



## **Red Flag Alert for Genocide**

### **Israel**

*Update #2*

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention condemns the state of Israel's most recent attack on the Gaza Strip following the attack on Palestinian Muslim worshippers at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan by the Israeli police. We further condemn the dramatic uptick in attacks on Christians by Jewish civilians. The rise of Israel's far-right government has led to more frequent attacks on Christian identity symbols, such as statues, churches, and clergy members, who report being frequently spit on, harassed, and even physically attacked by extremist Jews. These attacks have been perpetrated alongside the use of dangerous language, such as the chant, "Death to Arabs ... Death to Christians." All of this is happening in an atmosphere of impunity created by the Israeli state and a society that has ignored the violent injustices against Palestinians for far too long. In such a context, Israel is facing the very real possibility of mass atrocity, including the mass murder pattern of genocide. All the ideological building blocks for genocide already exist in both the state and in dominant society.

On April 4th, 2023 Israeli police brutally assaulted Palestinian Muslim worshippers and forcibly removed them from the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque located in occupied East Jerusalem where hundreds of men, women, elderly people, and children were staying overnight to pray during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Many eyewitnesses have reported the Israeli police's brutal use of force on worshippers and the destruction of the mosque. One witness, Bakr Owais, a 24-year-old student who was detained, recalled the event to *Al Jazeera*, stating that "[t]he army broke the upper windows of the mosque and began throwing stun grenades at us... They made us lay on the ground and they handcuffed us one by one and took us all out. They kept swearing at us during this time. It was very barbaric." Israel's unlawful assault on the Al-Aqsa Mosque has injured dozens of worshippers and has led to the unlawful arrest of 400 Palestinians.

Following the overnight attack of worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the state of Israel launched a series of attacks on the Gaza Strip, a densely populated territory that is home to around 2 million Palestinians. Israel's air assault took place early in the morning, striking multiple sites in Gaza, which has caused massive damage to Palestinian homes and property.

Israel's attack on the Gaza Strip comes after rockets were fired from Gaza in response to the Israeli's police brutal raid and assault at the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Israel's recent attack on Al-Aqsa Mosque stems from "status quo" rules around the site, which allows only Muslims to worship at the site. While non-Muslims are allowed to visit the compound, they are not allowed to worship there due to the sacredness of the mosque, which is regarded as Islam's third-holiest site after Mecca and Medina. Israel accepted those terms in 1967 and recognized the status quo arrangement as the legally-binding framework regulating the administration of the Al-Aqsa compound. However, the site is also revered by Jews, who refer to the site as Temple Mount. Israel's far-right groups have long attempted to change the status quo to allow Jewish prayer at the site. In addition to prayers, far right Israeli groups have also called for a temple to be built in place of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

This is not the first time Israel has violated the status quo arrangement. Israel has committed a series of violations over the previous years. In 2007, Israel conducted many illegal and unauthorized excavations, resulting in at least 20 attempts to dig tunnels under the holy mosque despite the fact that under the status quo arrangement, excavations and maintenance must be carried out by the Muslim *waqf* (religious and charitable foundation). Then again, in 2019 Israeli forces entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound along with nationalist Jews on Jerusalem Day, violating the agreement which does not allow such visits during the last days of Ramadan. Most recently, in January of this year, Israel continued to violate the arrangement when Israel's new far-right security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir made a controversial visit to the site, which led to many Palestinian leaders calling the visit "an unprecedented provocation."

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention calls upon Israel to honor and abide by the legally binding framework that regulates the administration of the holy Al-Aqsa compound as outlined status quo arrangement they've previously recognized. The Lemkin Institute also calls for Israel to respect the religious rights of Palestinian Muslim and Christian worshippers and to allow them to exercise their religious duties and prayers in the holy month of Ramadan and the Easter holiday.

Finally, the Lemkin Institute calls on the international community, especially Israel's closest ally the United States, to make it absolutely clear that further atrocities will not be countenanced. What is needed is a thoroughgoing peace, justice, and reconciliation framework that creates accountability mechanisms through which the ongoing genocidal patterns against the Palestinian identity can be addressed and the dynamics that sustain them transformed. Such a framework is necessary to guarantee the security of all peoples in Israel-Palestine.