

# *EU Leader Says Illegal Settlements Obstacle to Peace*

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Brussels, January 15 (RHC)-- European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton says new settlements in the occupied territories of Palestine are "illegal" and the main "obstacle" to peace in the region.

Ashton's remarks followed an announcement regarding Tel Aviv's plans to build 1,400 more illegal settlement units – 1,800 according to some reports -- in East al-Quds (Jerusalem) amid the so-called peace talks between Palestinian and Israeli officials.

"I was deeply concerned to hear the latest announcement by the Israeli authorities to advance settlement plans once more," Ashton said in a statement on Saturday. She added that the settlements are "illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make the two-state solution impossible." The EU chief also called on the Israeli regime to put an end to its settlement constructions.

The presence and continued expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestine has created a major obstacle for the efforts to establish peace in the Middle East.

More than half a million Israelis live in over 120 illegal settlements built since Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1967.

The United Nations and most countries regard the Israeli settlements as illegal because the territories were captured by Israel in a war in 1967 and are hence subject to the Geneva Conventions, which forbids construction on occupied lands.

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