

## October 2008 in Akka (Acre)

# Course of Events

Updated 14 October 2008

*"Co-existence is a catch-phrase. After all, Akka is a city such as Ra'anana, Kfar Saba and Haifa, that must maintain its Jewish identity. I don't think there is a dispute. Akka is the Galilee capital, thousands of years of Jewish history. We are here in order to preserve the Jewish identity, fortify its spirit and to withstand this national challenge."*

**Rabbi Yossi Stern, head of the Akka "Hesder" Yeshiva**



**Caption: Akka resident's car, 11 October 2008**  
(Photos by "Arabs 48", "Panet" "Y-net", "Aconet")

Edited by Ala Hlehel

"Akka Residents Coalition" is a group of non-profit organizations, institutes, political activists and public figures.

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## October 2008 in Akka

### Timeline of Events

#### **Tuesday, 7 October**

Abbas Zakour, an Arab member of Knesset (Islamic Movement) and a resident of Akka sends a letter to the Minister of Public Security, Avi Dichter, demanding that the police place mobile patrols in Arab and Jewish friction areas in Akka. He warns of a disaster on Yom Kippur (the holiest Jewish holiday; the Day of Atonement) after the violent events in the past years on this day in Akka. His request is refused.

#### **Wednesday, 8 October (Yom Kippur eve) around 12 midnight**

Tawfik Jamal, a 48-year-old Arab citizen of Israel from Akka, rides in his car to the house of relatives, the Sha'aban family, who live in the eastern part of the city, to pick up his daughter. The daughter helped the family prepare cakes for a wedding ceremony planned to be held the following week. Jamal drove slowly and quietly with no radio or speakers turned on. His 18-year-old son and the son's 20-year-old friend were also in the car. Jewish youth attacked the car with stones after he parked it and entered his relatives' home from which he called the police. "Me, my son and his friend were close to death by a hairbreadth," said Jamal.



Fifteen people were besieged in the Sha'aban family home, surrounded and attacked by a large group of Jewish individuals, while the police stood aside. A rumor spread in the old city of Akka that one of the besieged people was killed and that people were called to help them escape. Simultaneously, the police were negotiating with the Jewish rioters to rescue the besieged family in order to prevent further conflict between the Arab and Jewish residents. After a few hours, the family members were rescued. The hundreds of agitated Arab youth returned to the old city, and on the way back, a few of them through stones at cars and shops in the city's Ben-Ami street.

#### **Thursday, 9 October**

After Yom Kippur ended, a large group of Jewish residents, estimated at 1,500, gathered around the train station in the eastern and northern parts of the city. The chief of the northern district police, major general Shimon Koren, reported two riot centers, one between Strauss junction and "Magen David"

junction in the eastern part of the city, and the other in the Wolfsson neighborhood, north of the Akka bus station. The Jewish rioters threw stones, clashed with the police and attacked Arab passersby. Ten rioters were arrested and a few people were injured.

Hundreds of Jewish rioters closed in on the Abu-Ataba family house, located on Ehad Ha'am Street.

They threw stones at the home and damaged it, and at the same time, they called out, "Death to the



Arabs". Some of the family members were injured.

That night police commissioner Inspector General Dudi Cohen met the leaders of the Arab and Jewish communities in Akka. After the meeting, he said that, "it is important to call for total calm. Everyone must examine themselves and restore peace and quiet. We need to reach a state of calm in the city, and let life return to its path." Leaders of the Arab public issued statements to calm down the situation as well, but representatives of the Jewish community did not. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni also demanded that peace be restored, but to date, no Israeli official had denounced the violent actions of the Jewish residents.

### **Friday, 10 October**

During the riots after the holiday, at least eight people were injured. Repeatedly, Jews were injured while colliding with police forces, while the Arabs were injured by Jewish offenders. Five hundred police were stationed in the city. Despite statements made by the police that their intent was to prevent further riots in the eastern neighborhoods, the rioters were not driven away but they continued assaulting Arab citizens who that lived in the area.

The police cleared away a few gatherings of rioters near the "Eshkol" school, where the protesters threw stones on a few Arab cars and homes. Ten people were arrested.

The Jewish crowd attacked the Hamad family home, near the West Galilee College; the Barghouti home located on Hayozrim Street; and another Arab family house on Ehad Ha'am Street. Two other Arab family homes in Harav Lopez and Ramhal Streets were burned down.

