

Netanyahu pledges to build 3,500 illegal homes in West Bank



Tel Aviv, February 27 (RHC)-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has announced his plans to authorize the construction of some 3,500 new illegal homes for Jewish settlers in one of the most sensitive areas of the occupied West Bank.

"I have given instructions to immediately publish for deposit the plan to build 3,500 housing units in E-1," Netanyahu said in a speech, describing the first phase of a planning process, adding that "this had been delayed for six or seven years."

The E1 plan involves building hundreds of illegal settlement units to link the nearby settlements of Kfar Adumim and Maale Adumim with East Jerusalem in the Israeli-controlled Area C of the West Bank. If fully implemented, Palestinians say the plan would effectively split the West Bank in half, as it is the only land corridor connecting the northern and southern West Bank.

Also, it would separate East Jerusalem from Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and force them to make even lengthier detours to travel from one place to another.

Building in E1 would sever the populated territorial contiguity of the West Bank and cripple the two-state solution if it isn't reversed. A spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said Netanyahu's announcement "crossed all red lines" and he called on the international community to act.

"Last time they tried to promote construction in E1 the world was shaken. This is a strategic area for the two-state solution and building a settlement in E1 means that Israel is officially choosing to risk perpetual conflict instead of resolving it," Israeli settlement watchdog Peace Now responded to the announcement in a statement.

Israel halted a plan to build settlements in the E1 region since 2012 because of objections from the United States, European allies and other world powers who considered the project a threat to any future peace deal with the Palestinians.

"This is a dangerous policy and we consider this an act of destroying the peace process," Abbas' spokesman Nabil Abu Rdainah said about Israeli settlement activities, which come days before the March 2 Israeli elections - the third electoral process in less than a year.

Israel has built some 140 settlements in the Occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem since the 1967 six-day war. These settlements are illegal under international law, breaching the Fourth Geneva Convention, among other international agreements and U.N. resolutions. However, under U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East peace proposal, unveiled on Jan. 28, the Jewish state would keep key swathes of the occupied territory where Palestinians hope to see their future, independent state.

Under the proposal dubbed "the deal of the century," Israel would be allowed to annex all Jewish settlements in the West Bank, as well as the strategic Jordan Valley. It would have the entire city of Jerusalem as its capital.

The Palestinians were offered limited self-rule in Gaza, small portions of the West Bank, a village in the outskirts of Jerusalem as a capital, and some desertic areas of Israel, in exchange for complying with a long list of conditions.

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