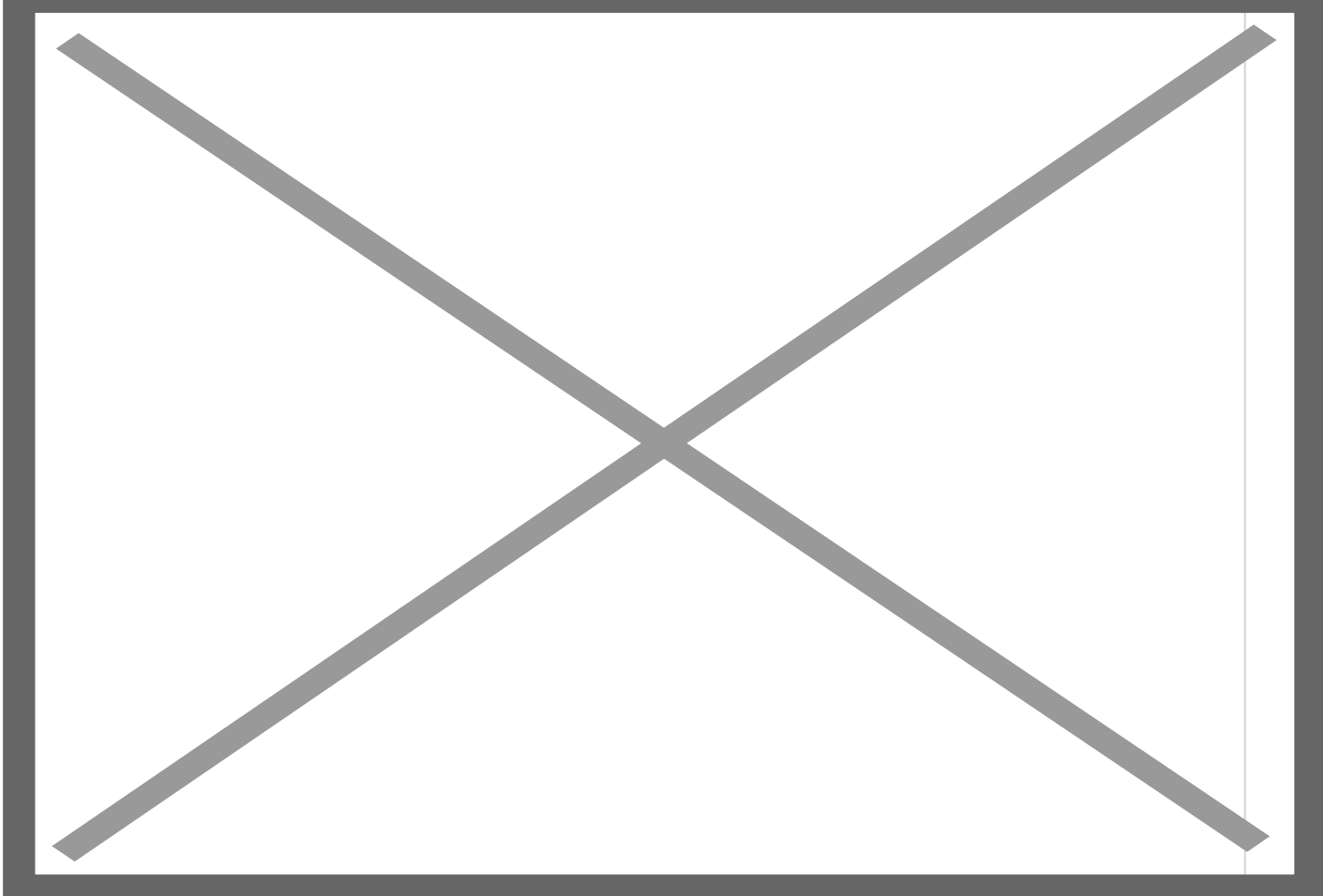


# *Al-Aqsa worshippers protest Palestinian evictions in Jerusalem*

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**Palestinians attend the last Friday prayers of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's old city [Ahmad Gharbali/AFP]**

Jerusalem, May 8 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of Palestinian worshippers packed into Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque on the final Friday of Ramadan and many stayed on to protest in support of Palestinians

facing eviction from their homes on Israeli-occupied land claimed by Jewish settlers.

With health restrictions mostly lifted following Israel's swift coronavirus vaccine campaign, worshippers packed tightly together as they knelt in prayer on the tree-lined hilltop plateau containing the mosque, Islam's third-holiest site.

However, thousands of Palestinians from the occupied West Bank were blocked from reaching the Al-Aqsa Mosque as Israeli forces set up several roadblocks and checkpoints along the way to the holy site.

Continuing tensions in the city at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were front and centre in the Friday sermon given by Sheikh Tayseer Abu Sunainah. "Our people will remain steadfast and patient in their homes, in our blessed land," Abu Sunainah said of the multiple Palestinian families in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood who could be evicted under a long-running legal case.

Following prayers, thousands remained in the compound to protest against the evictions, with many waving Palestinian flags and chanting a refrain common during Jerusalem protests: "With our soul and blood, we will redeem you, Aqsa."

Sheikh Jarrah's residents are overwhelmingly Palestinian, but the neighbourhood also contains a site revered by religious Jews as the tomb of an ancient high priest, Simeon the Just. The spokesman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said the evictions, "if ordered and implemented, would violate Israel's obligations under international law" on East Jerusalem territory it captured and occupied in the 1967 Middle East war.

"We call on Israel to immediately halt all forced evictions, including those in Sheikh Jarrah, and to cease any activity that would further contribute to a coercive environment and lead to a risk of forcible transfer," spokesman Rupert Colville said on Friday.

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