Akka mayor Shimon Lankri announced the cancellation of the Akka Alternative Theater Festival which is held annually in the city. The festival was due to open on 15 October. The mayor stated that, "considering the anger and infringement of the religious rights of the residents conducting the festival would be in bad taste." On the previous evening, the mayor had called on Israelis to come to the festival. The festival's cancellation came after Jewish rioters demanded it as an economic sanction against the city's Arabs.

Riots in the northern neighborhoods took place in Alkalai, Ben Shushan and Ehad Ha'am Streets. In these areas of the city, there is a Jewish majority; about twenty Arab families live there in total. The Jewish rioters gathered in the streets and cried "Death to the Arabs". They attacked Arab family homes trying to make their inhabitants flee; they damaged the homes and set them on fire. The riots continued: trees and garbage cans were set on fire in the streets. A text message distributed to Jewish residents called to boycott Arab tradesmen and shopkeepers.

Around midnight, three Jewish residents were arrested while trying to damage an Arab family's house. The violent clashes resumed in the eastern neighborhood. Twelve rioters were arrested.





### **Saturday, 11 October**

Arab public representatives issued a statement in which they condemned Jamal, the driver of the car, for driving on Yom Kippur. The driver publicly apologized before a session of the Knesset's Interior Committee. The representatives of the Jewish community in Akka, the mayor and the city's rabbi, declined to accept the apologies. Riots continued. The mayor demands more arrests.

A petition is circulated on the Internet to which many Arab and Jewish artists and academics have signed on. The petition calls for the Akka Alternative Theatre Festival to be held as planned. At nightfall, a Jewish mob burns down another house of an Arab family. The police confront the Jewish law-breakers.

### **Sunday, 12 October**

Several Arab women and children who have been evacuated from their homes try to return in order to take clothes and supplies but fail to do so. The Arab families demonstrate in front of City Hall; Jewish law-breakers come there and attack them.

Mayor Lankri changes his position and declares: "I'm glad the Arab leadership is condemning this grave incident." During the last four days of confrontations, 54 people were arrested, half Jews and half Arab citizens. Systematically, the courts release most of the Jewish detainees, while the time of detention for the Arab detainees is extended.

The Minister of Science, Culture and Sport, Galeb Majadle, announced that he opposes the



postponement of the Akka Festival. In an interview to Ynet, the chief of the northern district police Shimon Koren states that those who are disrupting public order are Jewish: "We know who they are and we'll get them." He made it clear that even when the riots end, arrests will continue: "We have evidence and we will file indictments."

In response to these violent events, the head of the "Hesder" Yeshiva, Rabbi Yossi Stern promised to build a new campus for the Yeshiva in town as soon as possible: "Akka is the national test in the struggle for the character of the State of Israel," he declares.

### **Monday, 13 October**

Police arrest and interrogate the son of Tawfik Jamal, the Arab citizen of Israel who drove in the Jewish neighborhood on the eve of Yom Kippur and who was blamed for causing the riots although he was attacked and his life was in danger.

Later, the police released Mr. Jamal's son and arrested Mr. Jamal himself. He is being interrogated and his detention was extended by the court. The police claim that he is suspected of driving beyond the speed limit, endangering human life and hurting "religious sentiments" when driving on Yom Kippur in a Jewish neighborhood.

Hurting the feelings of others and driving on Yom Kippur are not criminal offenses.

### **Tuesday, 14 October**

Solidarity committees for the Arab residents of Akka, initiated by Jews and Arabs, are visiting the city.

The riots against Arab citizens in Akka receive Arab and international attention around the world. Arab public leaders demand a neutral independent investigation committee and not one appointed by the state. "We have learned the lesson of October 2000," Arab leaders declared.

There is still no solution for the Arab families forced to flee from the eastern neighborhood during the nights of riots. Most of them are still staying in hotels and at relatives' houses. The police are not acting to bring them back to their homes.

**October 2008 in Akka**

## **Attacks by Jewish extremists on Arab citizens in recent years**

Violent harassment by Jews against Arab residents of the city of Akka did not start on Yom Kippur eve 2008. The wave of attacks and intimidation already started in 2002, just before a religious Yeshiva school was established in the city and Jewish settlers moved in. A few of the many documented events are listed below:

### **2002:**

Lawyer Madikha Ramal's car is set on fire following a bomb explosion in Netanya.

