

# *Ultra-right wing Israeli minister Ben-Gvir says Palestinians must voluntarily leave Gaza*

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Israel's hawkish minister Itamar Ben Gvir hugs a supporter as he arrives at the site of a reported

## attack on an Israeli settlement in the occupied West Bank (AFP photo)

Tel Aviv, October 22 (RHC)-- Israel's far-right minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has said Palestinians must migrate from the Gaza Strip as the territory "belongs to us."

Speaking at a "Preparing to Resettle Gaza" rally of his extremist supporters and settlers on Monday, Ben-Gvir called on Palestinians to "voluntarily" leave the blockaded region.

"We will encourage the voluntary transfer of all Gazan citizens. We will offer them the opportunity to move to other countries because that land belongs to us," Ben-Gvir said. Ben-Gvir and hardline Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich have made similar calls in the past.

Ben-Gvir, who has a history of making outrageously inciting comments and provoking Palestinians, earlier said that the "war presents an opportunity to concentrate on encouraging the migration of the residents of Gaza." He added that Israel has partners around the world that could help absorb numbers of Palestinians from Gaza.

The extremist minister has also said that encouraging Palestinians to leave Gaza would allow Israelis residing around the Gaza Strip to return to their settlements. Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip were removed in 2005.

The hawkish minister has also refused to acknowledge the national identity of Gaza residents and has refrained from calling them Palestinians.

In an interview with Israeli news outlet Kikar HaShabbat in May, Ben-Gvir said Gaza should be under "full Israeli control" and populated with Jewish settlements, suggesting that he himself would move to the war-torn Palestinian enclave.

In the past, he has said that the "encouragement of voluntary emigration" of Palestinians from Gaza was the "last" and "most important step" in achieving Israel's total occupation.

"If the emigration happens, and hundreds of thousands leave, you'll be able to bring more and more and more people in," he added. "Will you be the first one to go and live there?" Ben Gvir was asked. "Yes, why not?" he replied.

Israel withdrew its military and settlers from Gaza in 2005 after a 38-year occupation. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that his regime would maintain control for an indefinite period.

There has been little clarity, however, about Israel's longer-term intentions, while countries including the United States, Israel's greatest benefactor, have said Gaza should be governed by Palestinians.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who is a staunch ally of Israel, recently said he is "looking at" sanctioning Israel's Smotrich, as well as Ben-Gvir. Starmer said a series of statements made by the two ministers were "abhorrent" and that the government is "looking at" sanctioning them.

Smotrich has said that "starving two million people in Gaza might be justified and moral." This is while Ben-Gvir has "called settlers who killed a 19-year-old in the West Bank heroes."

The remarks come as Netanyahu is examining a plan to seal off humanitarian aid to northern Gaza in an attempt to starve out hundreds of thousands of Palestinians unwilling or unable to leave their homes.

Under the proposed plan, civilians who remain in northern Gaza would be classified as combatants, allowing Israeli troops to kill them. They would be denied access to food, water, medicine, and fuel. The plan gave Palestinians a week to leave the northern third of the Gaza Strip, including Gaza City, before

declaring it a closed military zone.

The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has warned that the confirmation by Israeli extremist minister Itamar Ben-Gvir of his intention to build a Jewish synagogue inside al-Aqsa Mosque is a dangerous declaration.

The Israeli genocidal war in Gaza continues to kill more civilians and leave behind a trail of destruction across the besieged strip.

There are 2.3 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. More than 42,600 of those have been killed by Israeli attacks and about 2 million displaced since October last year when the regime forces launched their genocidal war against Palestinians.

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