



**Six-Month Report on Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem,
(Reporting period January - June 2017)**

Summary

In the first half of 2017, a total of almost 8,000 settlement units in the West Bank including East Jerusalem were advanced in different stages in the planning and implementation process. Almost 5,000 housing units were promoted through plans and close to 3,000 housing units were advanced through tenders. This development will over several years enable potentially more than 30,000¹ Israeli settlers to move to the Occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The expansion of settlements occurred through a variety of methods, including the approval of a new settlement, the construction of housing units and public structures, the retroactive legalization of existing outposts and the declaration of Palestinian territory as Israeli “state land”.

There are currently approximately 208,000 Israelis living in East Jerusalem while the settler population in area C in the occupied West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem is some 399,000. This brings the settler population to approximately 600,000 Israeli settlers in 142 locations in the West Bank (130) including East Jerusalem (12)². According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics 4.6 % of the total Israeli population resides today in the Occupied West Bank excluding East Jerusalem.

A key development during the reporting period was the establishment of a new settlement, Amihai, in the West Bank in proximity to the existing settlement of Shilo, and in proximity of numerous outposts. In reality it is the first official settlement that is established by a government decision since 1992. Another worrying development was the retroactive legalisation of the illegal outpost of Kerem Reim near Ramallah.

In general, settlement related infrastructure projects like bypass roads, archaeological and touristic projects all contribute to continued settlement expansion and the strengthening of Israel's presence and control of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Continued settlement expansion, illegal under international law as reaffirmed by UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016), goes directly against long-standing EU policy and the recommendations of the Quartet Report (2016).

¹ The estimate is based on the average size of a household in the occupied West Bank of 4,66 persons per family (as defined by Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, media release 030/2016, February 7, 2016, p.5).

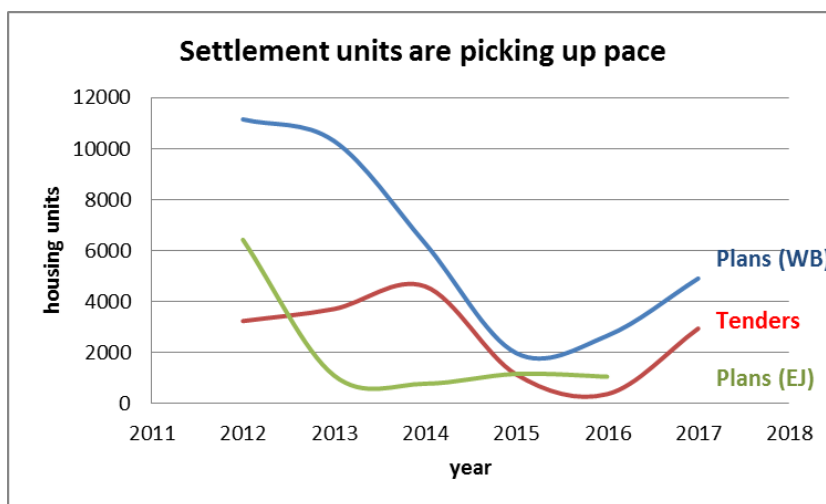
² East Talpiot, French Hill, Gilo, Giv'at Hamivtar, Har Homa/Givat Hamatos, Ma'alot Dafna, Never Yaakov, Pisgat Ze'ev, Ramat Eshkol, Ramat Shlomo, Ramot, Sanhedria Murhevet.

1. TRENDS IN SETTLEMENT PLANS AND TENDERS IN 2017 (JANUARY - JUNE)

The advancement of plans and the construction of new settlement units continued during the first half of 2017 in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem. Approximately 8,000 settlement units were advanced in different stages in the planning and implementation process. (Almost 5,000 housing units were promoted through plans and close to 3,000 housing units were advanced through tenders since the beginning of 2017).³

This development accounts for an extraordinary increase of more than 200 % in advancement of housing units through plans and tenders compared to 2016. The numbers are getting close to the high tide of settlement advancements in 2012/2013 (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Overview of numbers of housing units promoted through plans and tenders in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (2012-2017, June)



Source: Peace Now (Plans WB and Tenders) and Ir Amim (Plans EJ). Tenders show data for the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Note: Plans for additional new housing units in East Jerusalem announced in July 2017 are not covered by the reporting period and therefore not reflected in the graph.