### **2005:**

The homes of three Arab families on Alkalai Street are set on fire: the Ramal, Sha'aban and Khalaile families.

### **2007:**

In the same neighborhood, Subhi Morsi is attacked and his car is set on fire.

### **8 April 2008:**

Jewish extremists set Ramal's house on fire again. Molotov cocktails are thrown into the house while the family members are asleep.

### **23 April 2008:**

"Al-Manshiya" mosque is vandalized by four Jewish youth living in the neighborhood. During the interrogation, they admit to an attempt to burn down another Arab family's house a few months ago.

Since 2002, slogans like "Death to Arabs" are permanently tagged over the neighborhood's walls and inside the elevators of apartment buildings.

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## Testimonies from families who were attacked



### The Ali Family

Walid and Tamam Ali and their three children have lived on Lopez Street since 1976. On 9 October 2008, at around 19:30, they saw a mass of people – about three hundred – approaching their house. Within seconds the crowd started throwing stones and shouting 'Death to the Arabs', 'Leave this place and our country', and similar slogans. A barrage of heavy stones (pieces of pavement) damaged the doors of the house and the windows, including a large glass door in the living room. The attack lasted for around 30 minutes. Everything within the house was shattered, and the mob closed in on the house. Tamam Ali, the mother, lost consciousness due to a drop in her blood pressure caused by the events. The Ali family called the police multiple times, always receiving the same reply: the police know about what is occurring and would do something but the whole city is in shambles. However, the police never came, and eventually the Ali family called their relatives to ask them to come and assist them in escaping.

Walid Ali's brother and nephew arrived in their car but could not enter their street because the police had put a barrier at the street's entrance and were not allowing anyone to pass. After about one and a half hours of asking the police, two Arab police on guard finally agreed to let them enter the street as well as to accompany them to home of the Ali family. Together they helped the family members leave the house; the mother was in a bad physical condition and the rest of the family was in a state of shock. Throughout the rescue, the mob outside kept throwing stones and swearing, and began cheering that they "succeeded" in driving the family from its house.

After the family left the house, the crowds dragged Ali's car into the middle of the street, turned it over and went on throwing stones at it as well as the house. Later that evening, one



of the Jewish neighbors called the police and said that the mob had set fire to the car. Later that night the police sent six officers to guard the house's entrance.

On Friday, the next morning, the eldest son of the family, along with a friend, came to the house to fetch some clothes, money and several other things. The moment they reached the house, dozens of Jewish rioters approached them and threatened that they would hurt them if they did not leave immediately. They yelled and swore at them, calling them "dirty Arabs". The two teenagers were scared and left immediately without taking anything. On their way out, one of the neighbors – a department manager in the city hall – told the crowds: "Drive them away. Don't let them stay here. We don't want Arabs in this neighborhood and not in our country either. This is our country." The policemen who witnessed all of this did not interfere. That evening, the son's car was also set on fire while the police watched.

On Saturday, the next evening, the mobs set fire to the whole house, again while the police watched. Several Jewish neighbors called the fire brigade. Despite the fact that the fire station is located very close to the house, it took the brigade around 15 minutes to arrive.

On Sunday evening, the boys returned again, trying to take some school books and uniforms for the younger son from the house. They found most of the house had been burned down, and no electricity. They could not assess the damage because of the lack of electricity. The neighbors informed them that before the mob had set fire to the house they had stolen many things from inside.



### **The Sa'adi Family**

Hana and Jalal Sa'adi live in a house on 9/3 Yosef Gadish Street in Akka's Eastern Quarter. The couple have three daughters aged 7, 6 and 3 and half years old. Hana also has two sons from her previous marriage: Tamer Zaidan (24) and Omri Zaidan (20). On 9 October, the family, including the two sons and three daughters, was at home when a violent Jewish mob appeared outside.

The mob forced open the house gate, destroyed the garden and broke the blinds on the living room window and the glass window on the porch. The family called the police multiple times but received no assistance; the police did not come to aid or evacuate the family. After the



mob left, Hana fled on foot to the police to ask for help, first from an officer who responded by telling her "to learn her lesson", and then at the police station, where she was told to return home with no police escort, being promised that a YASAM (riot police) unit would be sent immediately. Hana returned home on foot, despite the danger involved. She waited for hours for the police unit to arrive.

