Paraguay opens its Israel embassy in Jerusalem

Paraguay is the third country after the United States and Guatemala to move its embassy to the disputed city. The status of Jerusalem remains a major hurdle to a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians.

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Paraguay opened its new Israel embassy in Jerusalem on Monday, following in the footsteps of the United States and Guatemala.

Last week, the US relocated its embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv, infuriating the Palestinians. The US move was followed by Guatemala two days later.

Romania, the Czech Republic and Honduras have said they are also considering moving their embassies to Jerusalem.

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The status of Jerusalem remains one of the biggest stumbling blocks in solving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, who with broad international backing want Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem as their future capital.

Israel regards the entire city, including the eastern sector that it captured in the 1967 Middle East war, as its capital. The annexation was never internationally recognized and most global powers want the city's final status to be agreed upon in a peace deal between the two sides.

'Provocative and irresponsible measure'

Paraguayan President Horacio Cartes and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attended the ceremony.

"This is a historic day that strengthens ties between Paraguay and Israel," Cartes said.

"A great day for Israel. A great day for Paraguay. A great day for our friendship," Netanyahu responded. "You have not only the support of our government but the profound gratitude of the people Israel."

Hanan Ashrawi, an official of the Palestine Liberation Organization, criticized Paraguay's move.

"By adopting such a provocative and irresponsible measure that is in direct contravention of international law and consensus, Paraguay has conspired with Israel, the United States and Guatemala to entrench the military occupation and to seal the fate of occupied Jerusalem," Ashrawi said in a statement.

In December, US President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, reversing decades of US policy. The move was seen as a setback to efforts to resolve the decades-old conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

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