In the first half of 2017 the expansion of settlement units took place in three waves.

The first wave of plans was advancements by the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) at the end of January/beginning of February when more than 2,800 units were advanced and almost 1,000 units were tendered.⁴

The second wave of advancements took place in March where the Israeli government decided to establish a new settlement (Amihai) inside the West Bank and approved the tendering of nearly 2,000 settlement units together with a declaration of almost 100 hectares as “Israeli state land”⁵ in the West Bank. Apart from cases of retroactive legalization of illegal outposts and transformation of

³ All the data on settlements are based on publicly available information from the Civil Administration’s High Planning Committee, where Peace Now is present at the meetings. For detailed information about the plans see this link: peacenow.org.il. The reason for the total number of 5,000 units advanced through plans is lower than the sum of the waves (2,800+3,000) is that around 1,000 units have been advanced twice at different stages of the process and are counted only once in the total.

⁴ In addition, close to a thousand housing units were issued building permits in East Jerusalem in January and February 2017. A building permit is the final formal decision and construction may begin. Permits are not counted in the overview of plans and tenders in this report.

⁵ The term “state land” is based on an interpretation of the Ottoman land law from 1858, stating that if land isn’t cultivated for several years in a row it becomes public land or state land. Declaration of state land is only possible if the land is not officially registered in the land registry as property of a specific individual.

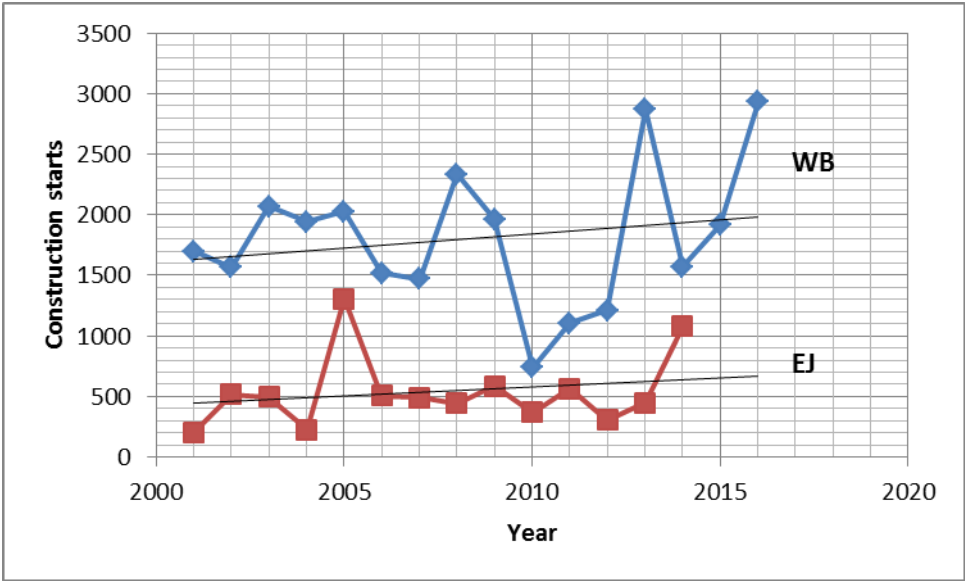
military outposts into civilian settlements, Amihai is the first settlement that the government of Israel is establishing since 1992.

The third wave of plan advancement by ICA took place at the beginning of June when over 3,000 units were further advanced in the planning process, among them more than 1,000 housing units in Maale Adumim, 102 housing units for the relocated Amona settlers in the newly established Amihai settlement, and the retroactive legalisation of the illegal outpost of Kerem Reim near Ramallah (255 new housing units), de-facto creating another new settlement.

While plans and tenders indicate expected future construction activity, data from the Israeli Central Bureau Statistics show that from January to June 2017 construction of 646 housing units began in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem⁶. This represent a decrease of about 50 % compared to the same period of 2016. In the first half of 2017 761 units were completed compared to 993 completed constructions in the same period of 2016.

