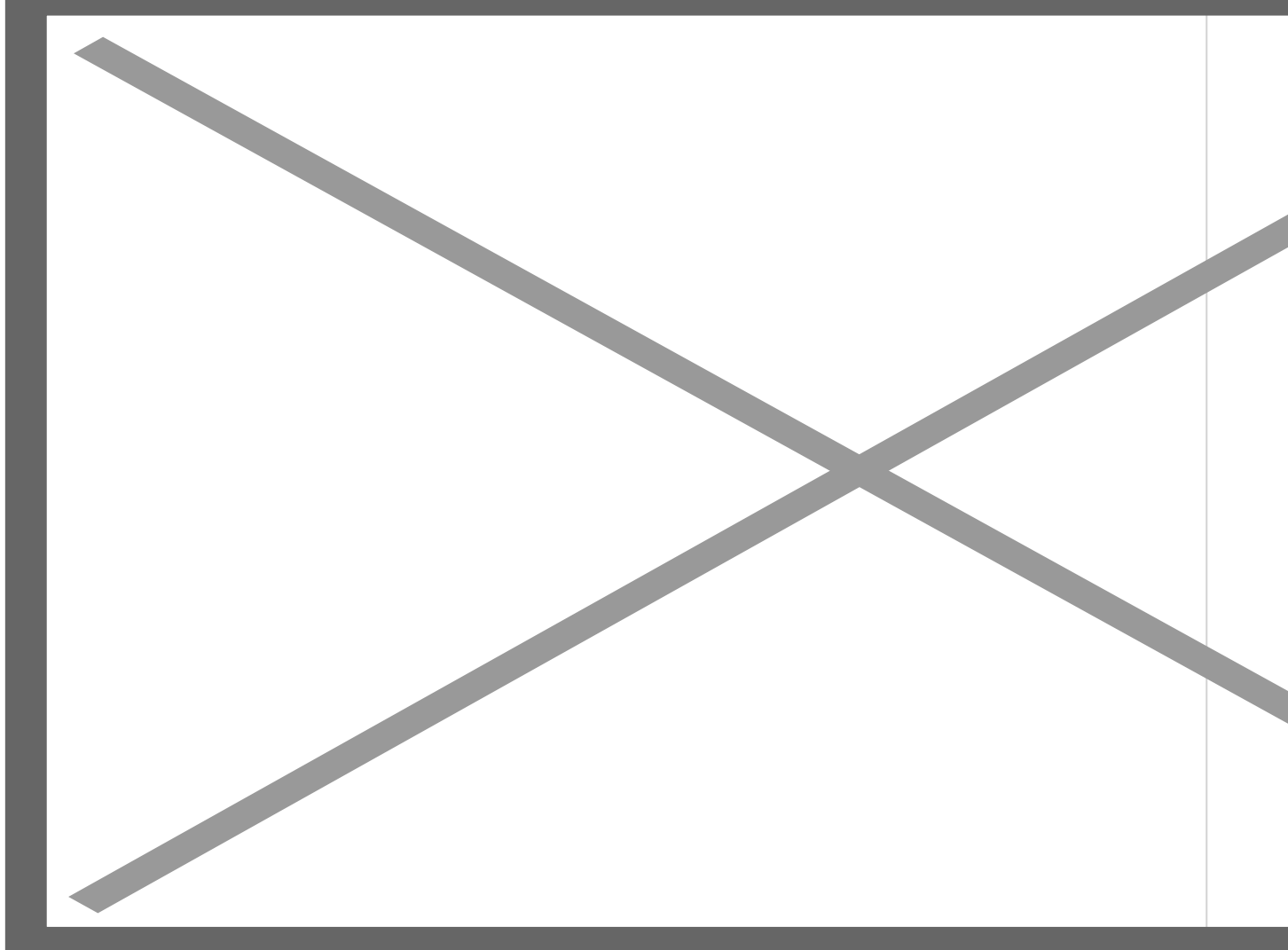


Israeli troops deny Palestinian worshippers entry to Al-Aqsa Mosque

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Israeli troops point guns at Palestinian worshippers to prevent them from entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. (File photo by AFP)

Occupied East Jerusalem, March 11 (RHC)-- Israeli troops have kidnapped a large number of Palestinians at the gates of Al-Aqsa Mosque simultaneous with the beginning of the holy fasting month of Ramadan across the occupied territories.

Young Palestinian men were prevented from worshipping at the holy site in the Old City of al-Quds on Monday. On Sunday evening, the eve of Ramadan, many were violently prevented from performing evening prayers inside the compound.

Thousands of Israeli forces have been deployed around the narrow streets of the Old City in al-Quds, where tens of thousands of worshippers are expected every day at the holy compound.

Israel has deployed 23 battalions throughout the occupied West Bank with the beginning of Ramadan.

Itamar Ben Gvir, a minister with the regime, has called for restrictions on worshipers at the mosque. The number of Israeli troops in the occupied West Bank is twice the number of troops in the entire besieged Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, leaders of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas have called on the Palestinians to march on the mosque at the start of Ramadan. The spokesman for the Hamas military wing Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades Abu Obeida called in a speech on March 8 for the Palestinian people to mobilize during the holy month in defense of Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Separately, Israel's Shin Bet spy service abducted several people in the northern flank of the 1948 occupied territories on Sunday. The men were allegedly in contact with Hamas and had plans to carry out resistance operations.

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad resistance movement warns Israel against "playing with fire" after the regime imposed restrictions on access to al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan.

Jordan is the custodian of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East al-Quds. It said on Monday that restrictions imposed by Israel on Muslim worshippers' access to the compound during Ramadan was pushing the situation towards an "explosion."

In remarks on state media, Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said his country rejected Israel's announced move to limit access to the holy site during Ramadan, citing security needs with war raging in Gaza. Jordan echoes the Palestinian view that such restrictions were an attack on freedom of worship, he said.

The West Bank has seen record violence for more than two years and a further surge since hostilities in Gaza began in early October. Israeli raids, combined with settler violence, have left more than 400 Palestinians dead in the West Bank.

More than five months into Israel's brutal campaign of death and destruction in Gaza, health authorities there say more than 31,000 Palestinians have been killed. Thousands of others are also missing, or feared dead.

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