



[U.S. House Speaker Elicits Condemnation for Calling the Illegally Occupied West Bank an Integral Part of Israel](#)

United States House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) recently led a Republican delegation to the occupied West Bank, with the trip including a visit to an illegal Israeli settlement there, making him the highest-ranking U.S. official ever to do so. Johnson drew criticism for the move, as well as his remarks that the territory was “the front line of the state of Israel and must remain an integral part of it.” Observers noted that the trip represented a blatant violation of international law, while also lamenting that the comments are a provocative incitement that encourage further illegal Israeli land seizures and settler violence against Palestinians. The Israeli government has repeatedly approved the construction and expansion of settlements despite numerous articles of international law prohibiting them. This has flagrantly been done in an attempt to create circumstances on the ground that obstruct the prospect of Palestinian statehood, especially as an increasing number of countries express their intention to formally recognize a Palestinian state.

The views conveyed by Johnson run contrary to the U.S. State Department’s official position that Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are inconsistent with international law and an obstacle to peace. The United States first adopted this stance in the late 1970s, and it stood until then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reversed it during the first Trump administration. However, Biden-era Secretary of State Antony Blinken restored the longstanding State Department position back in 2024. Incumbent Marco Rubio has signaled support for reverting to the first Trump administration’s position, while some sanctions have also been lifted that were previously imposed on extremist settlers – including one who murdered a Palestinian activist last week. All of this is troubling given that the international community overwhelmingly deems Israeli settlements to be illegal and a major barrier to peace, as human rights groups have documented the significant uptick in settler violence as well. Around a year ago, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the world’s top court, reaffirmed that Israeli settlements are illegal under international law. It is estimated that approximately 750,000 Israelis currently reside in more than 250 illegal settler colonies in the occupied West Bank.

With the trip, Johnson was not only condemned for becoming the first House Speaker and highest-ranking U.S. official to visit an illegal Israeli settlement, as the nature of his rhetoric and actions while there garnered denunciation as well. He, along with over a dozen other members of Congress, participated in a tree-planting event in the illegal settlement of Ariel. During the visit, Johnson also repeatedly used the Israeli term for the occupied West Bank, proclaiming that “Judea and Samaria was the rightful property of the Jewish people.” It is precisely because of overt displays of support like this for blatant Israeli violations of international law that authorities feel they can act with impunity without fear of being held accountable.

Rather than relay concern with the continued unlawful occupation and settlement expansion that the world collectively opposes, actions like those of the U.S. House Speaker warrant criticism as they instead normalize and even embolden further violations. Additionally, it undermines peace efforts and serves as a direct rebuke to the recent diplomatic measures that have been taken as a result of growing outrage over Israel’s behavior in both Gaza and the West Bank. In fact, Johnson seemed to even reference this explicitly when he stated that “Even if the world thinks otherwise, we stand with you.” At a critical juncture in time when an array of voices and entities around the world are expressing justifiable horror at the Israeli government’s actions, those in positions of power

like Johnson should seek to understand why this has become so commonplace as opposed to perpetuating injustice.