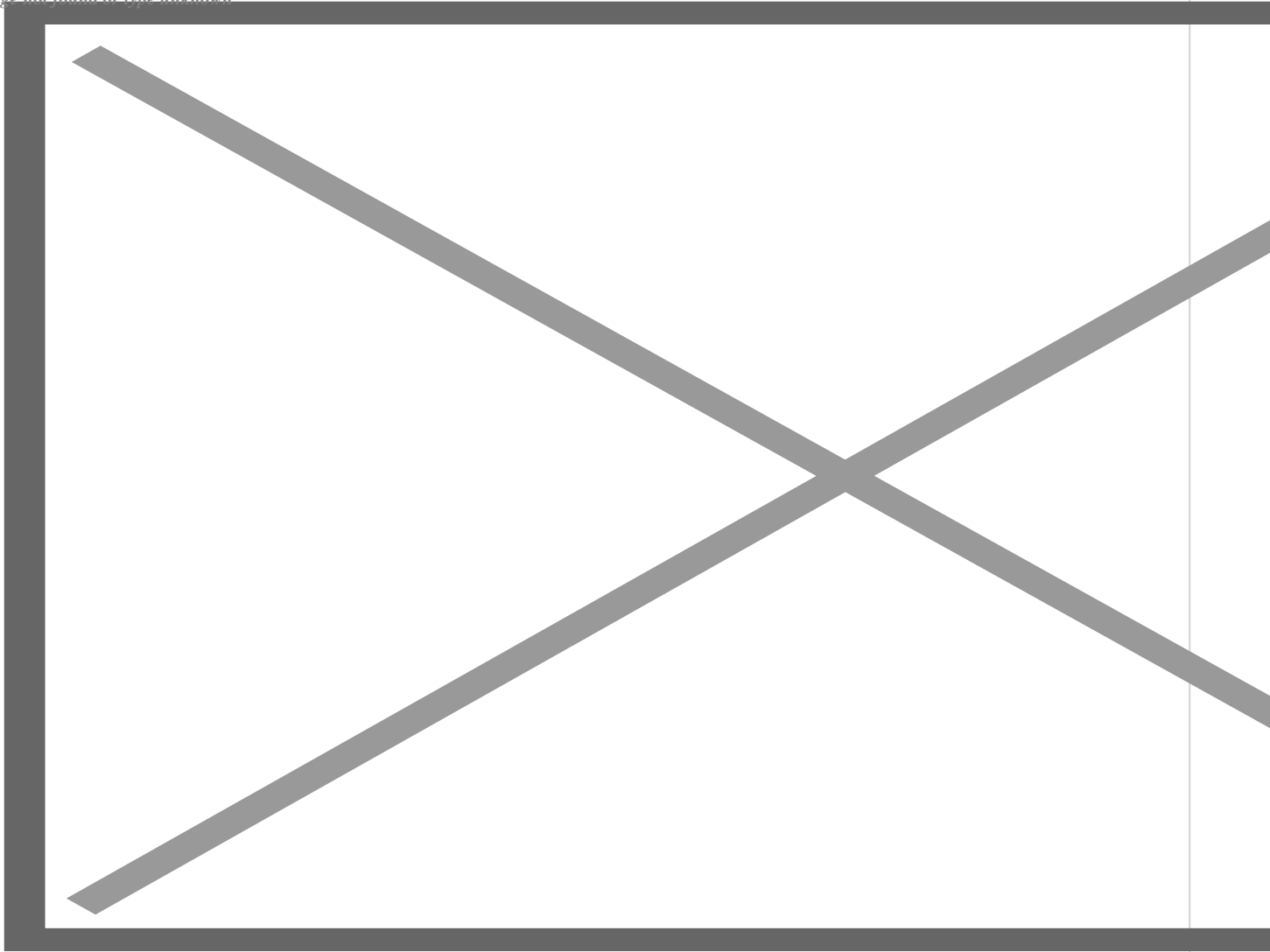


Israel legalizes nine settler outposts in occupied West Bank

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An aerial view shows the Jewish settlement of Maale Adumim in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law and have been condemned by the United Nations [File: Ilan Rosenberg/Reuters]

Tel Aviv, February 14 (RHC)-- Israel's far-right cabinet has approved the legalization of nine illegal settler outposts in the occupied West Bank, drawing condemnation from the Palestinian Authority (PA), which called the move an "open war" against its people.

More housing units are likely to be built in separate, existing illegal settlements, a statement from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said on Sunday. "The nine communities had existed for many years; some have existed for decades," the statement added. They were built without authorization from the Israeli government.

More than half a million Israelis live in more than 200 settlements built on Palestinian land considered illegal under international laws. Palestinians say the settlement expansion threatens the viability of the future Palestinian state as part of the two-state solution.

The Palestinian foreign ministry said in a statement on Sunday that the latest decision crossed "all red lines" and undermined the revival of "the peace process".

The United States, which provides billions of dollars in military aid to Israel, has yet to comment, but last month its ambassador said the country opposes the authorisation of Israeli outposts. Biden administration has aired views against settlements.

The United Nations has condemned illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories in multiple resolutions and votes.

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