

# *European states decry Israeli bill allowing settlers' return to evacuated areas*

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London, March 17 (RHC)-- Britain and a dozen other EU member states condemn the Israeli parliament's approval of a bill that will enable settlers to return to areas of the West Bank evacuated in 2005 as part of the so-called Disengagement Law.

In a joint statement issued in London, the UK and the EU countries, including France, demanded that Israel halt the looming dispossession of several Palestinian families from their homes in East al-Quds. They declared their "strong opposition to Israel's settlement expansion policy" and sternly warned about the forced evacuation of Palestinian families from the Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah neighborhoods in East al-Quds.

“It is very worrying that Israeli authorities intend to continue demolishing Palestinian houses in the occupied West Bank and East al-Quds during the [Muslim holy] month of Ramadan,” the statement read.

According to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, the Israeli parliament, known as the Knesset, approved on Monday a bill that would repeal the clauses of the Disengagement Law that ban Israelis from living in the region where the four illegal settlements of Homesh, Ganim, Kadim and Sanur previously stood in the northern occupied West Bank.

The bill, sponsored by Likud Knesset member Yuli Edelstein and Israel’s so-called national missions minister Orit Stroom, passed by 40 votes in favor and 17 against. “There is no longer any justification to prevent Israelis from entering and staying in the evacuated territory in northern Samaria (West Bank), and therefore it is proposed to state that these sections [of the disengagement law] will no longer apply to the evacuated territory,” says the introductory text to the amendment.

Israel’s so-called national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir orders the regime’s forces to press ahead with the demolition of Palestinian homes even during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

In 2005, then-Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon enacted a law requiring unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank, and the removal of 25 illegal settlements in the two areas.

Twenty-one settlements in Gaza have already been removed and 8,000 settlers have been evacuated. In the occupied West Bank, four illegal settlements were evacuated but the structures in them were maintained, and the areas were labeled closed military zones.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian foreign ministry has condemned the Israeli parliament’s latest move, calling on the international community to pressure Israel to prevent the enactment of the bill. “Proceeding with steps to enact this legislation is a dangerous escalation in the conflict and a belittling of the efforts exerted to reduce tension and achieve calm,” it said in a statement.

The foreign ministry called on the international community and the Biden administration to exert real pressure on the current Israeli administration to stop the process. It warned that Israel’s continued impunity pushes it to escalate its illegal unilateral steps and measures, which can lead to an explosion in conflict.

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 al-Quds.

All Israeli settlements are illegal under international law. The United Nations Security Council has condemned Israel’s settlement activities in the occupied territories in several resolutions.

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