

Palestinians lash out at U.S. for Israeli settlement activity

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Settlement Regulation Law to save homes like in Modiin Illit in the West Bank, 2017. (photo credit: AMIR COHEN/REUTERS)

The United States’s failure to condemn West Bank settlement activity encourages such building and threatens regional security, PLO Secretary-General Saeb Erekat said on Thursday.

He spoke after Israel published tenders and advanced plans for more than 2,000 settler homes in Area B and Area C of the West Bank during the last two weeks.

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“Israel’s latest settlement announcement reaffirms the commitment of the Israeli government to colonization and apartheid,” Erekat said.

“And by refraining from condemning such colonial illegal plans, the US State Department is, in fact, encouraging Tel Aviv to continue with its violations of international law that threatens peace and security in our region,” he added.

On Thursday, the Israel Land Authority published tenders for 420 houses, including 211 units for Ma’aleh Efraim in the Jordan Valley, according to Peace Now. The other tenders are for homes located in: Givat Ze’ev - 54 units; Beit Aryeh - 52; Ariel - 42; Karnei Shomron - 25; Alfei Menashe - 24; and Elkana - 12.

The ILA tender followed Wednesday’s approval of 1,010 new houses by the Higher Planning Council for Judea and Samaria.

On August 14, two new tenders were issued for 511 units in the Beit Aryeh

settlement and for 603 Jewish homes in the Ramat Shlomo neighborhood of east Jerusalem, Peace Now reported.

Separately, the Ministry of Construction and Housing advanced plans last week for 250 new homes in Beit El north of Ramallah.

Settler and right-wing politicians have argued that the numbers of advancement and authorizations are low, and that Netanyahu must do more to authorize such building. They were particularly perturbed that plans to authorize two outposts were removed from the Higher Planning Council's agenda at the last moment.

In a meeting with settlers in the Har Bracha settlement MK Makhoulf "Miki" Zohar (Likud) called on Netanyahu to annex Judea and Samaria. He argued that the "Land of Israel without Judea and Samaria is like a body without a soul."

He spoke the same week that US President Donald Trump warned Israel that it would have to pay a heavy price for the relocation in May of the US Embassy to Jerusalem.

But Zohar said that in spite of the media headlines about Trump, he believes the US President was a strong friend of Israel's.

"Now is the time to apply sovereignty in Judea and Samaria, to build and to strengthen the settlements," he tweeted.

Agriculture Minister Uri Ariel (Bayit Yehudi) on Thursday visited the northern Samaria region, and called for 400 new units to be built there.

Erekat said that such building was a "grave violation of international human rights law, "but a war crime that would not be taking place if the international community didn't treat Israel as a state above the law."

"It is long overdue time for the international community to impose sanctions on Israel until it recognizes and fulfills its obligations under international law and UN resolutions," he said.

The European Union also condemned the settlement activity. The spokesperson for the EU's foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said that construction of the settler homes "would further jeopardize the prospect of a contiguous and viable future Palestinian state."

The EU is strongly opposed to Israel's settlement policy which is illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace," the spokesperson said.

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