

Trump's US Embassy move explained

May 2017

What is happening?

At 2 pm UK time, the US will formally move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The event will be attended by Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan, Secretary of Treasury Steven Mnuchin, Ivanka Trump, Jared Kushner, US Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt and 40 senior US officials. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as President Reuven Rivlin, will also be in attendance. This follows US President Donald Trump's announcement last December that he would recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the US Embassy there. In the same speech, Trump emphasised that the US was "not taking any position on any final status issues, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem".

Where will the US Embassy going to be located?

The Embassy will temporarily be located in the Consular Section of the US Consulate-General in Jerusalem, on David Flusser Street, in the Jewish Arnona neighbourhood. It is expected to be subsequently built on the adjacent site of the Diplomat Hotel. The area has been under continuous Israeli control since 1949 and is not disputed by the Palestinians.

What is Israel's position?

The Israeli government believes the US is correcting a 70-year-old injustice and its decision will lay the groundwork for a peace based on truth and recognition. It argues that the refusal by the international community

to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital has reinforced Palestinian rejectionism and delegitimisation of the Jewish People's historic connection to the city. Speaking at a ceremony celebrating Jerusalem Day, Netanyahu said: "I call on all countries to join the US in moving their embassies to Jerusalem. It's the right thing to do . . . because it advances peace." Jerusalem was intended to be internationalised under the terms of the 1947 partition plan, but this was never implemented and the Jordanian Arab Legion captured the East of the city, including the Old City and holy sites, Israel retained control of the West of the city. For 19 years Jews and Israelis were not allowed access to Jewish holy sites and ancient synagogues were destroyed. In 1967, Israel captured the East of the city and Old City in the Six-Day War and later applied Israeli law to a unified capital city of Jerusalem.

What has been the Palestinian reaction?

The Palestinian leadership has rejected the US decision to relocate its embassy. Shortly after Trump's announcement, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas warned of "the dangerous consequences such a decision would have to the peace process and to the peace, security and stability of the region and of the world," whilst declaring that Jerusalem is a "Palestinian, Arab, Islamic, and Christian city". Abbas also denounced the US as an honest broker for peace and refused to enter into any talks with Israel under the (yet to be seen) Trump peace plan.

Where does the international community stand?

Although Jerusalem hosts several consulate-generals handling diplomatic relations with the PA – including those of the UK, France, US and EU – the international community in general continues to keep embassies in Tel Aviv until the final status of Jerusalem is agreed through bilateral negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.

The EU mission in Israel stated that the EU would “respect the international consensus on Jerusalem ... including on the location of their diplomatic representations until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved” and most European representatives in Israel are not attending the ceremony.

However, representatives of 33 diplomatic missions in Israel will attend the event, including Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Romania from the EU. Several countries have announced plans or expressed interest in relocating their embassies to Jerusalem, notably, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, the Czech Republic, and Romania.

What could happen on 14 May?

Any change to the status quo in Jerusalem, imagined or real, has the potential to cause violence because Jerusalem has enormous religious significance for Jews, Muslims and Christians that can be exploited to mobilise protestors for demonstrations. The fact the move coincides with Israel’s Jerusalem Day celebrations, Palestinian “Nakba Day,” the beginning of Ramadan, and during heightened tension along the Gaza border adds to the potential for violence.

* * *

Copyright © Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre 2018

For more information please contact:
Charlotte Henry, Senior Press Officer
020 3745 3348
07879 644099
charlotteh@bicom.org.uk