

Israel approves building plan in illegal Jerusalem settlement



Building settlements on occupied land is considered illegal under international law [File: Amir Cohen/Reuters]

Tel Aviv, October 14 (RHC)-- Israeli occupation authorities in Jerusalem have approved a plan to build housing units in an illegal settlement on the Palestinian neighbourhood of Khirbet Tabalya.

On Wednesday, the Israeli-controlled Jerusalem municipality's local planning committee approved the plan to construct "public buildings and roads" in the Jewish caravan settlement of "Giv'at Hamatos", according to Israeli media. It came a day after Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid met United States Vice

President Kamala Harris in Washington, DC.

According to Jerusalem map expert Khalil Toufakji, the area upon which the new infrastructure will be built was confiscated in the 1990s for Ethiopian settlers, and includes the caravans that were placed there to house them at the time.

“This is old-new. [Israel] is transforming the lands that were confiscated, about 900 dunams with the caravans on them, into long-term buildings,” Toufakji told Al Jazeera. He explained that part of the lands belonged to the German Lutheran Church and other parts were private Palestinian property, including for refugees, and pointed to previous sales of lands owned by the church for Jewish settlements north of Nazareth – in the “Bethlehem of the Galilee” – and Sarona, near Tel Aviv.

Plans since 2012 to build units in the settlement were previously met with strong opposition from Israeli allies Germany and the US, causing authorities to repeatedly postpone implementation.

But in February 2020, authorities announced that 6,500 housing units would be built for the settlement, supplanting previous plans for the area which included construction of 3,400 housing units and 1,100 hotel rooms. In November, they issued a tender for the construction of 1,257 units in the settlement.

The settlement lies on lands across the 1967 Green Line, seized from the Palestinian towns of Beit Safafa in the Jerusalem governate, and Beit Jala in the Bethlehem governate. The construction plan would cut off Beit Safafa from the surrounding Palestinian villages and from the rest of Jerusalem. It would also link together the nearby Israeli settlements of Jabal Abu Ghneim (also known as Har Homa) with Gilo, and the proposed Giv’at Yael settlement on the lands of Walajeh.

Fayrouz Sharqawi, of Grassroots Al-Quds (Jerusalem), told Al Jazeera the case of Khirbet Tabalya is part of the Israeli occupation’s “overall colonial planning policies in Jerusalem.” She said the aim is to “sever Palestinian communities and suffocate them, prevent their growth” to use as “a tool of displacement.”

She added that the growth of the settlement would mean “severance of all Palestinian links to Beit Safafa, isolating it entirely.”

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