

U.S. Drops Demand for Settlement Freeze

The Obama administration has dropped demands for a Jewish construction freeze in eastern Jerusalem, according to a report filed by Ha'aretz on Thursday. The news comes as a result of a meeting held this week in London between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. special Mideast envoy George Mitchell.

While rejecting a total freeze in settlements and stressing the need to guarantee "normal life" for Jewish residents of Judea and Samaria, Netanyahu proposed a nine month halt to settlement construction in the West Bank. Besides Jerusalem, the agreement would also exclude about 2,500 Jewish homes in disputed territories already under construction.

Netanyahu is reportedly seeking an 'exit strategy' in the form of a guarantee from the U.S. not to protest a continuation of new housing starts if the Palestinian Authority and Arab states do not reciprocate the move.

Mahmoud Abbas demanded a total freeze in settlement activity, including in Jerusalem, before resuming peace negotiations with Israel. Abbas is reportedly now willing to meet informally with Netanyahu on the sidelines at next month's United Nations General Assembly.

[International Christian Embassy Jerusalem;]