

# *U.S. Says Israeli Settlement Projects Inflame Tensions*

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Washington, January 31 (RHC)-- The U.S. State Department has once again criticized Israel's latest plans to construct hundreds of new settlement projects in the occupied West Bank. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Friday that Washington is in close contact with Palestinian and Israeli officials over the issue.

The project will "inflame tensions, further isolate Israel internationally and will not help Israel's security," she said. Israel announced tenders for at least 450 settler units across the West Bank on Friday. Following the announcement, Palestine Liberation Organization official Wassel Abu Yusef denounced the move, saying the expansion of settlements amounted to a "war crime."

The settlement construction plans have also drawn an angry reaction from the European Union. The EU has described the activities as "an obstacle to peace" and called on Tel Aviv to reverse its decision.

Meanwhile, the UK condemned Israel's decision to publish new tenders for 450 settler units. "The UK's position on Israeli settlements is clear: they are illegal under international law," British Minister for the Middle East Tobias Ellwood said. "It is important to focus on steps that are conducive to peace."

Israeli settlements are considered illegal by the UN and most countries because the territories were captured by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967, and are hence subject to the Geneva Conventions, which forbid construction on occupied lands.

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