

## No Money for Marota City's Alternative Housing Project

15-07-2020

The deadline for building an alternative housing project within Marota City has passed without success, with the government proving unable to fund the project.

Alternative housing is housing provided to former property owners or to people who were evacuated from a property in the area where Decree No. 66 of 2012 is being implemented. The beneficiaries are required to pay the price of the alternative housing based on its construction cost.

Article 45 of Decree 66 stipulated that the alternative housing be provided within four years after the issuance of the legislation—that is, by 2016.

However, Law No. 10 of 2018, regarding the establishment of development zones in administrative units, amended Article 45 of Decree 66, stipulating that alternative housing be secured for residents four years after their evacuation, rather than four years after the issuance of the decree. But even according to the new measure, there has been a delay in securing housing, as residents were evacuated in 2015. Therefore, the housing is now one year overdue.

Decree 66 did not stipulate that beneficiaries necessarily be granted a full apartment. Rather, people who formerly owned or occupied a property are supposed to receive equity shares in the alternative housing project based on the value of their homes before they were evacuated from it. If the value was high enough, they can receive a full apartment—otherwise, they would only receive a share.

The Directorate of Technical Studies in the Damascus governorate has estimated that setting up alternative housing within the Marota City project would cost SYP 285 billion, with 38 residential towers included in the first phase.

Decree No. 66 stipulated that the project be built within Marota City. But in 2019, the project was transferred to Basilia City, another new real estate development further south of Marota. Because Basilia is farther from the city centre of Damascus, real estate prices there are cheaper.

On July 9, new Prime Minister Hussein Arnous requested that the [Ministry of Finance](#), the Damascus governorate and the Damascus Cham Holding Company — which is affiliated to the governorate — secure the necessary funds for alternative housing. The Board of Directors of the [General Housing Establishment](#), which is part of the Ministry of Housing and Local Development, is now discussing the possibility of implementing the project within the next three years, provided there is funding.

In addition to not providing new homes, other violations of the text of Decree No. 66 include delay in the payment of rental fees to certain individuals. Former owners entitled to the alternative housing are supposed to be compensated the equivalent of their annual rent until they are provided with the housing with compensation starting one month after the eviction notice.

Also, Article 44 of the decree stipulated that occupants who weren't eligible for alternative housing should be compensated with the equivalent of two years' rent — owners of agricultural land, or those who were living on public or private land in the area but who do not have documentation proving ownership or former residency, do not benefit from alternative housing.

The Damascus governorate is currently paying rental dues for 2017.

Of the 8,200 families eligible for alternative housing in Marota City, only 5,500 families have actually obtained this right, according to statements made by the director of the implementation of Decree 66. Some 2,700 families were unable to prove their ownership or document rental payments from

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before 2000. This is because they were outside the country or because they were unable to reach the Damascus governorate's office within the one-year deadline for proving ownership, often due to personal security concerns. This includes the families of detainees and forcibly disappeared people.

The governorate of Damascus has increased the complexity of the requirements for proving ownership or rent, by requesting to bring a "departure statement" from the Immigration and Passports Division, from the owner or tenant of any property in the area of implementation of Decree 66. This means that any person wanted by the security services or the military can be arrested. In practice, these conditions participate in the loss of the rights of missing persons, forcibly disappeared persons, and those leaving Syria irregularly.

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