

# *Netanyahu vows to legalize West Bank settlements if re-elected*

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**Israeli forces stand by as excavators demolish a Palestinian house southeast of Hebron (al-Khalil) in the occupied West Bank on March 8, 2021. (Photo: AFP)**

Tel Aviv, March 15 (RHC)-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has promised to authorize new illegal settlements in the West Bank if he were re-elected and formed a strong right-wing cabinet after the March 23rd election. "I swear to you: If I create a strong right-wing government without a rotation, I will take care of the settlements and the authorization of the young settlements [outposts]," Netanyahu said, according to the Jerusalem Post.

He made the remarks during a visit to the Givat Harel outpost in the West Bank's Binyamin region, pointing to 160 illegal West Bank outposts, out of which 65 were constructed in the last eight years during Netanyahu's tenure.

Netanyahu had already pledged support for the authorization of the outposts and backed an initiative for Israeli ministers to issue a declaration of intent to legalize the outposts before the fall of the cabinet. However, Alternate Prime Minister Benny Gantz kept the issue off the agenda.

The Israeli right-wing groups pushed to authorize the settlements prior to U.S. President Joe Biden's inauguration on January 20th, but they failed to take full advantage of the last days of the administration of the former president, Donald Trump, who had broken with decades of the United States' bipartisan show by not opposing the settlements.

The Biden administration has voiced opposition to the Israeli regime's settlement expansion, making it difficult for the regime to expand the illegal West Bank settlements, while rejecting calls to reverse Trump's recognition of Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's "capital."

The international community has repeatedly opposed Israel's settlement activities, urging Biden in recent months to put pressure on Israel over the issue.

In earlier remarks, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh called on the Biden administration to make good on its opposition to Israel's settlement expansion across the West Bank and take concrete measures to tackle the expansionism.

A human rights group has strongly denounced a fresh Israeli decision of razing more Palestinian homes and structures in Occupied Jerusalem al-Quds, stressing that such a plot would lead to massive destruction and amount to "ethnic cleansing" across the occupied Palestinian lands.

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor in a statement warned that the planned destruction operations were characterized by racial discrimination committed by the Israeli army, the Palestinian Information Center reported.

"The Israeli decisions coincide with the authorities' establishment of settlement projects in the heart of Palestinian communities in east Jerusalem to perpetuate a policy of racial discrimination against the Palestinian population," the statement read.

The nonprofit organization for the protection of rights also said the scheme would pave the way for a massive destruction and displacement against the native population in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

"Thus, 19 households from eight families, comprising 78 people, of whom 28 are children, remain threatened with forced displacement at any moment," Euro-Med noted. "While the Israeli authorities insist on eviction decisions against Palestinian homes in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, the municipality has approved establishing a memorial for soldiers of a battalion in the Israeli army paratroopers brigade killed during the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967," the human rights group further pointed out.

Elsewhere in the statement, the group voiced concern over the ongoing Israeli demolition campaign in Silwan neighborhood adjacent to the al-Aqsa Mosque in east Jerusalem al-Quds, which places dozens of Palestinian homes under threat of demolition at any moment.

Euro-Med Monitor calls on the international community and the United Nations to shoulder their responsibilities in stopping Israeli violations and urgently intervening to stop house demolition plans and change the city's demographic reality.

United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory Lynn Hastings said in a statement that the recent Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes and evacuation of local residents and

confiscation of their lands contravened international law, and were all in flagrant violation of human rights law.

Israeli authorities usually demolish Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank, claiming that the structures have been built without permits, which are nearly impossible to obtain.

They also sometimes order Palestinian owners to demolish their own homes or pay the demolition costs to the municipality if they do not.

The latest surge in demolition has drawn widespread condemnation against the Israeli regime for exploiting the coronavirus crisis to press ahead with its campaign of razing Palestinian homes.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has announced a plan for grabbing a huge swathe of the West Bank, namely the areas upon which the regime has built its illegal settlements since occupying the territory in 1967, as well as the strategic Jordan Valley. He made the announcement after former US President Donald Trump unveiled the “deal of the century,” a hugely pro-Tel Aviv scheme.

Following the signing of normalization agreements with Israel by the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, there has been a rapid increase in Tel Aviv's demolition of Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem al-Quds.

The rise is coupled with an increase in deportation of Palestinians from Jerusalem al-Quds, their expulsion from al-Aqsa Mosque and daily storming of the compound by extremist Israeli settlers.

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