For reference, according to data from the Israeli Bureau of Statistics the average number of construction starts in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem over the past 15 years has been above 2,000 units per year with a slowly rising trend (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Overview of construction starts in the period 2001-2016



Source: ICBS. Note: Data on construction starts in East Jerusalem 2015 and 2016 is not included.

2. UNDERLYING TRENDS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

The following factors are seen as contributing to the settlement expansion and the consolidation of Israel's presence and control of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Legalisation of outposts

One outpost (Kerem Reim) was legalised during the reporting period thereby transforming it into a new settlement.

⁶ Data from ICBS shows construction starts of 1,918 housing units the settlements in 2015 compared to 2,934 construction starts in 2016.

In order to remove legal obstacles to the retroactive legalisation of unauthorised outposts the Knesset in February 2017 adopted the so-called “Regularisation Bill”. The bill was challenged and brought before the Supreme Court. If approved by the Supreme Court this will allow the Israeli government in the future to retroactively expropriate privately owned Palestinian land on which Israeli settlements have been built.

Archaeological and touristic settlement expansion

During the reporting period the Israeli cabinet on 28 May 2017 approved a cable car project that is intended to run from Abu Tur in West Jerusalem, over the East Jerusalem neighbourhoods of Abu Tur and Silwan, to a stop in the vicinity of the Dung Gate entrance to the Western Wall Plaza in the Old City. One of the stops of the cable car is reportedly near the settler promoted Kedem compound, an approved plan for a large visitor center in Silwan just across the City of David and, on the other side, the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. The cable car will facilitate access to a growing number of tourist sites and national parks around the Old City that the state has privatized to settler organizations.

Another development that contributes to the consolidation of Israeli control of Palestinian neighbourhoods was the advancement of plans on 24 April 2017 to confiscate land in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Ras al-Amoud close to the Old City in order to build a new visitor centre for the adjacent Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives.

During the period under review promotion of archaeological sites continued to be a means to entrench Israeli presence in the West Bank. This was for example the case in May 2017 where excavation and conservation works resumed at the archaeological site of Tel Rumeida, situated at the heart of Hebron. According to the Israeli NGO, Emek Shaveh, this is the final stage before opening the archaeological park to thousands of visitors and heightens Israeli presence at the heart of the Palestinian neighborhood.

Settlement related infrastructure projects.

In January 2017 construction of a new 2.5 km long bypass road on Palestinian land began in the Northern part of the West Bank. It will bypass a section of Road 55 running through An Nabi Elyas village (Qalqiliya). These measures impact on Palestinians right to free movement and access to natural resources and give an indication of future construction plans in the area. In addition, the construction of the separation barrier around Al-Wallajeh (near Bethlehem) restarted again in April 2017.

According to the Israeli NGO Ir Amim several developments in early 2017 demonstrated that Israeli authorities may be stepping up the preparation of infrastructure to lay the ground for advancing plans in E1⁷. The E1 plan would entail a severe breach of contiguity between East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Primary among these developments, in addition to demolition orders in the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar, located near E1, are reports of advancement of the northernmost section of the Eastern Ring Road, which would facilitate access to the city for settlers northeast of the city while carrying Palestinians from Ramallah to Bethlehem without entry into Jerusalem.

⁷ E1 (“East 1”) is the name the Ministry of Housing and Construction designated to a 12 square kilometre block of land between East Jerusalem and Ma’ale Adumim, within the jurisdiction of Ma’ale Adumim. E-1 borders on the towns of Anata, Abu Dis, Al’Eizariya and Az-Za’ayem, all located just beyond the eastern border of the Municipality of Jerusalem.

3. EU ACTION DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

During the reporting period the EU issued the following statements related to settlement expansion.

- On 24 January an EU Spokesperson's statement was issued on the announcement by the Israeli government to build 2.500 settlement units across the West Bank, and the approval of building permits for 566 settlement units in East Jerusalem.
- On 1 February a statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini was issued on the announcement of 3,000 new settlements units in the West Bank.
- On 7 February a statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini was issued on the "Regularisation Law" adopted by the Israeli Knesset.
- On 31 March 2017 a statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini was issued on the Israeli government decision to establish a new settlement in the occupied West Bank.
- On 9 June 2017 a statement by the EU Spokesperson was issued on the decision by the Israeli government to advance plans for thousands of settlement units.