

Israeli settlers storm al-Aqsa Mosque amid strict restrictions on Muslims



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Ramallah, December 18 (RHC)-- In yet another provocative move against Palestinian worshipers, scores of Israeli settlers have stormed the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied Old City of al-Quds under the pretext of celebrating the so-called Jewish festival of Hanukkah.

Palestine's official Wafa news agency reported on Sunday that the Israeli settlers, escorted by the military forces, broke into the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque in groups on the first day of the Jewish holiday, and that more groups of settlers were expected to intrude on the holy site during the day.

Media reports said the occupation forces had earlier stormed the al-Aqsa Mosque compound through the Moroccan Gate, also known as the Mughrabi Gate, and had removed the Palestinian worshipers from the holy site to pave the way for the settlers' incursions. Israeli police also stopped the Palestinian worshipers and prevented them from entering the al-Aqsa Mosque.

Israeli groups and extremist Jewish settlers had previously called for massive incursions into the holy site during the Hanukkah holidays. Hardline Israeli officials and settlers regularly storm the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied city, a provocative move that infuriates Palestinians. Such mass settler break-ins almost always take place at the behest of Tel Aviv-backed temple groups and under the auspices of the Israeli police in al-Quds.

Israeli settlers break into al-Aqsa Mosque amid calls for mass breaks-in ahead of Jewish holidays
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 Jewish visitation of al-Aqsa is permitted, but as part of a decades-old agreement between Jordan – the custodian of Islamic and Christian sites in al-Quds – and Israel in the wake of Israel's occupation of East al-Quds in 1967, non-Muslim worship at the compound is prohibited.

Last year, an Israeli court upheld a ban on Jewish prayers at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound, after an earlier lower court's decision stirred outrage among various Palestinians and across the Muslim world. Judge of the district court in al-Quds Aryeh Romanov on October 8 confirmed that Jews are barred from worshipping openly at the site, and only Muslims are permitted to pray there.

In May 2021, frequent acts of violence against Palestinian worshipers at al-Aqsa Mosque led to an 11-day war between Palestinian resistance groups in the besieged Gaza Strip and the Israeli regime, during which the regime forces killed at least 260 Palestinians, including 66 children.

Palestinians want the occupied West Bank as part of their future independent state and view al-Quds' eastern sector as the capital of their future sovereign state.

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