

Israeli ministers ascend to Temple Mount after ban on lawmaker visits lifted



During the recent flareup of violence in Jerusalem, Guterres called for de-escalation and respect for the status quo at holy sites after Israel installed metal detectors at the Haram al-Sharif mosque compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount **AHMAD GHARABLI (AFP)**

Israel's Minister of Agriculture Uri Ariel became the first minister to ascend to Jerusalem's flashpoint Temple Mount compound on Sunday morning as a restrictions prohibiting lawmakers from visiting the holy site were lifted.

Later in the morning, MK Sharren Haskel of the ruling Likud party also entered the site.

Access for Israeli lawmakers to the hilltop site, known to Muslims as the Haram al-Sharif compound and to Jews as the Temple Mount, has been prohibited for over two years.

The Temple Mount is considered Judaism's holiest site, once the site of the first and second Temples, and is the third holiest to the Muslim faith.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that every member of parliament, including ministers, would be able to resume visiting the Temple Mount on a regular basis.

The decision reportedly came following a request by Likud lawmaker Yehuda Glick, who survived an assassination attempt in 2014 over his Temple Mount activism.



Israel's Minister of Agriculture Uri Ariel visits Temple Mount, July 8, 2018

The lifting of the ban came with certain conditions. Lawmakers must not visit the site more than once every three months and must their visits with police in advance. They are also prohibited from addressing public media and may not be

accompanied by media during visits.

Jewish lawmakers will be permitted to visit the site during visiting hours stipulated for Jews (between 7:30-11:00 a.m. on weekdays) and may accompany Jewish tour groups. Arab lawmakers will be able to begin visits with no time restrictions from 11:30 a.m.

Ariel last week welcomed the lifting of the ban, but called for limitations to also be removed.

“The Temple Mount must be open for Jewish prayer throughout the year, including to public figures,” he said. “The Muslims are not in charge of the Mount and they can’t make use of threats and violence that place limits on [Jewish] entry to the Temple Mount. I call on the prime minister to open the Temple Mount to Jewish prayer without limitations for anyone who wants.”

The ban on visits by Israeli ministers and parliamentarians was first imposed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in October 2015 as tensions at the site began escalating into a months-long wave of stabbing, car-ramming and shooting attacks, and violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces.

Plans to allow a temporary lifting of the ban in July 2017 were put off after violence again erupted in and around the site.

Israel has repeatedly stated its commitment to the status quo at the Temple Mount, in which Jews are allowed to visit but not to pray.

Source: <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/178964-180708-israeli-minister-as-cends-to-temple-mount-after-ban-on-lawmaker-visits-lifted>

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