

# UN to hold emergency meeting on Israeli visit to holy site

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**The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk:** The U.N. Security Council scheduled an emergency meeting Thursday at the request of the Palestinians and other Islamic and non-Islamic nations to protest the visit of an ultranationalist Israeli Cabinet minister to a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site and demand an end to Israeli extremist provocations and respect for the historic status quo at the site revered by Muslims and Jews. Tuesday's visit by Israel's new National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, a West Bank settler leader who draws inspiration from a racist rabbi, to the site known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as al-Haram al-Sharif, Arabic for the Noble Sanctuary, drew fierce condemnation from across the Muslim world, a strong rebuke from the United States, and fueled fears of unrest as Palestinian militant groups threatened to act in response.

The Palestinian U.N. ambassador, Riyad Mansour, told reporters Wednesday after meetings with Arab ambassadors, representatives of the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the 120-member Nonaligned Movement and others that there is not only widespread condemnation of Ben-Gvir's visit but also of the broader "environment of extremism" surrounding the most extremist government in Israel's history. He accused Israel of committing "aggression" not only against Muslim holy sites including the Al Aqsa Mosque but against Christian sites including graveyards.

The site is the holiest site in Judaism, home to the ancient biblical temples. Today, it houses the Al Aqsa Mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam. Since Israel captured the site in 1967, Jews have been allowed to visit but not pray there. Describing the Temple Mount as "the most important place for the Jewish people," Ben-Gvir decried what he called "racist discrimination" against Jewish visits to the site. With the Dome of the Rock, the Islamic shrine, in the background and waving his fingers at the camera, he said the visits would continue. As for threats from Gaza's Hamas militant group, Ben-Gvir, known for his anti-Arab rhetoric and provocative stunts, said in a video clip taken during the visit: "The Israeli government won't surrender to a murderous organization, to a vile terrorist organization."

Mansour, flanked by ambassadors from about 20 countries, said that at Thursday's emergency Security Council meeting, also supported by the United Arab Emirates, China, France and Malta, "we will not be satisfied with beautiful statements which will be uttered." "We want them to be implemented in a concrete way," he said. "We want this behavior not to be repeated in Al Aqsa Mosque and Al-Haram Al-Sharif, and we want a guarantee of honoring and respecting the historic status quo in deeds, not only in words." Assistant Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Khaled Khiare will brief the Security Council at Thursday's meeting, U.N. spokesman Stepane Dujarric said. Jordan's U.N. Ambassador Mahmoud Hmoud said his country, whose ruler King Abdullah II is custodian of the Islamic and Christian holy sites, is "extremely concerned at the incursion" by minister Ben-Gvir and the Israeli government. "This is an action of extremism that purports to create a new cycle of violence," he said. "The Security Council has to take its responsibility seriously and stop such attempts."

Hmoud said Israel has made a commitment to respect "the historic legal status quo" and its obligations under international law, but unfortunately Ben-Gvir made an incursion into the Al-Aqsa Mosque in violation of Israel's legal obligations. "There has to be a firm stand by the international community against this because it will happen again, and once it will happen again, a new cycle of violence will ensue," he warned. Hmoud recalled that in September 2000 Ariel Sharon, then Israel's opposition leader, visited the holy site, which helped spark clashes that led to a full-fledged Palestinian uprising known as the Second Intifada. The Security Council deplored Sharon's visit, which it called a "provocation." Clashes between Israeli security

forces and Palestinian demonstrators in and around the site also fueled an 11-day war with Hamas in 2021.

Benjamin Netanyahu returned to office last week for his sixth term as prime minister, leading the most religious, right-wing government in the country's history. Its goals include expanding West Bank settlements and annexing the occupied territory. Responding to the outcry over Ben-Gvir's visit, Netanyahu late Tuesday said Israel remains committed to "strictly maintaining the status quo" at the site. "The claim that a change has been made in the status quo is without foundation," he said.