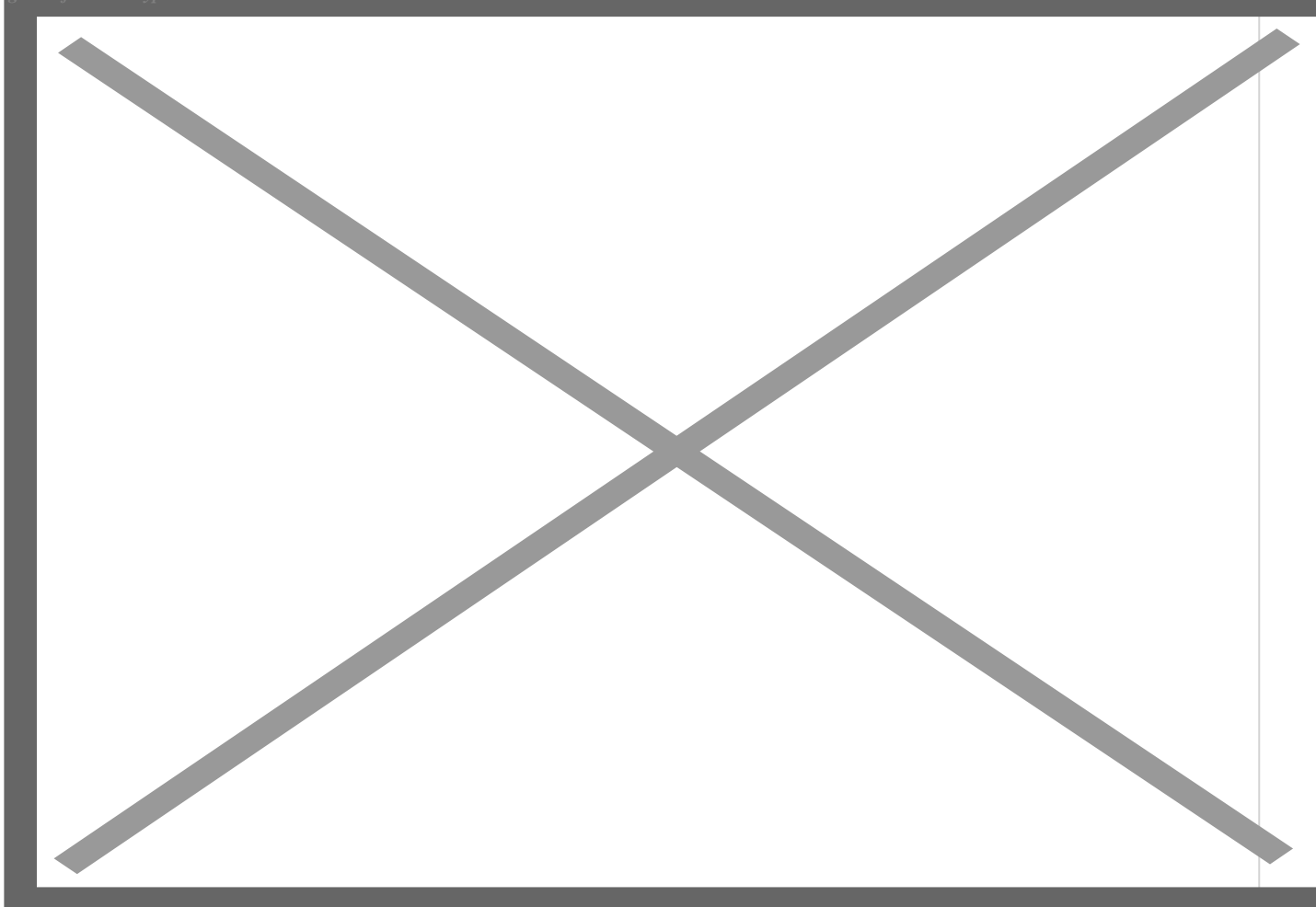


Report reveals Israel has made largest West Bank land seizure in over 30 years

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A villager points on April 16, 2024 towards a spot seized by the Israeli forces outside the Palestinian village of Jiftlik in the occupied West Bank, north of Jericho by the Jordan River. (Photo by HAZEM BADER / AFP)

Tel Aviv, July 4 (RHC)-- Israeli authorities have given the green-light to the largest West Bank land seizure in more than three decades as the rate of land grabs in the occupied Palestinian territory peaks, an Israeli anti-settlement watchdog says.

The planned seizure, approved by Israel's government late last month but only publicised on Wednesday, targets 12.7sq km (4.9sq miles) of land in the Jordan Valley, the Peace Now NGO said.

The move raises the total amount of West Bank land that Israel has declared its own this year to 23.7sq km (9.15 sq miles). That makes 2024 by far the peak year for Israeli land seizures, the watchdog said.

The Jordan Valley parcels noted are contiguous and located northeast of Ramallah, the city where the Palestinian Authority is headquartered. By declaring them state lands, the Israeli government has opened them up to being leased to Israelis and prohibited to private Palestinian ownership.

Israeli settlements in the West Bank, deemed illegal under international law, are often cited as the main barrier to any lasting peace agreement with Palestinians under a two-state solution. "Today, it is clear to everyone that this conflict cannot be resolved without a political settlement that establishes a Palestinian state alongside Israel," Peace Now said in a statement. "Still, the Israeli government chooses to actually make it difficult and distance us from the possibility of peace and stopping the bloodshed."

Far-right Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who oversees settlement planning and lives in a settlement himself, has promised to flood the West Bank with a million new settlers. Smotrich is a prominent leader among hardline nationalist political forces on which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government depends.

"Netanyahu and Smotrich are determined to fight against the entire world and against the interests of the people of Israel for the benefit of a handful of settlers who receive thousands of dunams as if there were no political conflict to resolve or war to end," Peace Now said. In Israel, one dunam is equivalent to 1,000 sq metres or 0.25 acres.

There are more than 100 settlements across the occupied West Bank, where more than 500,000 Jewish settlers with Israeli citizenship live. The three million Palestinians who live in the territory are subject to Israeli military rule and have endured near-daily military raids since the Gaza war broke out in October.

During these incursions, Israeli forces have wrecked Palestinian roads and homes, rounded up and detained 9,510 people and killed 553.

Tensions in the territory "have been rising and have now reached a boiling point", warned Al Jazeera's Nour Odeh, reporting from Ramallah.

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