Guatemala opens embassy in Jerusalem amid criticism from Palestinians and international community

Jerusalem, May 17 (RHC)-- Following in the footsteps of the United States, Guatemala opened its embassy in Jerusalem Wednesday. The move has infuriated Palestinians and drawn widespread international condemnation.

Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attended the opening ceremony for the embassy, which will be housed in an office complex in west Jerusalem, according to Reuters.

At the opening ceremony, Jimmy Morales said his country, the United States and Israel "share friendship, courage and loyalty." In his remarks, Netanyahu praised Morales and highlighted Guatemala and Israel's long history of close bilateral relations between the two countries.

"It's not a coincidence that Guatemala is opening its embassy in Jerusalem right among the first. You

were always among the first. You were the second country to recognize Israel," Netanyahu said referring to the country's establishment in 1948.

Guatemala is one of only a handful of nations that supported U.S. President Donald Trump's decision in December to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. After the U.S. it is only the country that has relocated its embassy to the occupied city. Paraguay has also announced that it would move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem by the end of May.

"The Guatemalan government has chosen to stand on the wrong side of history, to side with violations of international law and human rights, and to take a hostile step against the Palestinian people and the Arab world," Saeb Erekat, Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization, said Wednesday.

"We are not surprised that a president that has objected to United Nations investigations into corruption and abuses of power has decided to further violate international resolutions. Make no mistake, such an insult against the Palestinian people reflects the insult against millions of Central Americans that have struggled for the values of justice and peace," the Palestinian Authority's Chief Negotiator added.

The Jordanian government also denounced Guatemala for moving its embassy to Jerusalem. Mohammad Momani, the Minister of State for Media Affairs, called the move "an irresponsible step" and that all "peace-loving countries should support the two-state solution based on the international legitimacy, which calls on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on pre-June 4, 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital."

The Arab League and the French government called the embassy relocations illegal and a contravention of United Nations Security Council resolutions involving Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

Arab League Assistant Secretary-General Ambassador, Hossam Al Zaki, said the Arab League would convene Thursday to "discuss the emergence of a unified Arab stance against the crimes against the Palestinian people, as well as to confront the U.S. decision to transfer its embassy to the city of Jerusalem."

While Jean-Yves Le Drian, France's Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, said the decision to move the embassies to Jerusalem "violated international law and in particular UN Security Council resolutions."

The Israeli army and police deployed thousands of officers in Jerusalem and along the Gaza Strip for the U.S. embassy relocation ceremony. According to health officials, at least 63 Palestinians were killed along the Gaza Strip in the demonstrations Monday.

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