

# 60 east J'lem Jewish homes to be dedicated

## Five MKs slated to attend ceremony at Ma'aleh Hazeitim in Ras al-Amud

• By MELANIE LIDMAN

Sixty new apartments from the second stage of a Jewish neighborhood in the middle of Ras al-Amud in southeastern Jerusalem will be dedicated on Wednesday.

The ceremony is to be attended by Mayor Nir Barkat, Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin, Shas chairman Eli Yishai, Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar and Environmental Protection Minister Gilad Erdan, both from the Likud, Science and Technology Minister Daniel Herschkowitz (Habayit Hayehudi) and former Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel Eliahu Bakshi-Doron.

Families began moving into the apartments about two months ago, which constitute the second half of a 110-unit development called Ma'aleh Hazeitim.

Ateret Cohanim, which oversees Ma'aleh Hazeitim as well as other Jewish projects in predominantly Arab neighborhoods, denied there was any connection between the ceremony and the prime minister's trip to Washington, and that the date had been chosen to fit with Rivlin's schedule and coincide with Jerusalem Day, which falls on the evening of June 1.

Still, Ateret Cohanim executive director Daniel Luria said that the dedication was meant to send a strong message.

"The message is very clear: Hands off Jerusalem," he told *The Jerusalem Post* on Sunday. "Jerusalem belongs to the Jewish people and we don't need to be told by anyone, no matter how powerful these governments are, when it comes to Jerusalem I don't think anyone has any right to say what we should and should not do," he said.

"Obama doesn't understand reality on the ground, this is an important lesson for him that this place belongs to the Jewish people living in the heart of



CHILDREN GATHER in a thank-you photo for Ma'aleh Hazeitim benefactor Irving Moskowitz in the capital yesterday. (Melanie Lidman)

their own neighborhood," Luria said.

The gleaming white buildings, surrounded on three sides by decrepit Arab homes, are especially contentious for left-wing activists and the Arab residents of east Jerusalem.

"In Jerusalem, the closer you get to the compound of the Temple Mount, the more sensitive it gets," said Orly Noy, the spokeswoman for Ir Amim. "From Ras al-Amud, this specific settlement, you can literally touch [the Dome of the Rock], it's very, very near one of the most explosive places in the world."

During the Oslo Accords negotiations, the Arab neighborhood was discussed as the main channel through which Palestinians could enter the compound containing the Aksa Mosque in the event of a Palestinian state being formed.

Daniel, an immigrant from South Africa who asked that his last name not be used due to business concerns, said that those considerations were one

of the primary reasons for his decision to move to Ma'aleh Hazeitim nine years ago, to the first stage of apartments.

Daniel said that he was drawn to the beautiful views of the Old City – as well as to the ideology of living in the neighborhood.

"Anyone who lives here has an interest to make sure it stays part of Israel... This was definitely something we didn't want," he said of the plan to make the neighborhood the main entry point for Palestinians to enter the Temple Mount.

Daniel said the residents of Ma'aleh Hazeitim sometimes had problems with Arab children throwing stones at their cars and their balconies, but that it was quiet "95 percent of the time." He praised the private security guards and the police for preventing most such conflicts.

The balconies are open and unprotected, meters away from the rooftops of Arab homes. "We're not a fortress, no one has the intention of living here

and staying inside a fortress," Daniel said.

But Faris Tahau, a 52-year-old Ras al-Amud resident who owns a fruit stall around the corner from Ma'aleh Hazeitim, sees the complex as an impenetrable symbol of the inequalities in his neighborhood. He slammed the dedication ceremony as an example of how the government and the Jerusalem Municipality have favored Jewish residents while completely ignoring Arab residents.

"The municipality gives [building] permits to the Jews, but not to us. They need to make it the same," he said. "Why does the government let them build such big houses when we have none?"

Tahau claimed the Arabs wouldn't mind living side-by-side with Jews if they were afforded equal services. While Jews were holding dedication ceremonies, he said, Arab residents were suffering from a severe housing shortage, and no infrastructure or trash col-

lection. "Out of every 100 people, one person gets a permit for a small thing, and only if he has connections," he said.

"Why do our kids throw stones? They see their kids, all ages from the babies to the teenagers, going to classes and playgrounds and new buildings, and our kids have nothing," said Tahau. He added that the Arab neighbors tried to build a small play area for the children at the entrance to Ras al-Amud, but were denied permission by the authorities, who said it would ruin the view for tourists.

On Sunday, nearly 100 children who live in Ma'aleh Hazeitim gathered in the courtyard to take a group photo to give to the family members of Irving Moskowitz, the American millionaire who financed the development as well as other projects in east Jerusalem. Members of the Moskowitz family are expected to take part in the dedication ceremony on Wednesday and a cornerstone laying ceremony for a synagogue for the complex.

In the past two months, the complex has grown from 50 families to more than 90. The new units and the old units each make a semicircle, almost enclosing a small courtyard that is overrun with children of all ages riding bicycles, jumping off benches, and carrying younger siblings, their laughter bouncing off the walls of the buildings. Parents mingle after a day of work, and young teens lounge on the steps.

Daniel's children all agree on the best part of living in Ma'aleh Hazeitim: their friends. The complex is home to large national-religious families, some with nine or 10 children, and there is always someone ready to play outside.

Prices of the new apartments are double compared to the prices of the first stage nine years ago. A four-bedroom apartment in the first stage sold