

Full text of Minister of Foreign Affairs Yair Lapid international press briefing – 24th

April 2022

In the past three weeks, there has been a dangerous effort underway in Jerusalem. During Ramadan, terrorist organizations have been trying to hijack the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in order to create an outbreak of violence in Jerusalem, and from there, a violent conflict across the country.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad extremists, burst into Al-Aqsa Mosque in the early mornings, again and again. They brought weapons into the Mosque. They threw rocks and explosives from within it and used it as a base to incite violent riots.

I'm not a Muslim, but I know enough about Islam to tell you: This is not how you act in a holy place. They've done this to create a provocation, to force the Israeli Police to enter the Mosque and remove them. They've sacrificed their own religion for a viral video.

The only reason the police have twice entered the Mosque, in recent weeks, to remove them is because at the same time, tens of thousands of Muslim worshippers began arriving at the Temple Mount. It is not Israel that endangered worshippers - it is the terrorist organizations who endangered them. If we had not removed these rioters, there would have been a disaster. If you do not remove the rioters immediately at the start, it leads to much greater violence later. The moment the rioters were removed, the police left and ensured prayers could take place in peace.

Alongside this violence, we have had to deal with an unbelievable amount of fake news and altered videos which have gone viral. Unfortunately, some of this has also found its way into the mainstream media.

I want to clarify: Israel is committed to the Status Quo on the Temple Mount. Muslims pray on the Temple Mount, non-Muslims visit. There is no change. There will be no change. We have no plans to divide the Temple Mount between religions.

We call on Muslim moderates, on Muslim states, to act against this fake news, and to work together with us to ensure our common interest: preservation of the Status Quo and calming the situation.

We have to put things into proportion. What has happened on the Temple Mount is that there have been two to three hundred extremists who Hamas sent to incite riots, and on the other hand, just yesterday: ninety-five thousand peaceful worshippers came to the Temple Mount to hold a holy ceremony in peace.

During Ramadan, Israel ensured that hundreds of thousands of Muslims could go to the Temple Mount and pray at Al-Aqsa.

Despite provocations by terrorist organizations, despite attempts to stoke violence: We have done, and continue to do, everything to enable peaceful prayer. In fact, the only disruption to prayers yesterday, was a Hamas rally which took place on the Temple Mount. Hamas terrorists stood there and openly called for the murder of Jews. That is Hamas's prayer – an antisemitic call for the slaughter of innocents.

Yesterday, the Holy Fire ceremony was held in Jerusalem, by the Christian Orthodox communities in the city. Thankfully, it took place quietly and in an organized fashion.

This is a chance to wish our Christian friends a Happy Easter, and our Muslim friends, a Ramadan Kareem.

Throughout this period, Israel has made substantial efforts to stop Jewish extremist elements as well. The security services ensured no provocations were carried out. We are a strong sovereign state, and a strong sovereign state can act in a way that is responsible and measured.

One last issue: Israel will not accept rocket fire from Gaza. Period. We have a zero-tolerance policy for attacks on our territory. Because of such rocket fire, we took the decision not to enable workers from Gaza to enter Israel today. In Gaza, like in Jerusalem, Hamas is primarily abusing its own people.

Before Ramadan, we announced that if this period would pass quietly, we would double the number of work permits from Gaza to 20,000. That is 20,000 workers who would be able to work daily in Israel and support their families. In light of recent events, we will have to examine this decision carefully.

You know, when festivals of the three religions coincide, it should be a cause for joy. We should be able to celebrate together. Respect one another. Enjoy one another's traditions and cultures. That is the true spirit of Jerusalem. I believe that is what the majority want, and that is what the silent majority does.

Thank you.

