

Arab parliament member denies Jewish claim to Temple Mount, sparking Israeli outrage

by [Michele Chabin](#)

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JERUSALEM (RNS) An Arab-Israeli parliament member drew harsh criticism from Jewish Israelis on Monday (July 27) when he claimed that Jewish people have no religious ties to the Temple Mount, considered the holiest site in Judaism.

The site of the long-destroyed ancient Jewish Temples and the current-day Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Temple Mount, called *Haram al-Sharif* in Arabic, has long been a political and religious flashpoint between Jews and Muslims.

The remarks by Masud Ganaim of the Joint (Arab) List political party came a day after clashes between masked Muslim rioters and Israeli police marred the holy Jewish fast day of Tisha B'Av—a day when tens of thousands of Jewish worshippers pray at the Western Wall, which lies directly below the Temple Mount.

Tensions were already simmering after an incident last week in which Muslim women cursed Jewish women on a visit to the Mount. One of the Jewish women shouted back, "Muhammad is a pig." A video of the incident quickly went viral, causing outcries in the Muslim world.

In the past, Muslim extremists have thrown rocks from the Mount onto Jewish worshippers below, causing injuries.

Ganaim told Israel Radio that "historically, religiously, it is a Muslim site, period. The State of Israel knows that Jews and Israel have no legitimacy to the site, except for their legitimacy as an occupier—a legitimacy [won] by force," he said.

The parliament member said Muslims attacked the police following a Sunday (July 26) visit to the Mount by Uri Ariel, a Jewish cabinet minister, and hundreds of other Israelis. The fast of Tisha B'Av commemorates the destruction of the first and second

temples.

“What Minister Ariel did is a provocation; he entered the [Temple Mount compound] provocatively,” Ganaim said. “He should have been satisfied with being nearby, at the Western Wall.”

Police noted, however, that the rioters had stockpiled large amounts of projectiles before Ariel’s visit.

In recent years Palestinian officials have tried to delegitimize Jewish ties to Jerusalem, especially the Temple Mount, despite archaeological discoveries from the site dating back to the time of the Second Temple, which the Romans destroyed in the year 70. Jesus visited the Temple, according to the New Testament.

Israeli president Reuven Rivlin on Sunday condemned the Muslims’ actions.

“The acts of violence and terrorism committed—especially today—against worshippers at holy sites must be condemned unequivocally,” Rivlin said.