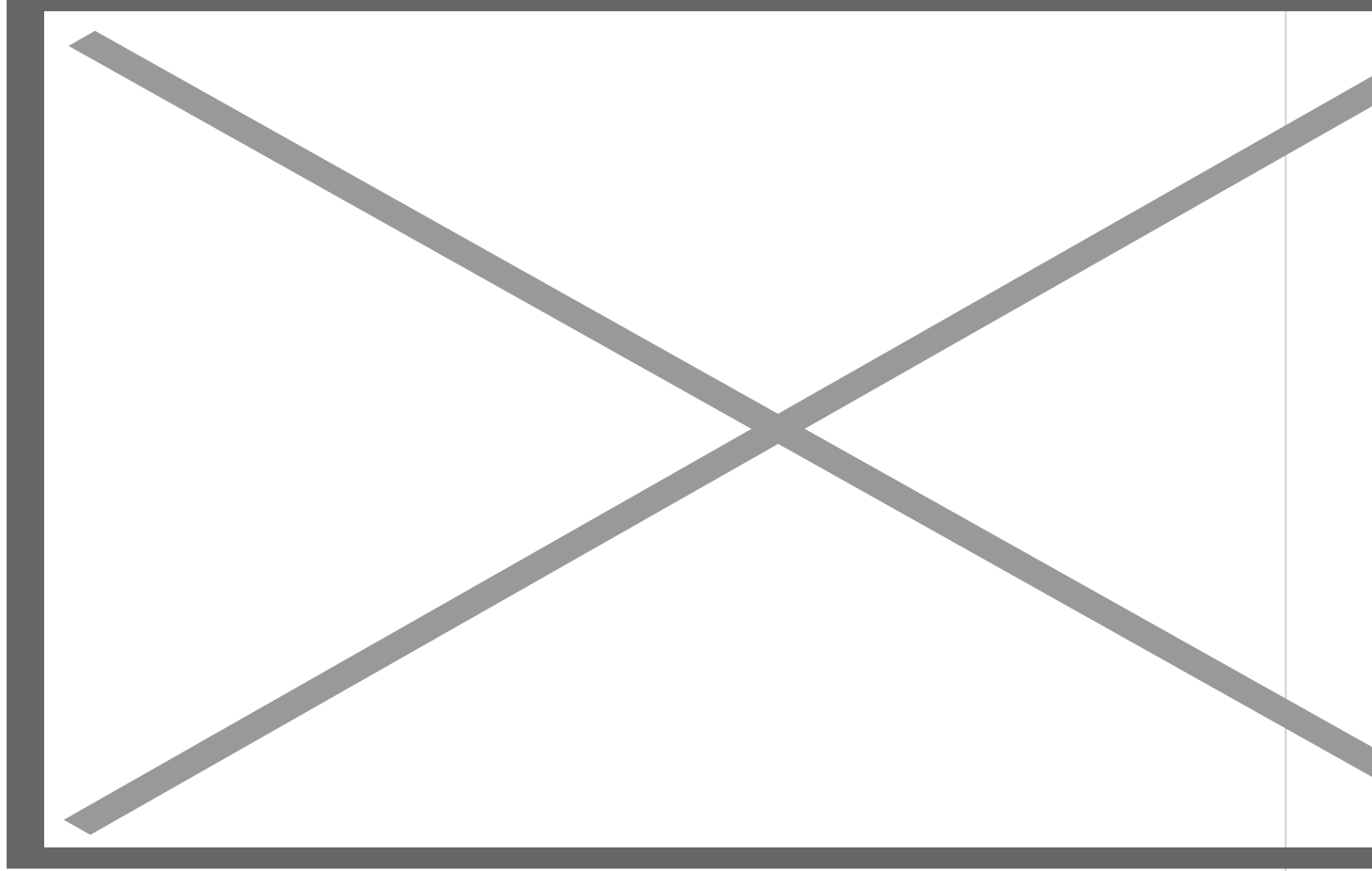


Israeli settlers step up provocative actions at al-Aqsa Mosque compound

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Thousands of Israeli settlers have provocatively entered the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East al-Quds

Ramallah, September 30 (RHC)-- Thousands of Israeli settlers have provocatively entered the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East al-Quds in a time span of one week under protection from the regime's forces, as they marked a seven-day Jewish holiday.

Media reports said on Wednesday that far-right Israeli settlers raised Israeli flags and marched through the Moroccan Gate on the western side of the holy compound, which has been under Israeli control since the beginning of the occupation of East al-Quds and the West Bank in 1967.

Large numbers of settlers had already broken into the mosque compound. According to Israel's Channel 7, a total of 3,597 settlers entered the complex during the seven-day Jewish holiday of Sukkot, which ended on Monday. Witnesses said many settlers were flanked by Israeli troops, and sometimes accompanied by ministers, Knesset members and senior officials. Israeli authorities barred Palestinians from entering the site during the settlers' tour.

A group of Palestinians reached al-Aqsa before the dawn prayer on Tuesday and staged a sit-in protest. Several Palestinian worshippers have since then remained and stayed at the holy compound to confront what is seen as incursions by the settlers.

In May, frequent acts of violence against Palestinian worshipers at the al-Aqsa Mosque led to an 11-day war between Palestinian resistance groups in the besieged Gaza Strip and Israel, during which the regime killed at least 260 Palestinians, including 66 children.

The al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which sits just above the Western Wall plaza, houses both the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque.

The Grand Mufti of al-Quds has warned against potential desecration of the al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli settlers in the Old City. The Jewish visitation of al-Aqsa is permitted, but according to an agreement signed between Israel and the Jordanian government in the wake of Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem al-Quds in 1967, non-Muslim worship at the compound is prohibited.

Following the recent visitation, Islamic Waqf, which manages the holy compound, has described the settlers' tours to the Muslim holy site as provocative. The organization says Israel has turned the site into "a military barracks" during the settlers' movement. The religious organization believes such provocations by Israeli settlers would not dissuade the Palestinians from continuing to defend the holy sites despite risking various violations by the Israeli forces.

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