

Argentinian President Javier Milei plans to move embassy to Jerusalem

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Argentina's President Javier Milei visits the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest prayer site during his tour in occupied East Jerusalem's Old City [Ammar Awad/Reuters]

Tel Aviv, February 6 (RHC)-- Argentinian President Javier Milei has announced plans to shift his country's embassy to Jerusalem as he embarked on a visit to Israel. The 53-year-old economist, who upended traditional politics to win election last year, was greeted warmly by Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv.

Milei, on his first official visit since taking office barring a brief swing through the Davos economic forum in Switzerland, said: "My plan is to move the embassy to West Jerusalem."

Confirmation of the widely expected announcement found favour with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose office said he "warmly welcomes" the move. "The prime minister spoke about this with President Milei after his election, and welcomes the fact that the president has kept his promise," a statement read.

Right-winger Netanyahu and the libertarian Milei, who has been compared with former US president Donald Trump – who moved the US embassy to Jerusalem in 2018, are set to meet for talks on Wednesday, with the aim of deepening ties between the two countries.

His trip will also see him visit a kibbutz and meet families of hostages taken by the Palestinian armed group Hamas when it attacked southern Israel on October 7, killing at least 1,139 people according to an Al Jazeera tally based on official Israeli figures. The group, which governs Gaza, seized about 240 other people as hostages.

After the Hamas attack, Israel launched a devastating bombardment and ground offensive on Gaza, while severely restricting supplies of water, food and aid to the territory. The campaign has reduced much of the territory to rubble and displaced more than 80 percent of Gaza's residents.

More than 27,500 people have been killed in the Israeli assault, and more than 66,000 others have been wounded, according to Palestinian authorities.

Palestinian group Hamas said it "strongly condemns" Milei's announcement. Hamas, the group that governs Gaza, said it viewed the move "an infringement of the rights of our Palestinian people to their land, and a violation of the rules of international law, considering Jerusalem as occupied Palestinian land".

Milei, known for his fiery speeches and wild sideburns, describes himself as an "anarcho-capitalist." He was raised in a Catholic family but has studied Jewish scripture. After his election win in November, he visited the tomb of a revered rabbi in New York – a popular spiritual destination for some Jews. Argentina's Jewish community is 250,000 strong and one of the largest in Latin America.

From Israel, Milei heads to Rome on Friday for a meeting with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, and a private audience with Pope Francis. Milei has previously criticised his fellow Argentinian but toned down his rhetoric more recently.

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