

Angry Palestinians Reject U.S. Vice President's Visit to Israel



Bethlehem, January 22 (RHC)-- Palestinians have taken to the streets of the West Bank city of Bethlehem to protest U.S. Vice President Mike Pence's visit to Israel, burning his photos over Washington's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital.

The protesters gathered in Bethlehem's Manger Square outside the Church of the Nativity on Sunday night after Pence arrived in Israel earlier in the day for a two-day visit. They carried signs that read "Pence: You are Desecrating our Land" and "Pence: Go Home."

Hailed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a "great friend," the U.S. vice president arrived in Tel Aviv as part of a Middle East tour revolving around Washington's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Pence landed at Tel Aviv's Ben-Gurion Airport on Sunday, marking the highest-level visit by a U.S. official to the region since President Donald Trump's decision in early December to move the U.S. diplomatic mission from Tel Aviv. Pence refused to talk to reporters after a welcome ceremony by Israel's tourism minister and headed directly to Jerusalem.

Earlier in the day, Netanyahu said during a cabinet meeting that he was looking forward to discussing regional issues with Pence. "Anyone who truly wants to fulfill those goals knows there is no substitute to

the United States' leadership," Netanyahu said.

Trump's Jerusalem shift was a break from decades of U.S. policy that left the holy city's status to be decided in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Palestinians are hopeful that the eastern part of the city would eventually serve as the capital of a future independent state.

Trump's declaration drew condemnation from world leaders and even Washington's closest allies in Arab nations and triggered demonstrations in the occupied Palestinian territories, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq, Morocco and other Muslim countries.

Pence's firm defense of Trump's decision has specifically caused uneasiness among Arab leaders. The frustration became evident earlier on Sunday, when he made a short stop in Jordan and met with King Abdullah II.

Abdullah told Pence that the Trump administration needed to "rebuild trust and confidence" in a two-state solution. Pence told reporters that he had a "frank discussion" with the monarch but said the issue was nothing more than a "disagreement" between friends.

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