



Settlements: obstacles to peace

Facts and figures

Settlements:

Although settlements are illegal according to international law, the construction process has continued at an accelerated rate. In the period between 2014-2016 the number of settlement units built in settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem was 9,883 according to the Arab Studies Society's Mapping Department. Moreover, the number of settlement units whose structural plans were submitted for objection was 2383 units. In addition, plans for 568 housing units have been approved while tenders have been announced for 2,816 units.

There are also unrecognized settlements, which the media calls "settlement outposts". It is impossible to give an accurate number for these outposts but estimates indicate that by the end of 2016, there were 116 settlement outposts. Usually, these settlements are very small in size with an ever-changing population. While they are illegal even by Israeli law, the Israeli government continues to fund them. No settlement outposts were evacuated in the aforementioned period except for two: Halmish and Amona, both east of Ramallah.

Settlers:

The number of settlers in the occupied West Bank, including Jerusalem is constantly rising. At the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, this number was about 651,000 settlers in 185 settlements and 220 random settlements, comprising around 21% of the overall residents of the West Bank.

Meanwhile, an increase in the number of West Bank settlers including in east Jerusalem was recorded at a rate of 55% since 2009, that is, in the seven years of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's term in office and with the continued negative net migration from Jerusalem, which reached 6,740 settlers in 2014.

Furthermore, a 2016 report released by former Israeli Knesset member and one of the founders of the extremist Gush Emunim organization, Yacov Katz who lives in the Bet El settlement near Ramallah, said the percentage of settlers in the West Bank had risen by 4.4% in 2014-2015.

A report by the Israeli human rights center B'Tselem indicated that the number of West Bank settlers at the end of 2015 was estimated at nearly 588,000.



According to the report, this statistic is comprised of two parts: First, according to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, at the end of 2015 there were 382,916 citizens living in West Bank settlements excluding east Jerusalem. Second, according to the Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies, at the end of 2014 the number of settlers living in Jewish settlements in east Jerusalem reached 205,220 people.

east Jerusalem:

east Jerusalem is considered one of the most contentious issues in the peace process. According to international law, east Jerusalem is occupied land, which means Israel has no right to militarily control it. It also means any of its measures in this area are in violation of the Fourth Geneva Conventions, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (PASSIA). Israel has been repeatedly called on to abide by international law, but to no avail. The US-brokered Roadmap to Peace of 2003 stipulated that Israel must halt all construction expansion in settlements. The Middle east Quartet Committee reiterated the importance of this call in 2009 when it condemned the plans underway to expand settlements in east Jerusalem. The Quartet Committee stressed the need for Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including ‘natural growth’ and to dismantle settlement outposts established since March, 2001. It also called on Israel to “refrain from the demolition of homes and expulsions in east Jerusalem” [The Guardian, Friday March 19, 2010].

In spite of this, Israel continued with its strategy to try and expel Palestinians while encouraging the growth of Jewish settlements in the area. Since Israel’s occupation of the eastern sector of the city in 1967, around 220,000 Jewish settlers have moved to east Jerusalem. In 2010, Israel announced plans to build 1,600 new homes in the area, raising the number of proposed homes to be constructed in east Jerusalem to 8,000, according to a Peace Now report. In the period between 2010-2014, plans were announced for the construction of 9,883 new settlement units. [Arab Studies Society Mapping Department)

In May, 2010, construction began on 14 housing units in Ras Al Amoud, a Palestinian neighborhood of Jerusalem comprised of 14,000 Palestinian residents. [Haaretz, May 9, 2010]. In the words of Arie King of the Israel Land Fund: “If you look at the years 2009 and 2010, you will see that the current trend is towards tremendous expansion.” King, whose organization buys land for Jews in east Jerusalem and other areas says their goal is to establish so-called “Jewish continuity” between Jerusalem and settlements in the West Bank in a way that makes their separation difficult. [AP, May 20,2010]. According to IPS [Inter Press Service], “Israeli Interior Minister Eli Shai announced that Israel would not halt construction in east Jerusalem --that part



of the city the Palestinians want as the capital of their future Palestinian state.” [IPS, May 14, 2010].

Israel’s announcement to expand settlements in east Jerusalem was made during a visit by then-US Vice President Joe Biden in March, 2010, who made the following statement:

“The decision by the Israeli government to advance planning for new housing units in east Jerusalem undermines that very trust, the trust that we need right now in order to begin ... profitable negotiations.” He continued that it also was contradictory to the “constructive discussions” he had with Israel on the matter.

In the period between 2010-2014, 7,500 housing units were planned, either for new settlements or to expand existing ones, with 4,446 of these units approved for construction [Khalil Tufakji, Arab Studies Society Maps Department].

Meanwhile, B’Tselem indicated that by the end of 2015, a total of 125 settlements in the West Bank (excluding east Jerusalem and the Jewish neighborhoods in Hebron), had been recognized by the Israeli government.

In the areas of Jerusalem annexed by Israel in 1967, 15 settlements were established. These are also considered settlements according to international law and therefore illegal. What’s more, settlement enclaves were established in the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods of east Jerusalem with the assistance of the Israeli government and the Jerusalem municipality.

According to estimates from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the natural growth of the settler population in 2015 excluding east Jerusalem was almost two and a half times more than the annual growth of the entire Israeli population, or 4.1% to 1.2%. Approximately 25% of this increase is due to the migration of Israelis from inside Israel and Jewish newcomers who settle in these settlements.

By the end of 2014, 849,000 people were living inside Jerusalem’s borders: 533,900 Jews and others (63%) and 325,900 Palestinians (37%). In addition, 521,890 people, or approximately 61% of Jerusalem’s population live in areas unilaterally annexed by Israel in 1967: 40% Jews and others and 60% Palestinians, given that the Palestinian population growth is higher (2.7% in 2014) than the growth rate of the Jewish population (2.2% in 2014). [B’Tselem]

At the beginning of 2014, the West Bank saw the start of construction for 1,800 new housing units and tenders for 1,143 of them, including 583 in east Jerusalem. Moreover, the Israeli higher planning committee approved plans for 348 new housing units.