The next day, the Jewish mob appeared at the house again. Around nine o'clock in the evening, people began to throw rocks at the house while cursing and yelling racist slurs, causing extensive destruction to the house and scaring and traumatizing the entire family. After around twenty minutes a YASAM unit arrived and told the occupants to prepare for a rescue-evacuation. They were evacuated in a police vehicle, while the rioting mob hurled rocks at the vehicle.

The vehicle arrived at the station, where the adult members of the family were notified of their arrest. The girls were put into the custody of family members. The next day, 11 October, Hana, the mother, was released at 2 o'clock in the afternoon but Jalal, Tamer and Omri were kept under arrest.

The three, in addition to five Jewish residents who had been arrested, were brought before a judge in the Kiryon Magistrate's Court. Subsequently all of the Jewish detainees were released but the detention of the three Arab detainees was extended and they remained imprisoned. While the family members were trapped in the house, they received no police assistance, and thus they threw stones back at the rioters in order to keep them away. This was the reason given for the arrest and detention of the adult males in the family. This pattern was repeated in the other assault cases: **the police arrested the victims of assault together with the perpetrators, and then in court the perpetrators were set free while the victims' detention was extended.**



### **The Rammal Family**

On 8 October, the members of the Rammal Family were removed from their home in Alkalai Street in Akka under police protection because they feared that their lives were in danger. They have been moving to different locations since then and so far have been unable to return home. In an interview with Arab journalists the mother, Ronza Rammal, criticized the powerlessness of the police against Jewish extremists who are creating a regime of terror by attacking Arab families in the area. She emphasized that she and her children live in extremely difficult circumstances, wandering from house to house without their most basic belongings.

Her daughter, Walaa, asked all institutions and responsible individuals to interfere quickly and to solve the family's problems by letting them return to their home. Currently they are living in a two-room apartment in Wolfsson with ten inhabitants.

On Sunday 12 October, Walaa asked the police to escort her to her home in order to pick up clothing and other necessary items for the family. The police refused to accompany her, declaring "We are not your taxi drivers." However, after the family insisted, the police agreed to their request and two police cars accompanied the taxi in which the family traveled. At the entrance to Alkalai Street, they encountered a threatening mob of Jews shouting "Death to the Arabs!" and the police immediately withdrew, requesting that the family retreat.

Ronza Rammal says that these attacks have one goal, "to drive us out of our neighbourhood, and to make the Arabs leave Akka. But we will remain in Akka, where we were born, in spite of the violence directed against us," she insisted.



### **The Halaila Family**

The Halaila family was removed from their home in Alkalai Street by the police on 10 October after their daughter was attacked by Jewish rioters. The mother and her four

daughters currently have nowhere to live. On 12 October, she approached the Akka Municipality ask for help and to find a solution for her problem.

In an interview, Mrs. Halaila said: “Our situation is extremely grave. The children do not go to school, we have no clothes, we do not go to work. We asked the Municipality to provide us, as it is obligated to, with temporary living quarters. We also asked to be escorted to our neighborhood in order to collect our necessities and clothing.” On 12 October they tried to return home, but were attacked and chased away by Jewish rioters.

### **The Sha'aban Family**

The Sha'aban family's home on Alkalai Street was attacked, vandalized, and subsequently burned down by Jewish rioters. The police helped the family to leave but did not protect the house.

### **The Morsi Family**

On 11 October, Jewish rioters attacked the home of Soubhi Morsi in the Al-Manshiya neighborhood in the eastern part of Akka. “They destroyed everything. It just shows how much hatred has been buried inside them for years,” said Morsi in an interview. The attack left the house completely burned down.

**The Barghouti family's** home in the eastern part of Akka, in HaYotsrim Street, was attacked damaged and set on fire several times during the riots.





Akka, October 2008

## “Activities to Judiaze Akka”

The latest events in Akka are part of a trend that has not received public attention: a widespread attack by the national right-wing groups on mixed Jewish-Arab cities. It is worth reading the racist calls to boycott Arab businesses in Akka together with the call to settle in Led (Lod) in 2002. These calls have produced results and one can see the connection between them and the activities of extremists in Jaffa-Tel Aviv. In recent years the national right-wing party called “the Seeds of the Settlements” have concentrated in Led, Ramla, Akka, Jaffa, and other areas at ‘demographic risk’ and they are being encouraged by the local authorities to carry out ‘social work’ in the areas. Today there are around 200 yeshivas in Akka in addition to around 1000 settler-extremists.



