

# *Palestinians slam Netanyahu for pledging settlement annexation*

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Ramallah, September 3 (RHC)-- Palestinian leaders have slammed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for pledging annexation of all illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said that Netanyahu's reiteration of annexation pledge was a "continuation of attempts to create an unacceptable fait accompli." He added that the move would "not lead to any peace, security or stability."

The secretary-general of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Saeb Erekat said, "Those who claim concern after every Israeli settlement announcement should face reality: Israel's PM is announcing further annexation of occupied territory."

"Enough impunity: There's an international responsibility to impose sanctions on Israel after decades of systematic crimes," he added.

Netanyahu told an audience at West Bank settlement Sunday that he would annex all illegal settlements. "With the help of God we will apply Jewish sovereignty to all communities, as part of the [biblical] Land of Israel, and as part of the state of Israel," he said.

More than 400,000 Israelis live in the illegal settlements in West Bank and around 20,000 live in occupied East Jerusalem. The prime minister's comments come amid Israel's elections due for Sept. 17. After elections in April, Netanyahu's Likud Party could not secure enough support to form a government coalition and another snap election was called.

According to the polls, the prime minister is running in a very close race with his main rival Benny Gantz from the centrist Blue and White party. In addition to that, his far-right Likud party needs to come out with a decisive lead in the ballot or Israeli President Reuven Rivlin might decide to appoint another candidate to form a ruling coalition. It is in this context that he is seeking to draw support from the voters of the right-wing parties close to the influential settlement movement.

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