

# *Israeli ministers join gathering calling for resettlement of Gaza*

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Tel Aviv, January 29 (RHC)-- Several members of the Israeli government joined a far-right conference calling for the resettlement of the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank.

The conference, organized by the right-wing Nahala organisation on Sunday night and dubbed "Settlement Brings Security and Victory," called for new Jewish settlements to be built in the Palestinian territories. The call of the politicians and activists gathering in occupied East Jerusalem came amid international pressure on Israel to confirm it would respect Palestinian statehood after its war on Gaza ends.

Israel withdrew its military and settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005 after a 38-year occupation. Debate is ongoing over who will run the enclave following the end of the war that started after the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel does not intend to maintain a permanent presence again but insists that Israel will maintain security control for an indefinite period.

Israel's international partners, led by the United States, have said a two-state solution is the only way that would guarantee security for both sides. Netanyahu, facing significant political pressure, is resisting, although he has not presented a clear plan of what his government envisages for the future.

Israel's Channel 12 reported that 12 ministers from Netanyahu's Likud party attended the conference. His far-right coalition partners, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, reiterated calls for Palestinians to be removed from Gaza. Smotrich said many of the children who were evacuated had returned as soldiers to fight in a war with Hamas. He said he stood against the government's decision to evacuate Jewish settlements from Gaza in the past.

"We knew what that would bring and we tried to prevent it," Smotrich said in a speech. "Without settlements, there is no security." The crowd roared with enthusiastic chants to rebuild the settlements.

Ben-Gvir said he had protested against the evacuation of Jewish settlements from Gaza and warned it would bring "rockets upon Sderot" and "rockets upon Ashkelon" in southern Israel.

"We yelled and we warned," Ben-Gvir said. "If [we] don't want another October 7, we need to return home and control the land." "There is no way to win that war without the rebuild[ing] of Gush Katif and the Gaza Strip. It should be flourished with Jewish villages and Jewish cities," Moshe Feiglin, a former member of Knesset, said at the conference. "That's the only way to win this bloody war. And Israel cannot afford not to win that war," he added.

Some Israeli politicians condemned the meeting, and the participation of government ministers. Gadi Eisenkot, a former army chief of staff and a current member of the Knesset and Netanyahu's war cabinet, said that the meeting would "sharpen divisions over that which brings us together" at a time when Israeli soldiers are "fighting shoulder to shoulder in a war with unparalleled justification."

Education Minister Yoav Kisch told Israeli Army Radio that the timing of the conference was off. "It's not right to get into this conversation now," he said. "We need to focus the discourse on unity for our troops."

The Jewish settlements that have spread throughout the occupied West Bank are classified as illegal by international law and humanitarian groups. They are also often the cause of clashes between armed settlers and Palestinians. Human rights groups and many governments frequently condemn armed settler violence targeting Palestinians.

Israel's expansionist settlement policy also hinders the envisaged future of a two-state solution.

"In this conference, 12 Israeli ministers participated, including members of Netanyahu's Likud party, additionally, 15 members of the Israeli Knesset participated, so it's not a joke," Mariam Barghouti, Palestinian-American activist and researcher, told Al Jazeera in an interview.

"These are the people who are making policy in Israel, and these are the people who were calling for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, complete ethnic cleansing of the people of Gaza."

The Palestinian Authority (PA) condemned the conference, saying it reflects the leanings of the Israeli right to destabilise the region. "The colonial meeting in Jerusalem poses a blatant challenge to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision, accompanied by public incitement to forcibly displace Palestinians," the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriate said in a statement, referring to

last week's ICJ verdict that called on Israel to prevent "genocide" in Gaza.

US news website Axios, quoting unnamed informed sources, reported on Monday that senior national security officials from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and the PA secretly met in Riyadh to discuss post-war Gaza.

The meeting apparently called on the PA to revitalise its political leadership in Gaza, which is currently run by Hamas. The gathering, on which Israel and the U.S. were reportedly briefed, illustrates the growing support of Arab states for a solution centred on the relatively moderate PA taking control following a post-war transition period.

Saudi Arabia's national security adviser said at the meeting that the kingdom is still interested in moving forward with normalisation with Israel in return for steps that would create a path towards a Palestinian state, even if such a state is not established immediately.

Israel's war on Gaza has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, destroyed vast swaths of the enclave, and displaced nearly 85 percent of the territory's people.

The October 7th Hamas attack in southern Israel killed about 1,140 people and fighters took about 250 captives, according to Israel. About 100 of them were returned in a deal with Hamas last November in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

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