UN experts say Israeli settlement expansion ‘tramples’ on human rights law

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UN Press Release

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UN human rights experts\* today sharply condemned the recent announcement by the Israeli Government that it is advancing plans to build thousands of new housing units in its West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements.

“The United Nations has repeatedly stated that the Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory are a ‘flagrant violation under international law’, and it has demanded that Israel cease its settlement expansion and remove its settlements,” said the experts. The illegality of the Israeli settlements is one of the most widely-accepted issues in modern international law.

“As well, the Israeli settlements are a presumptive war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and should be treated as such by the international community.”

In East Jerusalem, various bodies within the Israeli Government have approved plans in recent weeks for more than 1,700 new housing units in the East Jerusalem settlements of Givat Hamatos and Pisgat Zeev. Plans are also being advanced for an estimated 9,000 settler housing units in Atarot, as well as approximately 3,400 settler homes in the E1 area just east of Jerusalem.
In the West Bank, plans for the construction of approximately 3,000 housing units in a number of settlements are also being advanced. As well, recent reports indicate that the Israeli Government is planning to retroactively legalize several settlement outposts.

“The very raison d’être of the Israeli settlements in occupied territory – the creation of demographic facts on the ground to solidify a permanent presence, a consolidation of alien political control and an unlawful claim of sovereignty – tramples upon the fundamental precepts of humanitarian and human rights law,” the experts said.

They said there are now close to 700,000 Israeli settlers living in illegal settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. “The Israeli settlements are the engine of the occupation,” the experts said. “They are responsible for a wide range of human rights violations against the Palestinians, including land confiscation, resource alienation, severe restrictions on freedom of movement, mounting settler violence, and racial and ethnic discrimination.

“Most seriously, the purpose of settler implantation – rupturing the relationship between a native people and its territory – is the denial of the right to self-determination, which is at the very core of modern human rights law.”

The experts welcomed the diplomatic criticism regarding the Israeli plans for settlement expansion issued by leading actors in the international community in recent weeks, including by the United States and the European Union.

“However, criticism without consequences means little in these circumstances,” they said. “Israel has paid a miniscule cost over the past five decades for building its 300 settlements and defying international law.”

The experts called upon the international community to support the current investigation into the Israeli settlements by the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court. They also called upon UN member states to ensure that corporations and institutions under their respective jurisdiction have no involvement in aiding, assisting or investing in the settlements.

“An occupying power that initiates and expands civilian settlements in defiance of international law and the Rome Statute cannot be serious about peace,” the experts said. “Equally, an international community that does not impose accountability measures on a defiant occupying power contrary to international law cannot be serious about its own laws.”
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*\*The experts:****Michael Lynk,***[*Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967*](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/CountriesMandates/PS/Pages/SMichaelLynk.aspx)***.* *Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal****(United States of America),*[*UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing*](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx).