

# Clashes as Palestinians end boycott of holy site

## Jerusalem

Clashes erupted between Israeli police and Palestinians at a sensitive Jerusalem holy site yesterday as thousands of Muslim worshippers entered to end a boycott of the compound over new Israeli security measures.

An AFP correspondent witnessed the clashes break out shortly after the worshippers entered.

The Palestinian Red Crescent reported 56 people wounded both inside the Haram al-Sharif compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount, and in the immediate area.

Outside, clashes in one area erupted when a group of policemen walked in the middle of a crowd.

Thousands of worshippers had earlier streamed into the compound for afternoon prayers for the first time in two weeks, ending a boycott after Israel removed controversial new security measures, installed after a July 14 attack killed two policemen.

The site includes the Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock.

Some cried as they entered while others shouted "Allahu Akbar". Some brought their children in what was initially a celebratory atmosphere.

Worshippers had in previous days refused to enter the compound and prayed in the streets outside after Israel



Tear-gas fumes are seen in the Haram al-Sharif compound, as Israeli security forces disperse Palestinians who entered the complex



Palestinian Muslims raise their hands in prayer inside the Haram al-Sharif compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount, in the old city of Jerusalem

installed the new security measures.

### Arab League chief says Israel risks igniting 'religious war'

The head of the Arab League warned Thursday that Israeli attempts to control highly sensitive religious sites in Jerusalem by force risk igniting a "religious war".

Israel's actions are "playing with fire, and will only ignite a religious war and shift the core of the conflict from politics to religion", Arab League chief Ahmed Abul Gheit said.

He was speaking at an urgent meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo

on the latest violence in Jerusalem.

"I invite the occupying state (Israel) to carefully learn the lessons from this crisis and the message it holds," Abul Gheit said in a televised speech.

"Handling holy sites lightly and with this level of arrogance seriously threatens to ignite a religious war, since not one single Muslim in the world would accept the desecration of (Jerusalem's) Al-Aqsa mosque," he said.

The Arab League "condemns in the strongest terms Israel's plans and policies that aim to Judaize the occupied city of Jerusalem and distort its Arab and Muslim character," the

foreign ministers said in their closing statement.

"East Jerusalem is the capital of the Palestinian state," the organisation said, "expressing its rejection and condemnation of all measures by the occupying force to diminish Palestinian rights of sovereignty over it."

### Friday prayers

Deadly unrest erupted in the days after the new measures were introduced, with clashes breaking out around the compound and in the occupied West Bank, leaving five Palestinians dead.

There had been concerns that Friday's main weekly Muslim prayers -- which

typically draw thousands to Al-Aqsa -- would lead to serious clashes between protesters and Israeli security forces if a resolution was not found. After intensive international diplomacy, Israel removed the metal detectors on Tuesday.

Newly installed railings and scaffolding where cameras were previously mounted were also removed early on Thursday. Police said on Thursday morning that all new security measures had been taken away.

### Smart cameras?

Israeli officials had said they were to replace the new security measures with

"advanced technologies" -- widely believed to be smart cameras with facial recognition technology.

It was not immediately clear if Israel would stick to reported plans to install the smart camera system in Jerusalem's Old City. Cameras are already widespread inside its walls.

Jordan is the custodian of Muslim holy sites at the compound, and King Abdullah II had called on Netanyahu to remove the security measures. Information Minister Mohammad al-Momani on Thursday welcomed their removal, calling it an "essential step towards calm." (AFP)



Arab Foreign Ministers attend a meeting in Cairo to discuss the simmering unrest surrounding the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem