

Beat: Miscellaneous

U.S. extends flight restrictions to Israel by another 24 hours

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USPA News - The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on Wednesday extended its order prohibiting American planes from flying to and from Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport by another day, citing the possible threat of rockets to civilian aircraft. Israel has criticized the move.

"The notice was issued in response to a rocket strike which landed approximately one mile (1.6 kilometer) from Ben Gurion International Airport on the morning of July 22, 2014," the FAA said in a statement. The restrictions apply only to U.S. airlines and do not place any restriction on foreign airlines, but many airlines around the world have also canceled flights to Israel. "The agency is working closely with the Government of Israel to review the significant new information they have provided and determine whether potential risks to U.S. civil aviation are mitigated so the agency can resolve concerns as quickly as possible," FAA spokeswoman Kristie Greco said. The FAA issued the Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) immediately after Tuesday's rocket attack and has continued to assess and monitor the situation. U.S. State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said Wednesday that Hamas has rockets which can reach the airport, but said that it believes the accuracy of these rockets remains limited. El Al Israel Airlines, however, said it would continue its flight schedule worldwide, including its five daily non-stop flights between Israel and the United States. The FAA's order does not affect El Al as it is not based in the United States. The airline said it would add additional flights between Israel and various countries to accommodate passengers left stranded by other airlines. Also on Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry held a private meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres in an effort to achieve a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip, where an Israeli offensive has resulted in the deaths of more than 600 Palestinians and dozens of Israelis. Kerry defied the FAA's ban by flying into Israel himself. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday also met with former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who traveled to Israel with El Al Israel Airlines. "I am flying on El Al to Tel Aviv to show solidarity with the Israeli people and to demonstrate that it is safe to fly in and out of Israel. Ben Gurion is the best protected airport in the world and El Al flights have been regularly flying in and out safely," Bloomberg said. Netanyahu criticized the FAA's flight ban, saying there was "no reason whatsoever" to stop American planes from flying to Israel. "I think you (Bloomberg) are proving it by coming here," he told the former mayor. "I think this decision only rewards the Hamas terrorists for nothing. You can fly in and out of Israel and I hope that the FAA rescinds this decision as soon as possible." Netanyahu, who described Bloomberg as a "true leader," "true friend," and "a man of standing and truth" to Israel, thanked New York City's former leader for flying to Tel Aviv. "The truth is, that you wanted to demonstrate by coming here, is that this airport is open. You can fly in and out of Israel. We protect this airport," the prime minister said. Bloomberg added: "I would argue that Ben-Gurion Airport is probably the safest airport in the whole world to fly in and out of. This is a country that's been threatened since its existence back in 1948, when the United Nations created this country as a homeland for the Jews. And Israelis know what it is to keep people safe and in terms of that also." Numerous airlines around the world also canceled their flights to Israel on Tuesday and Wednesday, but it was not immediately known whether they would suspend additional flights.

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UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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