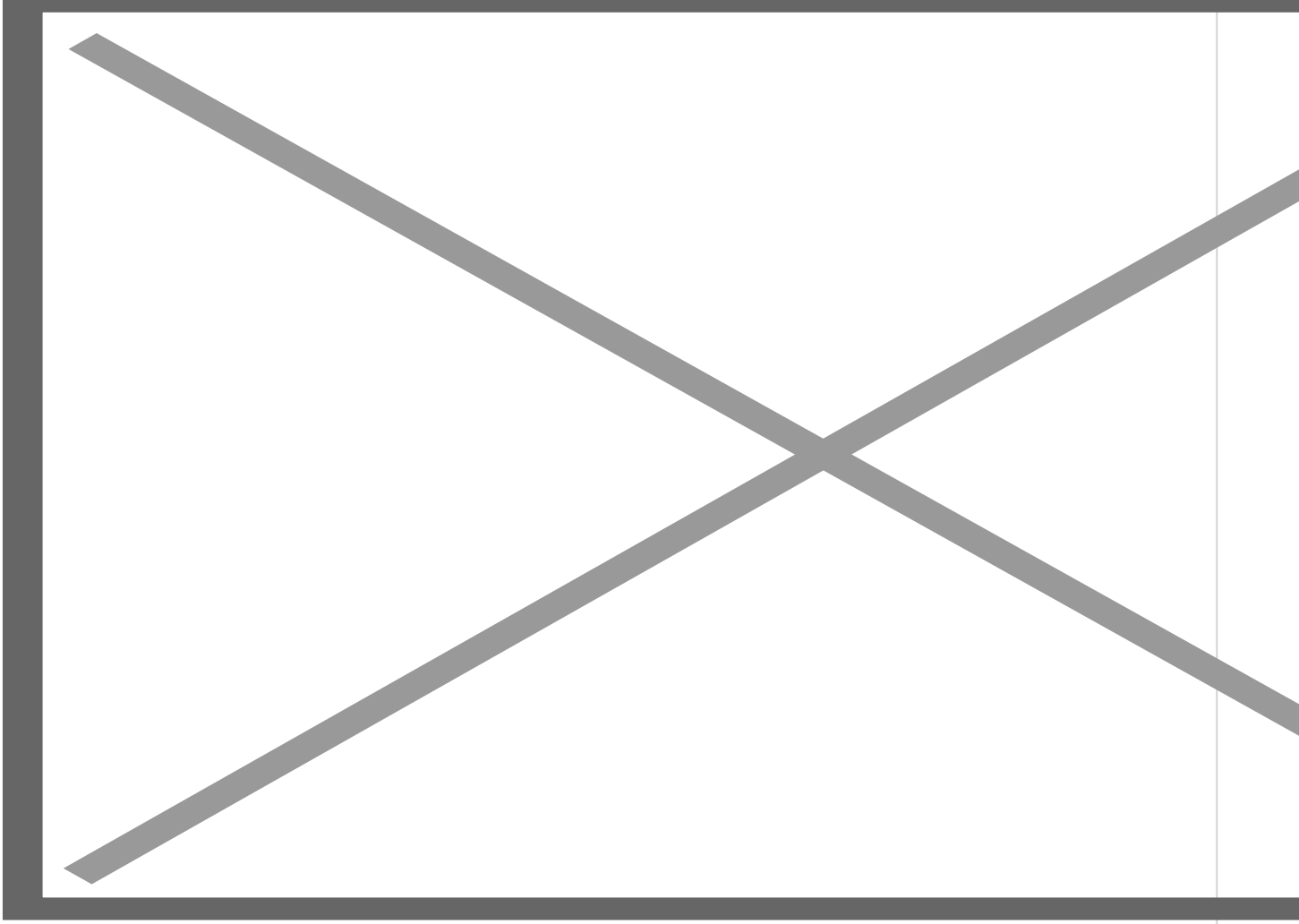


*Fresh from storming al-Aqsa
Mosque compound, Israeli
minister causes another
scandal*

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The Israeli regime's "national security" minister Itamar Ben-Gvir

Ramallah, January 8 (RHC)-- A far-right Israeli minister, who attracted international uproar by storming the al-Aqsa Mosque's compound recently, causes yet another scandal by visiting a high-security Israeli prison to make sure Palestinian inmates' conditions there has not improved.

The regime's "national security" minister Itamar Ben-Gvir paid a visit to the Nafha Prison, which is located in the southern part of the occupied territories, on Thursday, various Israeli newspapers reported.

The prison holds Palestinians, who are found by the regime to be guilty of "security offenses," the term which is applied by Tel Aviv to describe Palestinian resistance operations. The minister said he had visited the recently-renovated facility to "ensure" that the Palestinians incarcerated there "are not getting better conditions as a result of the construction of new cells," The Times of Israel reported.

"And I was glad to see that the Israel Prison Service does not intend to improve their holding conditions," he said. According to Ha'aretz, another Israeli paper, Ben-Gvir said he would continue to check in on the conditions of the prisoners to make sure they do not have "excessive rights."

The Gaza Strip-based Palestinian resistance movement of Hamas raged against the fresh controversy, calling it "a dangerous escalation." The move was intended "to oppress the prisoners and to tighten their suffocating conditions. It's unprecedented criminal behavior toward them," the group said, and warned that it would not remain silent in the face of such provocative measures.

Ben-Gvir had stormed the al-Aqsa Mosque's compound in the holy occupied city of al-Quds' Old City on Tuesday. The compound is regarded by Muslims as their third-holiest site. The Palestinian leadership called the intrusion "an unprecedented provocation."

The occupied West Bank-headquartered Palestinian foreign ministry reacted by warning that the move had violated both the international law and the historical status quo of the site, adding that it could trigger a "religious war."

"Ben-Gvir is widely regarded as a fascist, who has repeatedly made provocative moves against Palestinians and the sacred al-Aqsa Mosque, and has frequently stoked violence and terror with his inflammatory remarks, hateful threats, and controversial actions," the ministry said in a statement.

The United Arab Emirates and China have also called on the United Nations Security Council to meet publicly after the provocation, and Jordan has summoned the Israeli ambassador to Amman, presenting him with a strong-worded protest note.

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