

Riots Feared. Jerusalem Day to Coincide with First Evening of Ramadan

The date of the start of the Muslim month has not yet been set and this year it may coincide with Jerusalem Day, when right wing activists march through the Muslim Quarter. Two organizations seek to prevent the Flag Parade from passing through the Muslim Quarter for fear of riots

By Moshe Steinmetz

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Jerusalem is bracing for the possibility that Jerusalem Day will be marked this year in conjunction with the first night of the Ramadan holiday, and that the right wing Flag Parade through the city's Muslim Quarter will be held at the same time as the arrival of tens of thousands of Muslim worshippers to the Temple Mount [Haram al-Sharif – IR AMIM]. After recent years, in which the Flag Parade has been accompanied by violence against Arabs by some of the marchers, this year NGO Ir Amim and the Tag Meir organization have presented a demand to prevent the parade from passing through the Muslim Quarter to the commander of the Jerusalem District Police, against the backdrop of the wave of terrorism.

Jerusalem Day is marked this year on Sunday, June 5, and that night the annual Flag Parade to the Western Wall, passing through the Muslim Quarter, is scheduled to be held. Last year severe clashes ensued, as marchers injured Arab photographers and at the same time Palestinians threw stones at police officers and marchers and two police officers were injured. In recent years, the Police have demanded that shop owners in the Muslim Quarter close their shops while the parade passes so as to prevent friction. A similar petition filed by the two organizations last year was rejected.

The exact date of the start of Ramadan is determined a few days prior to the beginning of the month, according to [sighting of] the moon, and it could start this year on June 6 or June 7. Concerns are even greater this year since the festive prayer of the eve of Ramadan could be held at the same time as the Flag Parade if the holiday falls on Monday. Every year, tens of thousands of Muslim worshippers visit the Temple Mount [Haram al-Sharif – IR AMIM] for this prayer.

“The closure imposed on the Palestinian residents of the Muslim Quarter during the parade is a violent and aggressive act, which has the dangerous potential for a renewed flare-up in Jerusalem,” said sources in Ir Amim. “The proximity of the parade this year to Ramadan makes the harm [caused to residents] even more severe, as the Muslim residents of the Quarter will be barred from preparing freely for their most important holiday,” they added.

“Concerned for the well-being of the city”

Ir Amim Executive Director Yudith Oppenheimer and Tag Meir Chairman Gadi Gvoryahu wrote a letter to Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan, Commander of the Jerusalem District Police Maj.-Gen. Yoram Halevy and Mayor Nir Barkat stating that “as people who are concerned for the well-being of the city and for the stability of the relations between its communities, we are requesting that you prevent the Flag Parade from entering the Muslim Quarter this year.” They wrote further, “In our view, the proximity of the events requires even more cautious deployment than in previous years, so that the days special to the two religions and to the two peoples will contribute to instilling mutual respect and understanding between the two communities in the city, and not to further escalation.”

They summed up by stating, “In light of this, we insist that Muslims be permitted to celebrate the days of Ramadan without interference and without disrupting movement in the area of the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City. Last year the Supreme Court noted the obligation of the authorities to enable freedom of movement for the residents in the course of the parade, and to prevent racist and violent incidents. The fact that the month of Ramadan coincides with Jerusalem Day requires that the parade be rerouted, out of respect both for the Muslim religion and for the residents of the Muslim Quarter, and for the Jewish religion, in light of which it behooves us to mark Jerusalem Day sensitively and wisely.”

The Jerusalem District Police commented that the letter had been received by the Police and that the submitters would receive a proper response by the relevant agencies.