



Genocide Watch: Armenians in Israel

The Israeli government is [threatening](#) the expropriation of Armenian Church property in Jerusalem. This confiscation follows [threats](#) to the Cow's Garden in the Armenian Quarter. It is part of an [escalation](#) of attacks on Christians and the Christian presence in Jerusalem.

In 2018, the Jerusalem municipality began [imposing](#) *Arnora* taxes on Church property, despite a 200-year exemption. If tax arrears are not paid, the municipality may seize and auction off the Armenian Church's properties.

This is an existential crisis for the already [threatened](#) and dwindling Armenian community in the Holy City. This new tax is detrimental to [Christian](#) communities as well as others, who [experienced](#) an exponential increase in taxes this year.

[According](#) to the Chancellor of the Armenian Community, these properties were bought prior to 1860 when the Armenian Community was struggling to survive during the Crimean War. These financial assets help keep the Church running even when pilgrimages fall, and donations are not received.

The statement released by the Patriarchate [includes](#) the following claims:

- The *Arnora* tax assessment was never subject to a judicial decision and is illegal.
- The municipality is demanding exorbitant taxes retroactively without defining a tax base.
- A significant portion of the alleged tax debt concerns property that is leased to the city of Jerusalem itself, which has not paid rent for several years.

A single anti-Christian municipal employee is responsible for this seizure order. He has ordered the judiciary to ignore the Patriarchate's claim. He claims that his seizure order is equivalent to a court order.

In response, the Patriarchate has [filed](#) an administrative appeal, with a hearing scheduled for February 24th. The enforcement process is temporarily suspended. If the Patriarchate's petition is rejected, it will [establish](#) a dangerous legal precedent for the [expropriation](#) of property rights of Christian institutions.

The [Armenian Community in Jerusalem](#), [allied](#) activist [groups](#), and the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem [condemn](#) the municipal seizure of church property. They claim this is a direct attack on religious freedom, which must include the right of religious institutions to financially sustain themselves.

Armenians have lived in Jerusalem since the beginning of Christianity. Since 2021, Jerusalem Armenians have been [fighting](#) for their right to exist in a city that has become increasingly hostile to them.

This Israeli expropriation policy is part of a larger threat to Armenians. In 2023, Armenians in Artsakh [were victims of](#) genocide and forced displacement. Since 2020, Azerbaijan has [threatened](#) invasion and annexation of the southern part of Armenia. The situation in Jerusalem [mirrors](#) the seizures of Armenian property in Istanbul to rid the city of Armenians decades after the Genocide.

The continued existence of Armenians in Armenia and in the Holy Land is under mortal threat. Erasing Armenians from the Holy Land would be a catastrophe for Christians worldwide. It also threatens traditional religious pluralism in Israel and Palestine.

Recommendations:

- The Israeli government and Jerusalem municipality must uphold religious freedom.
- Armenian religious leaders should be transparent with the community. Secret land deals have impacted both [Armenian](#) and [Greek](#) Orthodox communities.

