

International condemnation of Israeli violence against Palestinians

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Palestinians protested following Israel's threatened eviction of dozens in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem [Mahmoud Illean/AP]?

Ramallah, May 8 (RHC)-- More than 200 people, mostly Palestinians, were wounded late on Friday outside the Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem as Israeli police fired rubber-coated metal bullets and stun grenades towards rock-hurling Palestinians.

Tens of thousands of worshippers had earlier packed Islam's third-holiest site on the final Friday of Ramadan and many stayed on to protest against Israeli plans to evict Palestinian families from their

homes on land claimed by Jewish settlers in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem.

Palestinians have staged a series of sit-ins in the area in recent days denouncing Israeli orders for them to vacate their homes. Israeli security forces have attacked the sit-ins using skunk water, tear gas, rubber-coated bullets and shock grenades. Dozens of Palestinians have been arrested.

The international community has reacted to the events at Al-Aqsa and Sheikh Jarrah. At the United Nations, the UN's rights office urged Israel to call off any forced evictions and warned its actions could amount to "war crimes." Spokesman Rupert Colville said: "We wish to emphasise that East Jerusalem remains part of the occupied Palestinian territory, in which international humanitarian law applies. The occupying power ... cannot confiscate private property in occupied territory." Transferring civilian populations into occupied territory is illegal under international law and "may amount to war crimes."

The European Union condemned violence at the compound and urged authorities to quickly calm tensions. A spokesman said in a statement: "Violence and incitement are unacceptable and the perpetrators on all sides must be held accountable. The European Union calls on the authorities to act urgently to de-escalate the current tensions in Jerusalem." The statement added that "acts of incitement around the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif must be avoided and the status quo has to be respected", using another term for the key religious site.

The United States said it was "deeply concerned" about the events and called on all sides to work to de-escalate them. It also expressed concern about the evictions. "It's critical to avoid unilateral steps that would exacerbate tensions or take us further away from peace. And that would include evictions, settlement activity, and home demolitions," U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jalina Porter told reporters in Washington.

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