

Al-Aqsa Sanctuary

BRIEFING CARD

Al-Aqsa is a **sacred compound** in the Old City of Jerusalem. It is also known as Masjid Al-Aqsa or the Noble Sanctuary.

The 35-acre area includes the **iconic golden-domed Dome of the Rock**, the ancient Al-Qibly Mosque and 200 other buildings of immense historical and religious significance.

Al-Aqsa is the site of the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey known as al-Isra. It is the first Qibla (direction Muslims face when praying), mentioned in the Quran and it is blessed. Al-Aqsa is woven into the fabric of Muslim historicity and integrated into Muslimness.

The sacredness and sanctity of Al-Aqsa provide Muslims with a place of contemplation and prayer. It binds present Muslims to the past and future. Each year tens of thousands of Muslims travel from across the globe to Al-Aqsa.

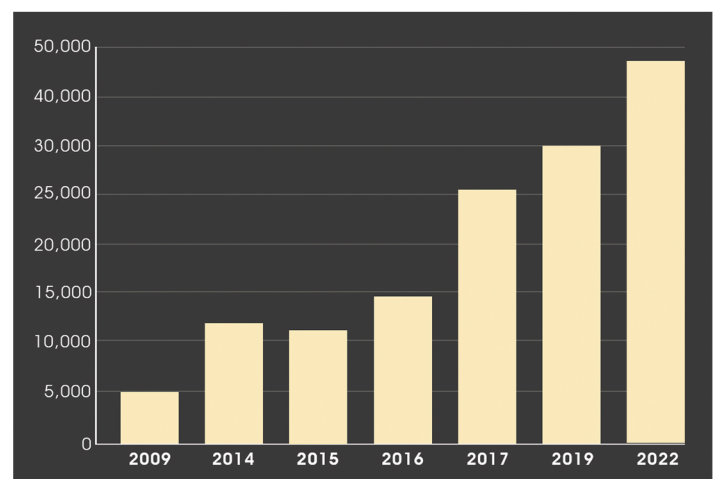
Al-Aqsa is also an important symbol of **Palestinian heritage and culture**. For the 14 million Palestinians worldwide, Al-Aqsa's importance transcends its **religious significance**. The golden Dome of the Rock is an iconic symbol that unites Palestinians and is **integral to Palestinian identity**.



Scan to learn more about the significance of Al-Aqsa

- Al-Aqsa Sanctuary is a 35-acre holy compound in the Old City of Jerusalem.
- It is the **holiest place in Jerusalem for Muslims** and one of the three holiest sites in the world, in parallel with Makkah and Medina.
- Al-Aqsa is **gravely threatened** by Israel's illegal occupation and apartheid regime. Israel has targeted Al-Aqsa Sanctuary for takeover.
- **Mainstream Israeli movements** and political figures are now **calling to destroy Al-Aqsa** and build a Jewish temple in its place.

Israeli threat to Al-Aqsa



Number of Israeli incursions at Al-Aqsa. [Info Middle East Eye]

For many decades Israel has targeted Al-Aqsa for takeover.

In June 1967 **Israel illegally seized East Jerusalem**, including Al-Aqsa in the Old City. In 1980 Israel illegally annexed East Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa. Israel's unilateral declaration of control of East Jerusalem is in violation of international law.

Israel has dug tunnels under the Al-Aqsa Sanctuary, which threatens its structural integrity. UNESCO has condemned Israel's disrespect for Al-Aqsa, which is a World Heritage Site.

Since 1967 Israel has **controlled entry and exit** to Al-Aqsa. Israel has increasingly limited the number of Palestinians who can visit and enforced **age and gender restrictions**. Israel has also introduced **permits to access** Al-Aqsa.

In contrast, Israeli armed guards escort Israeli extremists into the Al-Aqsa Sanctuary. These **provocative visits** are known as incursions. In the last few years the number of incursions at Al-Aqsa has rapidly increased. **48,000 Israelis stormed Al-Aqsa in 2022**, more than any year previously.

There is now a mainstream movement within Israel calling for the destruction of Al-Aqsa. This is called the **Temple Mount movement**. This has received financial support from members of the Israeli government such as Israeli security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. In 2023 Ben-Gvir called for Israelis to storm Al-Aqsa and the Temple Mount movement promised financial rewards for those who slaughtered animals at Al-Aqsa during Passover.

In recent years the number of **Israeli attacks on Palestinian worshippers** at Al-Aqsa has **rapidly increased**, particularly around the holy month of Ramadan.

In 2021 Israeli Occupation Forces **violently assaulted hundreds of Palestinian worshippers** at Al-Aqsa using tear gas, stun grenades and rubber-coated steel bullets.

In 2022 Israeli forces again brutally attacked hundreds of Palestinian men, women and children worshipping at Al-Aqsa. In April 2022, Israeli forces attacked worshippers at Al-Aqsa **7 times in 10 days**, injuring over 250 individuals. Journalists and medics were violently assaulted and ambulances were prevented from reaching the injured. There was also significant damage to historic buildings within the compound, including the stained-glass windows of Al-Aqsa.

In 2023 Israeli forces once again assaulted Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa, beating them with **rifles** and **batons** and assaulting men, women and children with **tear gas, stun grenades and rubber-coated bullets**.

The sanctity of Al-Aqsa is violated daily by the Israeli government.

References:

- 1) 'Temple Mount groups pledge prizes for animal sacrifice at Al-Aqsa Mosque', Middle East Monitor, April 2023, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230401-temple-mount-groups-pledge-prizes-for-animal-sacrifice-at-al-aqsa-mosque/>
- 2) '48,000 Israeli settlers stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque during 2022', Middle East Monitor, December 2022, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20221230-48000-israeli-settlers-stormed-al-aqsa-mosque-during-2022/>
- 3) 'Al-Aqsa Mosque: Israeli raids and incursions explained', Middle East Eye, April 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-aqsa-mosque-raids-incursions-explained>

