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Aqaba, February 27 (RHC)-- Israeli and Palestinian officials have pledged to implement measures to de-escalate surging violence after talks in Jordan. In a joint statement at the end of the meeting in the Red Sea resort of Aqaba on Sunday, Israeli and Palestinian officials said that they would work closely to prevent “further violence” and that they “reaffirmed the necessity of committing to de-escalation on the

ground.”

Israel was committed to stop “discussing setting up any new settlement units for four months and stop approving any new settlements for six months,” a joint statement said. After “thorough and frank discussions,” the Palestinian and Israeli sides “reaffirmed the need to commit to de-escalation on the ground and to prevent further violence,” it said.

The joint statement came at the end of a meeting also attended by United States, Egyptian and Jordanian officials amid growing concerns over an escalation of violence in the run-up to the holy Muslim month of Ramadan that begins in late March.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority stressed “joint readiness and commitment to work immediately to stop unilateral measures” for three to six months, according to the statement.

Host nation Jordan, along with Egypt and the United States, considered “these understandings as major progress towards re-establishing and deepening relations between the two sides,” the statement said. The two sides also agreed to meet again next month in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt.

The Hamas group, which governs the besieged Gaza Strip, condemned the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority for taking part. An official from the group said the meeting was “worthless” and would not change anything.

The ruling Fatah movement of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had earlier defended the meeting. “The decision to take part in the Aqaba meeting despite the pain and massacres being endured by the Palestinian people comes from a desire to bring an end to the bloodshed,” it said on Twitter.

Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who also has responsibilities over Israeli settlements in the West Bank, quickly said he would not abide by any agreement on freezing settlement construction. “I have no idea what they spoke about or not in Jordan,” Smotrich wrote on Twitter. “But one thing I do know: there will not be a freeze on the building and development in settlements, not even for one day (it is under my authority).”

The talks were held on the same day two Israelis were shot and killed in the occupied West Bank in what the Israeli government called a “Palestinian terror attack”. The fatal shooting came days after Israeli forces launched their deadliest raid in the West Bank in nearly 20 years, which left 11 Palestinians dead in the northern city of Nablus.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's return to power at the head of one of the most right-wing coalitions in Israeli history has added to Arab concerns about escalation.

Israel on February 12th granted retroactive authorization to nine Jewish settler outposts in the occupied West Bank and announced the mass construction of new homes within established settlements. The United Nations Security Council issued a formal statement denouncing Israel's plan to expand settlements on occupied Palestinian territory – its first action of the kind against Israel in six years.

The occupied West Bank is home to about 2.9 million Palestinians plus an estimated 475,000 Israelis who live in state-approved settlements considered illegal under international law.

Israeli forces have killed 65 Palestinians, including 13 children, this year so far. They have also injured hundreds of others, making the first two months of 2023 the deadliest for Palestinians compared with the same period since 2000.

Eleven Israeli civilians, including three children, a police officer and one Ukrainian civilian have been killed over the same period, according to the AFP news agency.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967.

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