

UK Minister Priti Patel Quits Cabinet Over Secret Israel Meetings



London, November 9 (RHC)-- British International Development Secretary Priti Patel has resigned following a political storm over her undisclosed meetings with Israeli officials, including Premier Benjamin Netanyahu.

The UK Secretary of State for International Development was ordered back from an official trip to Kenya and summoned to Downing Street by Prime Minister Theresa May after it was revealed that she held 12 separate meetings with senior Israeli politicians and organizations during a family holiday in August, something that can be construed as a significant breach of diplomatic protocol.

Patel herself paid for the trip, during which she also met with Yuval Rotem, a senior Israeli Foreign Ministry official, and Yair Lapid, the head of Yesh Atid, one of Netanyahu's coalition partners, who tweeted about their meeting. The meeting with Netanyahu was organized by Lord Polak, an experienced Tory lobbyist.

She was publicly reprimanded by the prime minister but managed to keep her job. However, Patel's trip to Africa was cut short when reports emerged that she had two other unauthorized previously-undisclosed

meetings with Israeli politicians in September as well as a visit to Syria's Golan Heights -- which have been occupied by Israel since 1967.

In her resignation letter, Patel apologized and said: "While my actions were meant with the best of intentions, my actions also fell below the standards of transparency and openness that I have promoted and advocated," adding, "I offer a fulsome apology to you and to the government for what has happened and offer my resignation."

In her reply, May said: "Now that further details have come to light, it is right that you have decided to resign and adhere to the high standards of transparency and openness that you have advocated."

"As you know, the UK and Israel are close allies, and it is right that we should work closely together... But it must be done formally, and through official channels," May said in the letter to Patel.

Patel's resignation from the cabinet is the second in seven days, after Sir Michael Fallon quit Wednesday last week as defense secretary after becoming embroiled in a mounting Westminster sexual harassment scandal.

Adding to the turmoil, Damian Green, May's de facto deputy, was forced to deny allegations at the weekend that "extreme" pornographic material was found on his work computer in 2008, and in another shocking development, former Welsh government minister Carl Sargeant, who was sacked last week after undisclosed allegations about his personal conduct, was found dead on Tuesday. According to UK Press Association, he had apparently killed himself.

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