Saudi Arabia reportedly denies entry visas to two Israeli ministers ahead of UNESCO conference

September 7, 2023

Israel Behind the News

<https://israelbehindthenews.com/2023/09/07/saudi-arabia-reportedly-denies-entry-visas-to-two-israeli-ministers-ahead-of-unesco-conference/>

Saudi Arabia has reportedly denied entry to two Israeli ministers who were due to take part in a UNESCO conference in Riyadh next week, according to Israeli media.

The Israeli Channel 13 said on Monday evening that Saudi Arabia refused to grant visas to Foreign Minister Eli Cohen and Education Minister Yoav Kisch.

The US and Israel have increasingly been pushing for a deal to normalise ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel, but this has so far failed to materialise, as Riyadh sticks to its official position that it will only establish official relations with Tel Aviv if a Palestinian state is established.

Channel 13 reported that Israel had engaged in “great efforts” for the two ministers to be invited but Saudi Arabia had “put up obstacles” and did not issue them with visas.

It also said that the Israeli foreign ministry had pulled back from its efforts to get visas for the two ministers, following a US request.

As a result, Israeli professionals will take part in the Riyadh meeting but not Israeli ministers.

According to Channel 13, US officials told their Israeli counterparts that because of “progress in contacts” between Israel and Saudi Arabia, an invitation to Israeli ministers at this stage would put Saudi Arabia “in a complicated situation”.

“This is not the time, it is too early,” a US official reportedly said.

Saudi Arabia recently appointed an envoy to the Palestinian territories, in a move believed to be a preparation for normalisation of relations with Israel.

In 2020, three Arab states – the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco, normalised ties with Israel in a controversial deal known as the Abraham Accords.

Palestinians slammed the deals as a betrayal of their cause, pointing out that they rewarded Israel while it continued to occupy the West Bank, besiege the Gaza Strip, and prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.