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*Protest called to defend Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Quds (Jerusalem)*

**The protest has been called by: The American Muslim for Palestine (AMP), Al-Awda, The Palestine Right to Return Coalition, the Islamic Centers for North Jersey, , Arab Muslim American Federation,, Mas NJ, Mas NY, Arab American Civic Organization, Muslim Public Affairs Council**

On March 14th a group of Israeli settlers – people living illegally on Palestinian land – stormed the al Aqsa mosque compound under the protection of Israeli police.

At least 100 worshippers were injured when Israeli police fired high-velocity tear gas canisters and used their batons against the crowd, which protested the settlers' attack.

The organizers of the Protest strongly condemn the attacks by settlers and police in what has become a nearly annual occurrence at Yom Kippur.

"The attack on worshipers at al Aqsa is entirely unacceptable. It is just another tactic employed by Zionists and religious zealots intent on ethnically cleansing Jerusalem of its Palestinian population," said Dr. Hatem Bazian, AMP chairman and professor of Near East and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

Nine years ago today, former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and several heavily armed security forces appeared at the al Aqsa compound and declared it would one day be Israel's. The provocative statement initiated the second intifada.

Al Aqsa mosque is the third holiest site in Islam. Muslims believe it was from this site that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) led all prophets in prayer before ascending into heaven on his Night Journey. The compound also contains the gilded Dome of the Rock mosque, which is a source of national pride for Palestinians.

Since Israel illegally annexed East Jerusalem in 1967 – a move not recognized by the international community – Jewish extremists have attacked al Aqsa several times.

Here is a partial list of incidents:

**August 1969** – Rabbi Shlomo Goren broke into al Aqsa with about 50 people to set up Jewish prayers.

**August 1969** – Australian extremist Michael Dennis Rohan set fire to al Aqsa, destroying an 800-year-old pulpit that once belonged to Saladin.

**July 1971** – Members of the Zionist youth group – the Betar Movement – broke into al Aqsa in attempts to set up prayer.

**January 1989** - Some members of the Israeli Knesset – under police protection – entered the al Aqsa compound to read a provocative statement.

**October 1990** – Israeli police killed 21 Palestinians and wounded more than 150 when they protested a Jewish extremist group that was attempting to lay the foundation for the purported “Third Temple” at the al Aqsa compound.

**September 2000** – Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon entered the al Aqsa compound with 2,000 soldiers, sparking the second intifada.

**October 2008** – A large group of illegal settlers, Jewish extremists and rabbis storm the al Aqsa compound and lead marches in support of the “Third Temple.”

**March 2009** - 30 ultra-orthodox Jews dressed as tourists enter al Aqsa compound and attempt to set up a seminary. (Source: Al Jazeera)

The organizers of the Protest strongly condemn all these actions as contrary to seeking peace. AMP calls on President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Middle East Special Envoy George Mitchell as they work toward establishing peace talks to hold Israel accountable for the most recent attack on al Aqsa worshipers.

The organizers of the Protest calls on members of Congress to pressure Israel to halt all settlement activity – especially in East Jerusalem – by tying more than \$3 billion in U.S. aid to compliance with U.S. demands and international law.