

Israel, Turkey Divided Over Restitution for Gaza Flotilla Raid

Following Israel's apology to Turkey over the May 2010 raid of the Mavi Marmara, the process of negotiating the restitution payments is underway.

Israel is reportedly willing to pay \$100,000 to each family of the nine Turkish activists killed on board on the Mavi Marmara, while Turkey is reportedly demanding \$1 million for each family.

The two countries agreed to establish a joint committee to deal with the restitution issue. Israel's negotiating team will be led by National Security Adviser Yaakov Amidror and Dr. Joseph Ciecchanover and Turkey's will be led by Deputy Foreign Minister Feridun Sinirlioğlu.

Israel prefers that the restitution payments be transferred via a humanitarian fund, rather than paid directly to the families.

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç confirmed on Tuesday that formal negotiations regarding financial restitution have begun, according to the agreement reached between Netanyahu and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Arınç called the Israeli apology over the raid – a move brokered by U.S. President Barack Obama during his visit to Israel last week – “a success for Turkey's foreign policy,” adding that “both sides will work together to resolve the issue.”

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu also commented on

Israel's apology, saying that "Israel took its time on this, but it ended up doing the right thing."

Davutoğlu told reporters in Ankara that he discussed the restitution payments with Justice Minister Tzipi Livni as part of the restoration of ties between the two countries.

Erdoğan on Tuesday briefed the Turkish parliament on the Israeli apology over the raid, which ended a three-year diplomatic crisis between the once-close allies, and reiterated his intention to visit Gaza Strip to "further inspect the issue of the blockade."

The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday that the United States has already begun trying to dissuade Erdoğan from visiting Gaza. According to the report, Israeli officials are "less concerned" by the visit, given the renewed ties with Turkey.

Turkish newspaper Sabah reported on Wednesday that while defense ties between the two countries have been renewed, they will be limited, as Turkey will not allow the Israel Air Force to hold aerial exercises in its skies until the Gaza blockade is lifted.

Meanwhile, news of the restored ties with Turkey is beginning to affect Israeli tourism. Israel Hayom learned on Wednesday that by the end of the Passover holiday, the number of flights from Israel to Turkey is likely to double.

Once among Israelis' favorite vacation destinations, tourism to Turkey declined significantly over the past three years. Prior to the crisis, an average of 550,000 Israelis visited Turkey every year. Since 2010, only 30,000, a majority of them Israeli Arabs, have visited per year.

Sources in the tourism industry told Israel Hayom that the number of Israelis vacationing in Turkey is likely to double by the end of the year, but that reprising the record numbers

seen in 2008 and 2009 would be difficult.

For the original article, visit .