

Israel announces plan for 3,300 more illegal settler units amid Gaza genocide

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Tel Aviv, February 24 (RHC)-- The cabinet of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has announced plans to build more than 3,300 new settler units in the occupied West Bank amid the ongoing war on the besieged Gaza Strip.

The announcement was made by Israel's extremist finance minister Bezalel Smotrich, who said in a statement that the plan includes 2,350 new units in Ma'ale Adumim, 300 in Kedar and 694 in Efrat.

Smotrich said the plan was a response to a retaliatory Palestinian shooting attack on a checkpoint near the occupied West Bank on Thursday, during which an Israeli settler was killed and 11 others injured.

The statement said the construction plan enjoyed backing from Netanyahu as well as Israeli minister of military affairs Yoav Gallant and minister of strategic affairs Ron Dermer.

The Israeli ministers also called for increased curbs on Palestinians, including heavy restrictions on movement after the retaliatory attack in the area.

The Israeli regime has over the past decades advanced plans to build new illegal settlements while the US and its allies have historically done little to pressure Tel Aviv to halt or roll back the illegal settlement expansion.

Tel Aviv has stepped up settlement expansion since December 2022, when Netanyahu staged a comeback as prime minister at the head of a cabinet of hard-right and ultra-Orthodox parties.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East al-Quds.

The international community views the settlements – hundreds of which have been built across the West Bank since Tel Aviv's occupation of the territory in 1967 – as illegal under international law and the Geneva Conventions due to their construction on the occupied territories.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent state with East al-Quds as its capital.

The move is almost certain to stoke up fresh storm in Washington, which is already under massive domestic and international pressure over its untrammelled support for Israel in the genocidal war on the Gaza Strip.

Reacting tepidly to Smotrich's statement, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the construction of new Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank was a "disappointing" decision.

"It has been a longstanding policy of both Democratic and Republican administrations that new settlements are counterproductive to achieving enduring peace. They are also inconsistent with international law," Blinken said at a news conference late Friday.

"Our administration maintains firm opposition to settlement expansion," he added.

More than 29,000 Palestinians, most of them women and children, have lost their lives so far during Israel's brutal aggression, which began following Operation al-Aqsa Storm by Gaza-based resistance movements in October last year.

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