

*Israel approves new illegal West Bank settlement amid deadly raids on Palestinians*

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Tel Aviv, August 14 (RHC)-- Israel has approved the construction of a new settlement on a UNESCO World Heritage Site near the occupied West Bank city of Bethlehem as the regime's forces continue to raid areas across the occupied Palestinian territories.

Israel's finance minister Bezalel Smotrich said Wednesday that his office had "completed its work and published a plan for the new Nahal Heletz settlement in Gush Etzion." He said in a message on X that the new approval was a response to actions by the Palestinian West Bank leadership and countries which

have recognized a Palestinian state.

In May, Spain, Ireland and Norway joined the majority of UN states that have recognized a Palestinian state.

Smotrich, himself a settler, said: "No anti-Israel or anti-Zionist decision will stop the development of the settlement. We will continue to fight against the dangerous idea of a Palestinian state. This is the mission of my life."

Peace Now, an Israeli anti-settlement group, denounced the new settlement plan, saying it is a "wholesale attack" on an area "renowned for its ancient terraces and sophisticated irrigation systems, evidence of thousands of years of human activity."

"These actions are not only fragmenting Palestinian space and depriving large communities of their natural and cultural heritage, they also pose an imminent threat to an area considered to be of the highest cultural value to humanity."

The Palestinian Authority has also reiterated that settlement construction and the demolition of Palestinian homes constituted ethnic cleansing.

Israel, according to a European Union report, advanced plans for 12,349 homes to be built in the West Bank last year. Most United Nations member states consider settlements built in the West Bank and other territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war to be illegal under international law.

The latest approval comes at a time of heightened tensions in the West Bank and east al-Quds over the regime's hostilities that have killed nearly 40,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip since October.

On Wednesday, Israeli forces killed five Palestinians in air strikes and a raid in the north of the occupied West Bank. The regimes forces and settlers have killed at least 625 Palestinians in the West Bank since October 7, according to Palestinian health ministry figures.

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