Palestinian family evicted from East Jerusalem home to appeal to ICC

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A Palestinian family evicted from their house in a flashpoint East Jerusalem neighborhood will appeal to the International Criminal Court against Israel after the home was demolished, a London-based group announced Friday.

On Wednesday, Israeli police evicted the Salihiya family and razed their home, arresting 18 Palestinians and Israeli activists at the scene that unfolded before dawn. Several members of the family who were arrested have since been released.

The Jerusalem City Hall said it plans to build a special needs school for the neighborhood’s residents on the plot, as well as six kindergartens and other public facilities.

The city has said it purchased the land from previous Arab owners and that the Salihiyas had lived there illegally for years, but failed to agree to a compromise on an eviction order first issued in 2017.

Last year, a Jerusalem court ruled in favor of the city, although the family had continued to contest the eviction.

According to the International Centre of Justice for Palestinian Rights (ICJP), the ICC case is being prepared by Bindmans, an English law firm. The ICJP said a Bindmans lawyer will speak with the Salihiya family next week to finalize the appeal.

“The Sheikh Jarrah case is already notorious. ICJP is proud and privileged to stand alongside this family as they represent not just their own interests, but the century of historic injustice meted out to the Palestinian people individually and collectively,” the organization’s director Crispin Blunt said in the statement.

“For Israel’s sake, for all Palestinians and for humanity’s sake the Sheikh Jarrah case needs to be a turning point where justice and our common humanity starts to count for more than people’s insecurities driven by fear,” added Blunt, a former Conservative MP.

The ICJP statement noted the ongoing probe by The Hague-based ICC of Israel and the Palestinians for alleged war crimes in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

Wednesday’s eviction was the first in Sheikh Jarrah since 2017. Eviction battles in the neighborhood in May of last year were a major factor in tensions that touched off a brief war between Israel and Hamas terrorists, who threatened violence should Palestinians be removed from their homes.

In those cases, Palestinians risked having to surrender plots of land to Jews who had mounted legal claims to the land.

But Jerusalem authorities have stressed the Salihiya family eviction is a different case and that the city intends to build a special needs school on the land, benefitting Arab residents of East Jerusalem.

Sheikh Jarrah, parts of which were historically known in Hebrew as Shimon Hatzadik or Nahalat Shimon, has become one of Jerusalem’s most tense neighborhoods. Palestinians live alongside a small cluster of right-wing Jewish nationalists who moved in following complex legal property cases.

According to the left-wing Ir Amim nonprofit, some 300 Palestinians are currently under threat of eviction in Sheikh Jarrah, mostly in private cases filed by right-wing Jewish groups.