

# *Israel Begins Building First New Settlement in West Bank Since 1992*

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Ramallah, June 21 (RHC)-- Israel has started building its first new settlement in the West Bank in 25 years in defiance of the international law and the latest UN Security Council resolution against the illegal move.

On Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the illegal construction in Emek Shilo, near the city of Ramallah, as an “honor.” The construction of the new settlement started just a week after the Israeli minister for military affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, hailed the plan as Israel’s biggest settlement expansion since 1992.

The new settlement is aimed at accommodating the residents of the illegal West Bank outpost of Amona after it was demolished by the Israeli military in February following a court order.

Since 1992, Israel's settlement construction in the occupied territories has involved expansion of the existing outposts, increasing the number of illegal Israeli settlers from 20,000 to 700,000. The expansion of illegal settlements has been a major hurdle in the way of the so-called peace talks, which opened between Israel and the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo Accord in 1993.

The Palestinian Authority wants the West Bank as part of a future independent Palestinians state, with East Jerusalem as its capital. According to data released by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics on Monday, expansion of the illegal settlements in the West Bank soared by 70 percent between April 2016 and March 2017. The figure does not include Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem.

In early June, Israeli anti-settlement group, Peace Now, which monitors settlement activities in the West Bank, revealed that Tel Aviv had advanced plans for constructing 7,721 settler units since January, almost triple the figure for all of last year, which amounted to 2,699 units.

Peace Now said the plans were at various stages of the approval process and the units were located in a number of settlements across the occupied West Bank. Last week alone, the occupying regime advanced plans for over 3,000 settlement homes.

The continuation of settlement construction and expansion is a blatant violation of the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 2334, issued on December 23 last year, which demands that Israel "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem." It also states that the building of settlements by Israel has "no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law."

Since the inauguration of U.S. President Donald Trump in January, the regime in Tel Aviv has stepped up its construction of settler units on occupied Palestinian land in a blatant violation of international law.

In his last month's visit to the occupied territories, Trump reportedly urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to hold back on such controversial projects, which could further cloud chances of a so-called two-state solution.

Trump, who met with both Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, purportedly sought what he termed as the "ultimate deal." He urged both sides to restart the so-called peace negotiations.

As the Israeli regime strives to fortify its military occupation by unleashing settlement construction, there seems to be little chances, if any, of success of Trump's "ultimate deal."

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