

## **Settlement Expansion Continues; Ask President Bush to Intervene**

August 19, 2004

Recent reports show that the Sharon Government is quietly increasing efforts to enlarge existing settlements, as well as undertaking plans to establish new settlements and to increase the amount of lands available for future settlement construction and expansion. It is going about these matters in a secretive manner, in order to avoid international criticism. These actions violate Israel's Road Map commitment to freeze "all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements)."

Settlements undermine Israel's security, waste its financial resources, and endanger its future as a Jewish and democratic state. Israel should avoid expanding settlements for these reasons and to honor its commitments to the United States.

Continued settlement expansion also undermines American interests, including America's credibility across the globe, the emergence of an empowered and moderate Palestinian leadership, and the prospects for a return to a peace process.

Recent reports provide four examples of large-scale settlement expansion:

- Two months ago Prime Minister Sharon and Defense Minister Mofaz secretly signed the construction order for 600 new residential units in the settlement of Maale Adumim. Former Housing Minister Effi Eitam confirmed the details of the plan for Maale Adumim, and added that in the wake of pressure from the Prime Minister's Bureau, the ministry did not publish a public tender about these units in order not to "draw fire."
- Agriculture Minister Yisrael Katz has issued instructions to have 72,000 olive trees planted in huge areas of the West Bank near settlements for the settlers' exclusive use. "This is seizing lands and preventing them from being turned over to Palestinians. That is how we will strengthen our hold on Judea and Samaria," said Katz. The Agriculture Ministry plan was drafted months ago, but kept under wraps in order to prevent it from being torpedoed.
- An Israeli construction company is planning to build a new settlement in the West Bank. This new settlement of 50 private houses would abut the Israeli community of Nirit, which borders the Green Line on its western side. These houses would be built on the West Bank side of the Green Line.
- A group of immigrants from the former Soviet Union is planning to establish a new, Russians-only settlement in the Jordan Valley, along with an industrial center, a nursing home, technological incubators, and other resources for immigrant scientists who have not found their place in Israel. The World Zionist Organization's Settlement Division and the Jordan Valley Regional Council (a settlement body) are reportedly enthusiastic about the idea and prepared to allocate land for its realization.

The Bush Administration has already allowed previous initiatives - like the Mitchell Committee recommendations, the Tenet cease-fire plan, and the Zinni missions - to wither on the vine for lack of American commitment. The disengagement plan and the Road Map may face a similar fate if the

Administration allows Sharon to continue establishing facts on the ground. If the Bush Administration cannot deal with this clear cut issue in a forthright manner, then there is little hope that this Administration will be able to play a meaningful role in efforts to reach a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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PLEASE CONTACT PRESIDENT BUSH. Demand that he be firm in insisting that Israel live up to its commitments to freeze settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

18 Aug, 2004  
Dear Mr. President,

I urge you take immediate action - including personal intervention - to hold Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon accountable for Israel's commitments to stop the expansion of settlements and stop the establishment of new ones.

Prime Minister Sharon has explicitly committed to you to refrain from establishing new settlements, and to limit settlement growth to within the existing "construction lines" of settlements. Israel has also committed itself to the Road Map which calls on Israel to freeze "all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements)."

Recent news reports indicate that Israel is quietly working to enlarge existing settlements, plan new settlements, and increase the land reserve for future settlement construction and expansion. These reports indicate that Prime Minister Sharon is not living up to his commitments.

Settlements undermine Israel security, waste its financial resources, and endanger its future as a Jewish and democratic state. Israel should avoid expanding settlements for these reasons and because it has committed to the United States that it would do so. Continued settlement expansion also undermines American interests, including America's credibility across the globe, efforts to strengthen Palestinian moderates, and the prospects for a return to a peace process.

The seriousness of your Administration's commitment to the disengagement plan and the Road Map can be called into question if you accept such blatant violations of Israel's obligations. Your Administration correctly insists on the Palestinian Authority's fulfillment of its commitments to fight terrorism and to institute credible political, security, and economic reforms. You should do no less with Israeli obligations.

Sincerely,

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