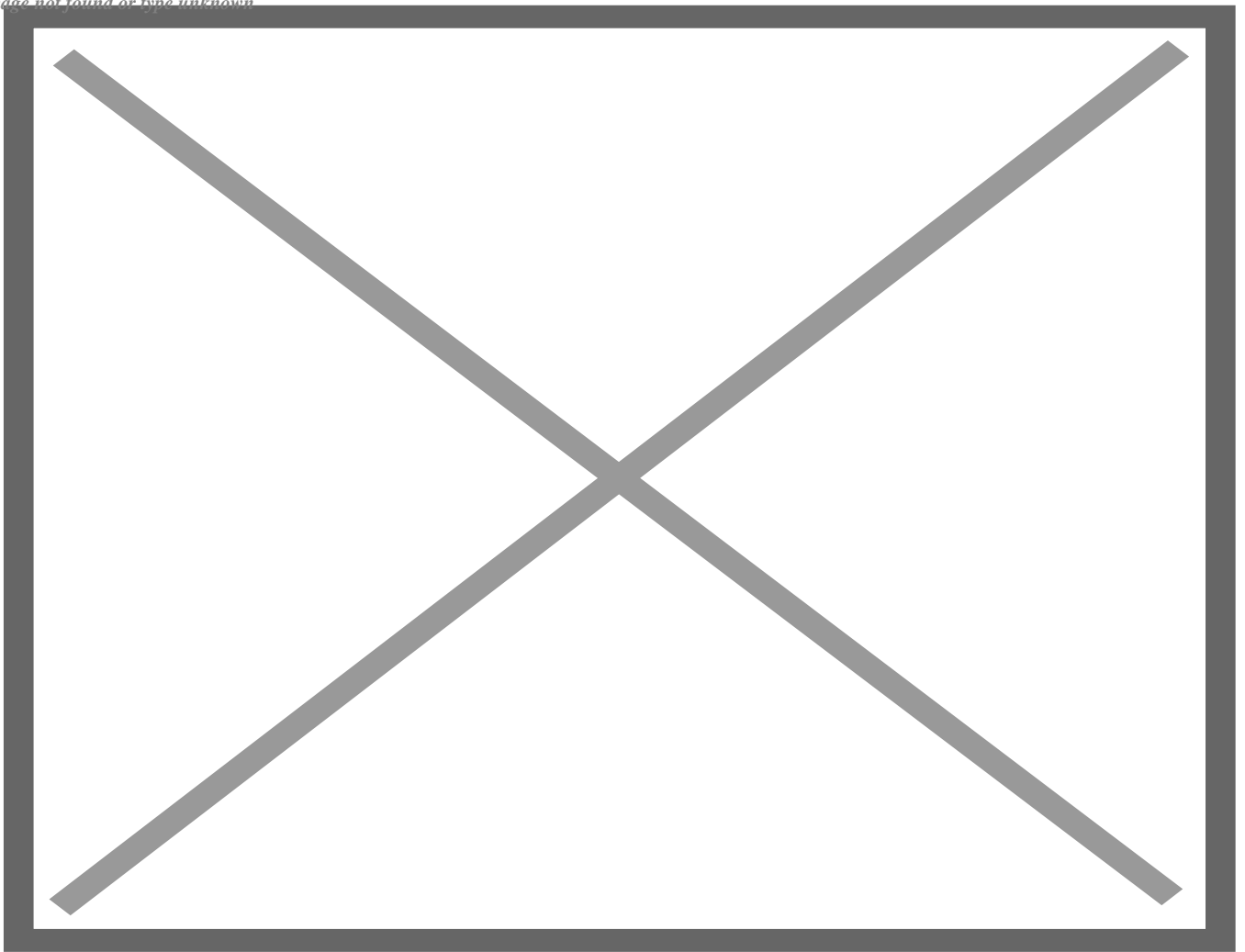


Israeli settlers break into al-Aqsa mosque amid rising violence against Palestinians

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Jerusalem, July 26 (RHC)-- Dozens of Israeli settlers, under the heavy protection of the occupation troops, have broken into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied Old City of al-Quds, amid growing Israeli violence against Palestinians.

Palestine's official Wafa news agency said the extremist settlers, divided into groups, entered the courtyards of the holy site through the Moroccan Gate, also known as the Mughrabi Gate, and made a provocative tour of the premises on Tuesday.

The news agency added that the settlers performed Talmudic rituals in the eastern part of al-Aqsa Mosque, in violation of the site's status quo. The occupation troops also deployed soldiers inside and around the mosque to secure the settlers' raid.

Israeli settler incursions into al-Aqsa Mosque and violence against Palestinians have been on the rise since the far-right extremist cabinet of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took office last December.

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, leading to daily confrontations with Palestinians at the mosque, with many injured, arrested and killed.

The issue has been a major flashpoint between the Israeli occupation and Palestinians for decades. It was the epicenter of the 2000-2005 Palestinian Intifada, also known as the uprising.

The al-Aqsa Mosque compound sits just above the Western Wall plaza and houses both the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque. According to an agreement between the occupying Israeli regime and the Jordanian government following the regime's illegal seizure of East al-Quds in 1967, non-Muslim worship at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound is prohibited.

In another development on Tuesday, Israeli bulldozers destroyed a number of agricultural structures in the West Bank village of al-Zayyem, located to the southeast of the occupied city of al-Quds, as part of the regime's land grab policy.

Local sources said Israeli forces also demolished shacks, yards and uprooted several olive trees owned by Palestinians in al-Issawiya district in al-Quds. Israel has occupied thousands of acres of Palestinian agricultural lands to construct and expand new settler units in various areas in the West Bank. In recent year, Israel has accelerated settlement expansion on an unprecedented scale.

More than 700,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East al-Quds. The international community considers all those settlements illegal under the international law as they have been constructed on occupied land.

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