### **The Ometz (Courage) Group**

This group in Akka was established by Jewish settlers, graduates of yeshivas in the West Bank towns of Hebron, Kedumim, and south of Mount Hebron. One of the founders is Ishai Rubin, who was born and raised in the ‘ideological’ settlement of Elon Moreh. Rubin and his friend David Cohen had initially planned to join a new settlement on one of the hills around Hebron, but decided to move to Akka instead.

In 1997 a group of young families settled in Akka, with the intention of strengthening the process of “Judiazation of the city”. More and more young settlers are moving to the mixed towns who are members of the national religious movement mainly focusing on ‘social issues.’ Some of them see this as an important ideal in and of itself. Others view it as a means of increasing the financial support among Israeli Jews. Their leader is Rabbi Nachshon Cohen, formerly of the Hebron Yeshiva in the Beth Romano settlement in Hebron. In an



interview with journalists from *Ha'aretz*, he declared: "There is no doubt at all that the settlement of Yesha is as vital as that of Misgav Am or Kiryat Shmona."

The National Unity Party is active in Jaffa. A conference in April 2008 devoted to the 'settlement' of Ramla was initiated by the nationalist right-wing party, the religious Amichai group and the Komemiut movement (established after the withdrawal from Gaza). The illegal actions of these settlers, which appear to be supported by the government, are similar to that undertaken in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).

These young settlers are carrying out "social missions", intended to judiaze Israeli society and to reinforce hostility against the Arabs. They recruit residents by promising national-religious families the chance to improve their quality of life by moving to mixed cities in communities within Israel with economic support from the State.

### **According to the Head of the Hesder Yeshiva in Akka, Rabbi Yossi Stern:**

*"Akka is a national test. Akka today is Israel in 10 years' time. What happens in Akka today is what will happen in Israel. We are the vanguard. We respect the State, and we must, by every possible means, be strong and stand firm for its honour.*

*Co-existence is a slogan. Ultimately Akka is a town like Raanana, Kfar Saba, or Haifa, and must safeguard its Jewish identity. I think everyone would agree that Akka is the capital city of Galilee, of thousands of years of Jewish history. We are here to preserve that Jewish identity and to reinforce that spirit, to stand for our nation's honour.*

*There were plenty of houses for sale here, and the situation was that either Arabs would buy them, or that we would bring yeshiva students to live in them. Recently another 30 families from the group have come in. Today, we are constructing a large community of settlers, and creating permanent housing for them." (Channel 7).*

The yeshiva is located on the site of an old synagogue in Kiryat Wolfsson. It is intended to block access to Arab residents in the area, and to contribute to the 'Judiazation' of the city. Thus the apartments in which the yeshiva students live are in buildings and areas in which all or most of the residents are Arabs.

### **Economic boycotts – not the first time**

A petition recently disseminated among Jewish residents calls for the boycott of Arab tradesmen and businesses in the city. A new Internet site has been set up, specifically to encourage these sanctions: [www.akko.txt.co.il](http://www.akko.txt.co.il)

During the riots, flyers were distributed – "Jews don't buy from Arabs". An important rabbi endorsed the boycott. Other boycotts were also organized following the events of October 2000, and for almost a whole year Jewish citizens purchased very little from shops in Akka's Old City and rarely visited the area. A similar boycott was attempted following the violent events at the end of Simchat Torah two years ago but failed.

Arab businesses in Akka are suffering as a result, yet the Municipality has cancelled the Alternative Theatre Festival – one of the best sources of income for Arab tradesmen in the Old City.

**Four ongoing processes are underway to ‘Judiaze’ the mixed towns:**

- a) Making life more difficult for Arab citizens, instituting discriminatory practices with regards to providing services, marginalizing Arabs in order to encourage them to leave;
- b) Erasing all signs of Arab identity including the destruction of historic buildings and inscriptions, and street names and names of historic sites in Arabic;
- c) Acquiring buildings and property through government-owned companies in accordance with laws targeted at the ‘Judiazation’ of cities, not allowing families to inherit property, and making squatting and other forms of control of property easier. All of this is supported by unlimited financial contributions from wealthy Jews abroad;
- d) Rehabilitating some of the neighborhoods; turning them into artists’ quarters, galleries, and tourist projects without the inclusion of any Arab citizens.

