

‘We Will Soon Pray There’: Israeli Minister Urges Jewish Settlers to Enter Al-Aqsa (The Temple Mount)

Comments from Miri Regev come days after clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police at the site during tense Jerusalem Day celebrations

By [Middle East Eye](#)

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An Israeli minister has called on settlers to continue entering Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa compound and thanked security officials for making their visits possible after hundreds broke into the mosque during the final days of Ramadan.

In a video released on Monday, Culture and Sports Minister [Miri Regev](#) said:

“We should do everything to keep ascending to the Temple Mount [the name used by Jews for Al-Aqsa].”

“And hopefully soon, we will pray in the Temple Mount, our sacred place,” she added.

Regev also thanked Gilad Erdan, Israel’s Interior Security Minister, and Jerusalem’s Police Chief for their “fight and contribution for Jews to ascend to the Temple Mount”.

Regev’s comments come days after Palestinians and Israeli police clashed at the compound. On Sunday, tensions ratcheted up in the city with Israel’s Jerusalem Day – a celebration of the country’s capture and occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967 – coinciding with the last days of Ramadan.

As Israelis planned to march through the Old City, including the Muslim Quarter, to observe the holiday, Palestinians were urged to occupy the Al-Aqsa compound, an act of defiance against Jewish Israelis that were expected to enter the holy site.

In response to Palestinians rallying in Al-Aqsa, Israeli police – who [reportedly](#) allowed the settlers to enter the site – raided the mosque.

The Waqf, an Islamic organisation that oversees the site, said Israeli police fired rubber bullets and used pepper spray against Palestinians as they cracked down on the rally. Two Palestinians were arrested, the Waqf said.

In a statement, [the police said](#) protesters had barricaded themselves in the Al-Aqsa Mosque and threw chairs and stones at forces who were attempting to “disperse” them.

Settlers regularly praying at holy site

The status of the Al-Aqsa compound is one of the most sensitive issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Al-Aqsa compound is one of the holiest sites in Islam and served as the first Qibla, the direction towards which Muslims must turn to pray, before that was changed to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia.

It is also the holiest site in Judaism, believed to be the location of the Jewish temple that was destroyed 2,000 years ago.

Jews are allowed to visit the site during set hours but not pray there to avoid provoking tensions. However, Israeli settlers who regularly enter the compound often perform Jewish prayers on the site and some right-wing activists have called for the mosque's destruction to make way for another temple.

Increasingly, these activists have sought to build support for increased Jewish presence at the site despite a longstanding, joint guardianship agreement between Israel and Jordan, which retains control over Christian and Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem.

Palestinians fear settler tours inside the Al-Aqsa compound may erode their claims to the area, and further extinguish their aspirations for full rights and a state of their own, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Regev is part of a religious Zionist wave that is dominating Israeli politics, and she is a prominent figure in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party. Also on Monday, Israeli MK [Bezalel Smotrich](#) said Israel should be governed by the Torah and return to days of King David and Solomon.

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Featured image: Israeli Minister of Culture Miri Regev in the Knesset on January 27, 2016. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

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