

# *UNESCO to Israel: Hands Off Old City of Jerusalem*

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Geneva, July 25 (RHC)-- The United Nations' cultural body has called on Israel to halt all its archaeological and restoration activities in the occupied Old City of Jerusalem. UNESCO submitted a resolution to its World Heritage Committee to vote on next week, describing the Temple Mount as a "Muslim holy site of worship."

The Jerusalem Post reports that Temple Mount, which has also been called al-Haram al-Sharif for centuries, refers to the al-Aqsa Mosque Compound. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has strongly condemned the resolution.

Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest site in Islam after Masjid al-Haram in Mecca and Masjid al-Nabawi in Medina.

The occupied territories have been the scene of heightened tensions since August 2015, when Israel imposed restrictions on the entry of Palestinian worshipers into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem. The Palestinians say the Tel Aviv regime seeks to change the status quo of the holy Muslim site.

In a separate development, activist NGO Peace Now said that, over the past four years, Israel had advanced plans to legalize 14 West Bank outposts and had approved 20 such communities.

Israel occupied the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in 1967. It later annexed the West Bank and East Jerusalem in a move never recognized by the international community. Tel Aviv withdrew from Gaza in 2005, but has been keeping the territory under a crippling siege and regular deadly offensives.

More than half a million Israelis live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

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