

Israel speeds up settlement construction fearing Biden's possible freeze plans



Tel Aviv, November 14 (RHC)-- Israeli authorities are reportedly expediting approval of plans for the construction of more settler units across the occupied territories, amid growing fears that the projected winner of US presidential election Joe Biden would oppose such plans once he enters the White House early next year.

According to Israeli newspaper Haaretz, the so-called Jerusalem City Hall and the Israel Lands Authority (ILA) have been identifying and speeding up approval of construction plans beyond the Green Line, part of the border that Israel drew between the West Bank and the rest of historical Palestine, over the next two months to prevent them from being stopped by the next US administration.

The report highlighted that Biden had an important role in Israeli settlement construction freeze in Jerusalem al-Quds during the administration of former US President Barack Obama, where he served as vice president.

This is while the outgoing administration of U.S. President Donald Trump staunchly supported the Israeli regime's settlement expansion and land expropriation policies. Meanwhile, the Jerusalem Municipality has given the green light for the construction of 108 settler units north of the holy city in Ramat Shlomo settlement.

The Palestinian Arabic-language Safa news agency, citing a report published by public Israeli KAN 11 television network, said the so-called Jerusalem Local Planning and Building Committee has endorsed plans for the units to be built in Ramat Shlomo settlement.

Anti-settlement watchdog Peace Now also told AFP that plans for 96 homes in the east Jerusalem settlement of Ramat Shlomo were given the green light by the municipal planning committee on Tuesday.

Israel announced plans to build 1,600 settler units in Ramat Shlomo, which adjoins the Palestinian neighborhoods of Shuafat and Beit Hanina, in March 2010. That announcement, according to AFP, came as Biden, now U.S. President-elect, was visiting Israel, provoking fierce U.S. opposition and souring ties with Washington for months.

"After straining relations with Biden and the U.S. in 2010 over the approval of settlement units in Ramat Shlomo, one would think that Prime Minister (Benjamin) Netanyahu would at least try not to remind the incoming Biden administration of that time," Peace Now spokesman Brian Reeves said. He added: "Approving units in the exact same location, just as Biden is about to enter office, is both counter to Israel's interests and recklessly provocative toward Biden personally."

More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds.

Since Trump took office in January 2017, Israel has stepped up its settlement construction activities in defiance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, which pronounced settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds "a flagrant violation under international law."

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