

## Indonesian Muslim cleric to speak in Israel amid diplomatic row

News Desk

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A worker hangs a road sign showing the way to the United States Embassy in Jerusalem on May 7. (Reuters/Ronen Zvulun)

A top Muslim cleric from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, is scheduled to deliver a speech in Jerusalem after an invitation from an Israeli organization.

NU supreme council secretary-general Yahya Cholil Staquf, who is also known as Gus Yahya, has reportedly been invited by the Israel Council on Foreign Relations to deliver a speech titled “Shifting Geopolitical Calculus: From Conflict to Cooperation” at the David Amar World North African Jewish Heritage Center in Jerusalem on June 13.

The news about his planned departure for Jerusalem, which was announced by an Israeli journalist with the handle @simonarann on Twitter, has sparked controversy in Indonesia as Tel Aviv recently announced that it would bar Indonesians from entering the country in retaliation for Jakarta’s move to deny visas to dozens of Israeli citizens.



Israel claimed that Jakarta made the move in response to the ongoing violence in Gaza, which has left dozens of Palestinians dead at the hands of Israeli security forces.

The ban was supposed to take effect on June 9, but Israel waived it until June 26.

It is unclear if Yahya, who also serves as an adviser to President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo, will fly to Israel. He was not available for comments on Sunday. Numerous calls from *The Jakarta Post* were not returned.

On Saturday, NU executive Robikin Emhas confirmed that Yahya had been invited to deliver a speech in Israel but his departure was personal and did not represent his organization.

“I believe that Gus Yahya’s presence [in Israel] is to give support [to the Palestinians] and to show the world, particularly Israel, that Palestine is an independent nation,” he said in a statement.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/06/10/indonesian-muslim-cleric-to-speak-in-israel-amid-diplomatic-row.html>