

Israel approves far-right march in occupied East Jerusalem

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Jewish ultra-nationalists wave Israeli flags during the "Flags March," next to Damascus gate, outside Jerusalem's Old City

Tel Aviv, May 19 (RHC)-- Israeli authorities have said they have given permission for the far-right groups to march through the heart of the main Palestinian thoroughfare in occupied East Jerusalem's Old City later this month, in a decision that threatens to re-ignite violence in the Holy City.

The Office of Internal Security Minister Omer Barlev said on Wednesday the march would take place on May 29th along its "customary route" through Damascus Gate.

Each year, thousands of Israeli far-right groups participate in the march, waving Israeli flags, singing songs and in some cases, chanting anti-Arab slogans, as they pass by Palestinian onlookers and businesses. Barlev's office said the decision was made after consultations with the police.

The march is meant to celebrate Israel's capture of East Jerusalem in the 1967 war. Israel subsequently annexed the area in a step that is not internationally recognised. Many Palestinians have viewed East Jerusalem as the potential capital of a future state.

Violence broke out last April after far-right Israelis marched outside one of the entrances to the walled Old City, chanting "death to Arabs." Last year's Gaza war erupted as the march was just getting under way, even after authorities changed the route at the last moment to avoid Damascus Gate.

The Old City, located in occupied East Jerusalem, has experienced weeks of violent confrontations between Israeli police and Palestinian demonstrators, and the march threatens triggering new unrest.

Tensions also have been heightened by an Israeli police crackdown during the funeral of slain Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh last Friday. As the funeral procession got under way, police pushed and beat mourners, causing the pallbearers to lose control of the coffin and nearly drop it.

One of her pallbearers, Amro Abu Khdeir, 34, has been in solitary confinement since being arrested early on Monday, according to his lawyer. Attorney Khaldoun Najm said Abu Khdeir's detention has been extended until Sunday. Israeli authorities said he is a member of an armed organisation and that they have a file on him.

Israeli police said in a statement that Abu Khdeir was arrested "as part of an ongoing investigation which, contrary to allegations, had nothing to do with his participation in the funeral procession". The statement confirmed that a court has extended his detention and the police refused further comment.

Abu Akleh, a well-known journalist, was fatally shot while covering an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank last week. The Palestinians, including witnesses who were with her, said she was shot by Israeli troops. Israel has said that Palestinian gunmen were active in the area, and it was not clear who fired the deadly bullet.

Al Jazeera Media Network continues to demand a rapid, independent and transparent investigation into the killing of its journalist in the occupied West Bank.

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