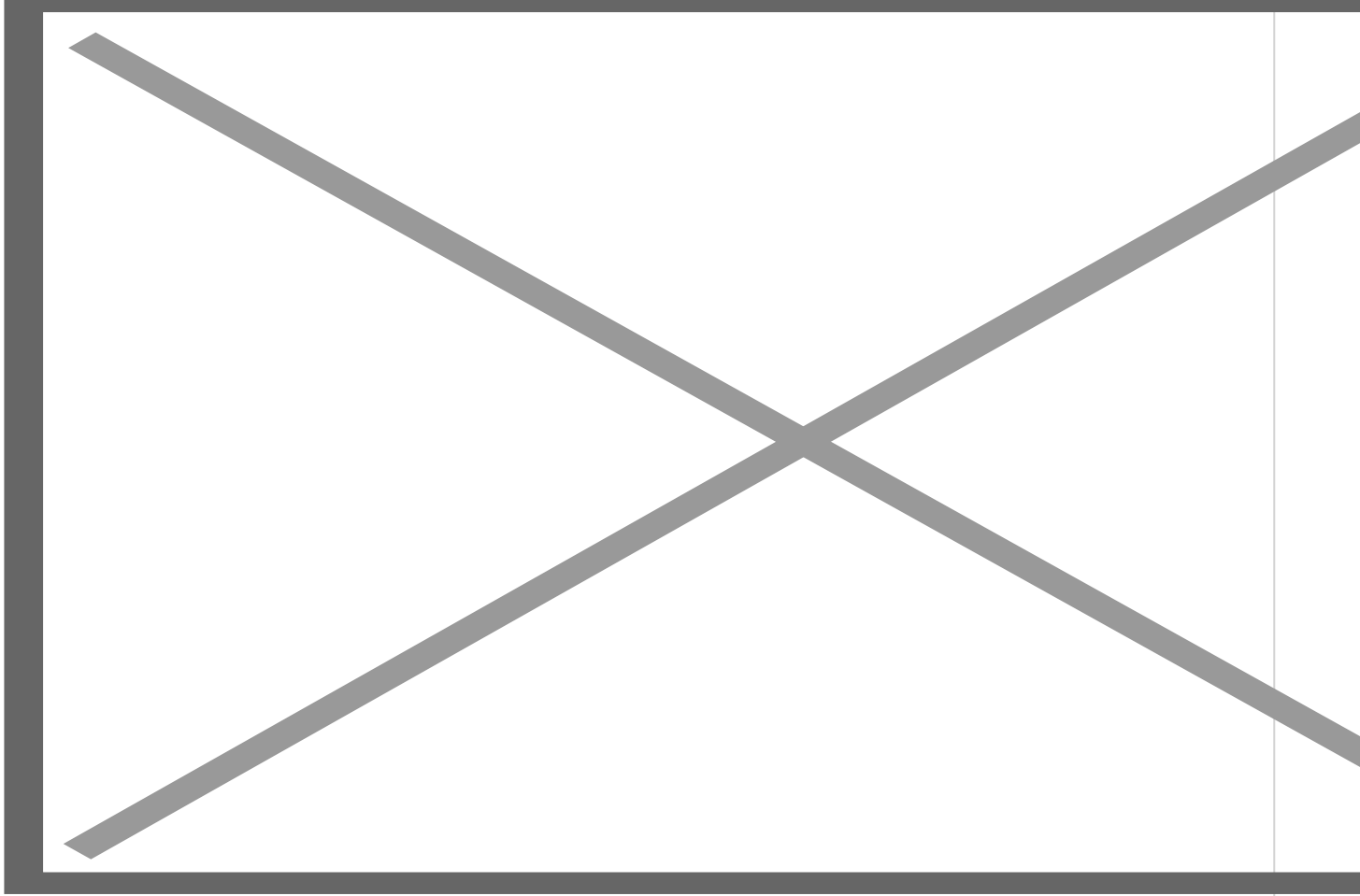


UK 'seriously concerned' by Israel's West Bank settlement expansion

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UK 'seriously concerned' by Israel's West Bank settlement expansion

London, January 19 (RHC)-- The British government has expressed serious concern about Israeli plans to expand settlements in the occupied West Bank, calling for an immediate halt to the illegal construction as the move could threaten future peace negotiations.

The anti-settlement monitoring group Peace Now announced on Sunday that Israeli authorities advanced plans for the construction of 780 new illegal settler units in the occupied West Bank.

The announcement came a week after Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered plans for the construction of new homes in the area.

"The UK is seriously concerned by... Israel's decision to approve the construction of 780 new settlement units across the Occupied Palestinian Territories," a Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office spokesperson said.

The inclusion of areas "deep within the West Bank" and within the construction plans "could threaten future peace negotiations," the spokesperson added. "Settlements are illegal under international law and risk undermining the physical viability of the two-state solution. We call for the construction of these in East Jerusalem [al-Quds] and elsewhere in the West Bank to cease immediately," the spokesperson said.

The UK and much of the international community have censured ongoing construction of illegal settlements in areas that belong to Palestinians. The European Union urged Israel in a statement on Monday to halt its settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank.

European Commission's spokesperson on foreign affairs said in the statement that Israel's latest decision to advance plans for the construction of new settlement was "contrary to international law and further undermines the prospects of a viable two-state solution."

The European Union urges Israel to halt its settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank. Egypt slams Israel's construction plans.

Also on Monday, Ahmed Hafez, Egypt's Foreign Ministry spokesman, condemned the Tel Aviv regime's decision to build 780 new settlement units in the occupied West Bank and said the measure undermines the possibility of achieving the two-state solution. Hafez also underlined that such decisions challenge the current efforts aimed at advancing the peace process and resuming the negotiations between Palestine and Israel.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds. All Israeli settlements are illegal under international law as they are built on occupied land.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of their future independent state with East Jerusalem al-Quds as its capital.

After U.S. President Donald Trump took office in December 2016, Israel stepped up its settlement expansion in defiance of Resolution 2334, which pronounces settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds "a flagrant violation under international law."

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