

# *Israel approves 2,000 West Bank settlement units despite outcry*

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Tel Aviv, June 1 (RHC)-- The Israeli regime has approved plans for the construction of about 2,000 settlement units in the occupied West Bank. Israeli media said that the defense ministry of the regime in Tel Aviv which is responsible for the authorization of the internationally-banned settlements gave the go-ahead for the contracts of 1,957 new units in the West Bank.

Of those settlements, some 696 gained full approval for construction, the reports said, adding that plans for a total of 1,262 units were advanced through an earlier planning stage. The decision comes despite increasing international outcry over Israel's expansion of the settlements which many see as a major impediment to peace in the Middle East. Israel builds the settlements in territories that it captured in a 1967 war. The international community insists those territories belong to the Palestinians and will be part of their future state.

Many governments have condemned the expansion of settlements, saying the policy shows Israel lacks a genuine inclination towards peace. Even the United States, Israel's closest ally, abstained from a vote condemning the settlements in the United Nations General Assembly in late 2016. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a report earlier this week that Israeli banks are financing the regime's unlawful settlement construction activities, saying the move contributed to serious human rights violations and war crimes against Palestinians.

In the 41-page report, the New York-based rights group said Israel's seven largest banks provide services to settlements and facilitate their expansion, thus abetting unlawful population transfers. The report also warned that the Israeli settlements contribute to "a discriminatory regime in which Israeli authorities restrict and stunt Palestinian economic development."

"Settlements inherently contribute to serious human rights abuses. Companies that conduct business in or with settlements cannot mitigate or avoid contributing to these abuses, because the activities they conduct take place on unlawfully seized land, under conditions of discrimination, and through a serious violation of Israel's obligations as an occupying power," it added.

Israel's approval for the new settlements also comes against the backdrop of heightened tensions inside the occupied Palestinian territories, where anti-Israeli sentiments have deepened following Israel's crackdown on people protesting a crippling blockade in the Gaza Strip. More than 115 people have been killed since protests began on Gaza's border in March.

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