

# *German Chancellor Says Israel Settlement Expansion Counterproductive to Peace*

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Berlin, April 20 (RHC)-- German Chancellor Angela Merkel has strongly criticized Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories as "counterproductive" to the so-called two-state solution.

During a joint press conference with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Berlin on Tuesday, Merkel also expressed concerns over the stalemate in the Middle East negotiations.

Mahmoud Abbas, for his part, stressed that Israel's "housing development is the biggest problem for the attainment of freedom." The Palestinian president also met with German President Joachim Gauck and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier as part of his international tour to secure support for a UN vote to officially condemn the Israeli settlement policy.

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