backlash from the Armenian community, the Patriarchate canceled the land deal on October 26, 2023. Since then, Xana Gardens has sent bulldozers and aggressive company representatives to illegally seize the Cow's Garden.

Armenians have lived in the Armenian Quarter since the fourth century. It is also the oldest Armenian diaspora community in the world. For over 1,600 years, the community has persisted against the construction of Jewish-only settlements in Jerusalem. Armenians, as well as other Jerusalemite Christians, have faced decades of verbal and physical harassment in the city. Extremists regularly vandalize the Armenian Quarter with hateful graffiti, such as, "Death to Arabs and their Armenian Friends" and they also attack Armenian families.

Jerusalemite Armenians are fighting for their personal and cultural survival. Kegham Balian, born and raised in the Armenian Quarter, is the communications director for an organization called Save the ARQ that protests for the right to keep the Armenian Quarter in Armenian hands. Balian, as well as other members of the community, created a base in a demolished parking lot in the Cow's Garden where they host protests against Israeli encroachment. Kerkonian Dajani LLP, a law firm in Illinois, USA, represents the Armenian Quarter in its battle against Xana Gardens. Save the ARQ's supporters include Muslim and Jewish community members.

Xana Gardens is allegedly connected to far-right Israeli activists who help Jewish Israelis buy property in East Jerusalem and the Old City, which is where a majority of the city's Muslims and Christians live. Armenians in Jerusalem are guardians of Christian history. Applying pressure to the already miniscule community could be disastrous to the future of Jerusalemite Christians; their fate hinges on the outcome of this legal battle. The deal could result in Armenian community members' displacement from the Quarter as the homes surrounding Cow's Garden are at risk in the land grab. Despite the ongoing court case, armed settlers, the police, and company representatives have tried to force bulldozing efforts.

After facing a genocide in September 2023 and continued cultural erasure at the hands of Azerbaijan, it is imperative that world leaders prioritize Armenian survival. Allowing Xana Gardens to seize the Cow's Garden sets a precedent for continued land encroachment that threatens the wider Christian community in Jerusalem and the city's multicultural history.

**Recommendations:**

- Support Save the ARQ and community members on the ground by donating to their Legal Defense Fund and following their social media updates
- Israeli courts must ensure that members of the Armenian Quarter are protected from outside harassment, including from law enforcement, for the duration of the legal battle
- Israel must cease all efforts to expand settlements at the expense of non-Jews and commit to protecting all peoples of all faiths

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Photo Credit: *(Ahmad Gharabli / Getty). The Armenian car park in the Old City of Jerusalem in December 2023.*

# Comments



**Roubik Allahverdi** – 2024-12-01 18:00:35
The Armenian quarter of the old city must be preserved and protected . God bless Armenians for fighting the tyrannical regime in Israel that is an apartheid regime . God bless multi racial Israel .