

Israeli defense minister wants annexation of occupied West Bank



Tel Aviv, January 29 (RHC)-- Israeli Defense Minister Naftali Bennett has called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to annex over a third of the occupied West Bank shortly after U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled his so-called "Deal of the Century" plan on Middle East peace.

"Yesterday evening, history knocked on our door and granted us a one-time opportunity to apply Israel law on all of the settlements in Judea and Samaria and the Jordan Valley," Bennett stated. The right-wing defense chief called on Netanyahu to quickly annex 30 percent of the occupied West Bank just hours after the Israeli cabinet voted to delay the matter.

"It's an opportunity to set the Jordan Valley as Israel's western border, it's an opportunity to define what territory is part of our land and it's an opportunity to anchor our security for generations," Bennett continued.

The far-right minister added that he was opposed to Palestinian statehood and would not recognize this part of Trump's proposal. The remarks by Naftali Bennett, a coalition partner in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government, led Palestinians to say Trump's plan had given the "green light" for

Israel to formally annex its settlements in the West Bank that it has occupied since the 1967 Middle East War.

Trump's plan envisages a two-state solution with Israel and a future Palestinian state living alongside each other, but with strict conditions that Palestinians have baulked at. He proposed a four-year schedule for the creation of a Palestinian state, with Palestinians first having to agree to halt attacks by the Islamist militant group Hamas which controls the enclave of Gaza.

But the plan also gave U.S. recognition of Israel's West Bank settlements -- deemed illegal under international law -- Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley, and a redrawn, demilitarized Palestinian state that would meet Israel's security requirements.

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