

Despite Veiled Threats, Israel Refuses to Back Down on Housing

Israel is standing firm on its plans to go forward with plans to close the gap between Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Monday.

"We continue to insist on our vital interests, even under international pressure. There will be no change in the decision that has been made," a source from Netanyahu's office said.

One day after the UN voted to grant nonmember observer state status to the Palestinian Authority, Israel's government approved 3,000 new housing units in various locations—including in a disputed three-mile-long area between Jerusalem and the suburb of Ma'ale Adumim known as E1.

"The Palestinians' unilateral initiative at the U.N. was a blatant violation of agreements which were guaranteed by the international community," the PMO source added. "If the Palestinians continue with their unilateral measures, we will act accordingly."

Plans for housing in "E1" have long been on hold due to diplomatic pressure from Washington. Building on the site would close the gap between the capital and its eastern suburb but would enrage the Palestinian Authority, which contends the move kills any hope of creating a contiguous PA state by bisecting the territory from north to south. It would also sever the PA-controlled areas from Jerusalem, thereby increasing security and jurisdiction over who enters the Israeli capital and who does not.

Governments of Russia, Britain and France, as well as Denmark,

Sweden and Australia all summoned Israeli ambassadors to express “deep concern” and call for reversal of the construction plans. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned that “settlements are illegal under international law and should the E1 settlement be constructed, it would represent an almost fatal blow to remaining chances of securing a two-state solution.”

But Ban’s reference to “settlements” includes veteran Jerusalem neighborhoods such as Ramat Eshkol and Gilo, which have existed for more than 40 years. The city of Ma’ale Adumim is home to more than 30,000 people. The population of Efrat, another Jerusalem suburb, is nearly that large. Both are also called “settlements” by the UN, as are numerous other similar towns and cities throughout Judea and Samaria.