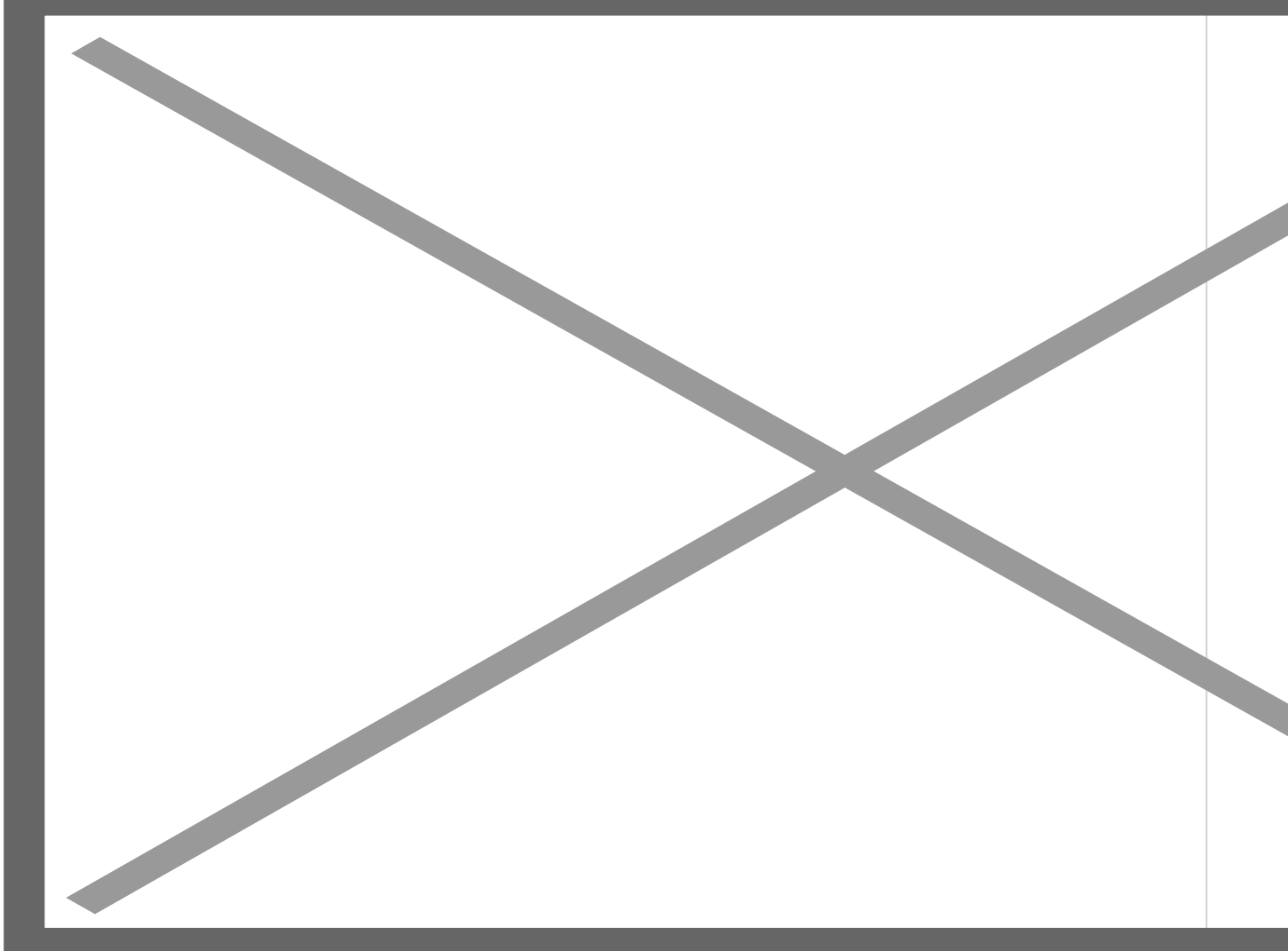


Israel approves 780 new illegal settler units in occupied West Bank

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Construction site in the Israeli settlement of Susya, in the southern area of the West Bank city of Hebron. (Photo: AFP)

Tel Aviv, January 18 (RHC)-- The anti-settlement monitoring group Peace Now says Israeli authorities have advanced plans for the construction of 780 new illegal settler units in the occupied West Bank, days before U.S. President-elect Joe Biden takes office.

Peace Now, which tracks settlement construction in the occupied territory, said Sunday that Israel has approved "plans to build 780 housing units in settlements, most of them deep in the West Bank", adding that the move will put the Tel Aviv regime "on a collision course" with the incoming U.S. administration.

"Not only will this settlement activity erode the possibility for a conflict-ending resolution with the Palestinians in the long-term, but in the short-term it needlessly sets Israel on a collision course with the incoming Biden administration", the group said.

The announcement came a week after Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered plans be advanced for the construction of 800 new illegal settler units in the occupied West Bank. Peace Now said at the time that Netanyahu's announcement sends a signal to the Biden administration that "Israel wants a confrontation."

Biden, who will be sworn on Wednesday, has already indicated his administration will restore U.S. policy of opposing settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories. Biden had an important role in Israeli settlement construction freeze in Jerusalem al-Quds as well as the West Bank during the administration of former U.S. President Barack Obama, where he served as vice president.

This is while the administration of outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump staunchly supported the Israeli regime's illegal settlement expansion and land expropriation policies.

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.

After Trump took office in December 2016, Israel 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."

To Palestinians, expansion of illegal Israeli settlements makes a future state unviable. Palestinians say all indications prove that Israel is racing against time to build new settlements before the outgoing US administration leaves office.

The Palestinian Authority has warned that settlement activity has grave consequences in the occupied West Bank, and will definitely lead to more Palestinian land grab by the Israeli regime to facilitate the annexation of the occupied territories.

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