



### [U.N. Middle East Envoy Criticizes Israel's Plans to Enlarge an Illegal Settlement in Occupied East Jerusalem](#)

The United Nations' envoy to the Middle East peace process has criticized Israel over plans to expand upon illegal settlements in occupied East Jerusalem. Israel's Land Authority announced it had opened tenders for over 1,200 new structures in the settlement of Givat Hamatos, in a move that would significantly harm the future prospects for a legitimate two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians. Under the Trump administration, the United States has reversed its decades-old position that these settlements are illegal, and Israel has been keen to advance policies that violate international law while he is still in office since President-elect Joe Biden has frequently criticized Israeli settlements. Peace Now, an Israeli social justice and anti-settlement group, has highlighted that the timing of the process is deliberately scheduled to conclude just days before Biden's upcoming inauguration. Furthermore, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is set to break with longstanding American policy and visit a settlement in the occupied West Bank this week, a sharp departure from predecessors who often spoke out against their construction. This is a further example of the Trump administration flouting international law and established American policy in an effort to legitimize illegal actions by the Israeli government.

Nickolay Mladenov, the U.N. envoy to the Middle East peace process, criticized Israel's plans to expand the settlement as "significantly damaging prospects for a future contiguous Palestinian state...based on the 1967 lines." Mladenov called on Israel's authorities to reverse their course, and also appealed to the international community to stand in steadfast opposition to Israel's brazen attempts to undermine the future prospects for a two-state solution. Mladenov explicitly stated that Israel's actions were in violation of international law, and the expansion of settlements should be immediately halted. The settlement expansion, should it go through, would consolidate a ring of settlements between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, which would seriously dampen the prospects for a two-state solution in the future. In response to Mladenov and others, a group of European diplomats who were visiting the site of the planned illegal settlement expansion to express their opposition were heckled by some right-wing Israeli protesters earlier this week. The demonstrators chanted so loudly that members of the delegation were ultimately unable to deliver their public remarks and were forced to relocate to another part of the city.

Since taking office, the Trump administration has emboldened Israel to carry out policies it had previously feared the repercussions for. The expansion of illegal settlements is a primary example of this, as longstanding American policy refused to recognize or condone them. The Trump administration has broken with this policy, and experts have hypothesized that Israel is proceeding with actions such as settlement expansion before the Biden administration takes office. President-elect Biden, while being outwardly supportive of Israel, has criticized the government on multiple occasions and has a contentious relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that dates back to controversies during the Obama administration.

In a further attempt to legitimize Israel's settlements, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is due to travel to the Psagot winery, which is located on land stolen from Palestinians. It will be the first time an American diplomat travels to an Israeli settlement, and observers have warned that Pompeo runs the risk of legitimizing Israel's illegal actions. Israeli media has also reported that Pompeo could travel to the Golan Heights, an area seized from Syria during the 1967 war which is still under Israeli occupation. These are just the latest instances in a long line of the Trump administration rolling back longstanding American policy toward Israel that denigrates the Middle East peace process as a whole.