

# *Palestine president calls for Middle East peace conference*

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United Nations, Feb 21 (RHC)-- Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has called for an international conference on a new and wider peace process in the Middle East to be convened by the middle of 2018. Addressing a rare address to the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday, Abbas presented a "peace plan" to revive the Israeli-Palestinian talks with new international mediation, but with less United States weight.

"To solve the Palestine question, it is essential to establish a multilateral international mechanism emanating from an international conference," Abbas told the 15-member council. He said the Israeli regime was the main factor behind the failure of peace efforts as it was "acting as a state above the law."

"It has transformed the occupation from a temporary situation as per international law into a situation of permanent settlement colonization," the Palestinian leader added.

Also briefing the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, Nickolay Mladenov, the UN special coordinator for the so-called Middle East peace process said the international community must continue supporting "substantial Israeli policy changes" on settlements and stressed that "these are not negotiations between equals." The so-called Israeli-Palestinian peace process has been deadlocked since April 2014.

About 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built illegally since the 1967 occupation of the Palestinian territories. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements is one of the major obstacles to the establishment of peace in the Middle East.

In recent months, Tel Aviv has stepped up its settlement construction activities in the occupied Palestinian lands in a blatant violation of international law and in defiance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334. European nations and the United Nations, among others, maintain their strong opposition to settlement building in the Palestinian territories.

Israel occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds during the Six-Day War in 1967. It later annexed East Jerusalem al-Quds in a move not recognized by the international community. Palestinians want the resolution of the conflict with Tel Aviv based on the so-called two-state solution along the pre-1967 boundaries. However, Israeli officials insist on maintaining the occupation of Palestinian territories and press ahead with their settlement activities.

U.S. President Donald Trump on December 6th defied global warnings and said Washington formally recognized Jerusalem as the “capital” of Israel and would begin the process of moving its embassy to the occupied city, breaking with decades of American policy. His decision infuriated the Palestinians, who declared that Washington could no longer play a role as lead mediator in the Middle East peace process.

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