

Jerusalem mayor orders new walkway plans

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[摘要] February 13, 2007, ERUSALEM - The Jerusalem municipality will submit new plans for a walkway leading to a disputed holy compound, a City Hall spokesman said Monday, but work was scheduled to continue at the site.

[关键词] Jerusalem

February 13, 2007, ERUSALEM -

The Jerusalem municipality will submit new plans for a walkway leading to a disputed holy compound, a City Hall spokesman said Monday, but work was scheduled to continue at the site.

The plans for the new walkway up to the compound known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary and to Jews as the Temple Mount already were approved by City Hall, but Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski now will demand a longer and more transparent planning process that will allow residents to see the plans. Tensions in the city have been high since last week, when Israel began work outside the compound. The new walkway is meant to replace an ancient earthen ramp that partially collapsed in a snow-storm three years ago. Israel says the work, about 60 yards from the compound, will not hurt Muslim holy sites but the project has drawn fierce protests from Palestinians and Arab countries.

The new City Hall decision will have no effect on the work currently under way at the site, where archaeologists are carrying out an exploratory dig to ensure that no important remains are damaged when the walkway is built.

But Schmerling said it could delay construction, which was set to begin in about six months' time. The new walkway was originally expected to be completed within a year.

Schmerling said the decision will "likely" delay construction, because more hearings will be held and residents will be allowed to submit objections, he said.

Lupolianski made the decision after meeting with Muslim leaders, Schmerling said, "so that the process will be transparent, and so that it will be entirely clear that there is no attempt to harm any Muslim holy sites."

On Sunday, the Cabinet voted overwhelmingly to push ahead with the work. There were no objections to the decision, the government said in a statement, though three ministers abstained.

Israeli police have restricted access to the compound's Islamic sites over the past week in an attempt to limit protests. Only Muslim men with Israeli ID cards over 45 years old and women were allowed to pray Sunday at the Al Aqsa Mosque, built on the site of the biblical Jewish temples.

Jerusalem police spokesman Shmuel Ben-

Ruby said the same limits would be in effect on Monday, and 2,000 police would be in duty in the holy city, about double the usual contingent.

On Friday, about 200 riot police firing stun grenades and tear gas battled rock-

-throwing protesters among the 3,000 Muslim worshippers, while on Saturday Palestinian teenagers stoned Israeli security forces, burned an Israeli flag and pelted a Canadian tour bus with rocks. Only a few minor incidents were reported Sunday.

The Old City hilltop compound has been a catalyst for earlier rounds of Israel-

-Palestinian fighting. It houses the third holiest site for Muslims, who believe it is where the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven.

As the location of the biblical temples, the compound is Judaism's holiest site, and Jews gather to pray near one of its outer retaining walls, known as the Western Wall.

