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Islamabad Cracks Down on Illegal Housing Societies

August 9, 2025

– Categories: Real Estate



The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has launched its most aggressive campaign yet against illegal housing societies in Islamabad, preparing to place multiple developers on the Exit Control List (ECL). This escalation follows years of complaints from defrauded investors and growing concern over unregulated urban expansion in the federal capital. Recent CDA operations identified 47 unauthorized housing projects

operating without valid No Objection Certificates (NOCs), some occupying land meant for public infrastructure. These developments often market plots at 20–30% below market rates but lack basic utilities, proper land titles, or access roads. According to a senior CDA official, many cases involve developers taking millions in advance payments while delivering nothing beyond a paper plot number. The ECL restrictions are aimed at preventing implicated owners from leaving the country while investigations are underway.

The crackdown has highlighted longstanding weaknesses in Islamabad real estate oversight. Although the CDA maintains an official list of approved societies, many buyers report being misled by sophisticated marketing campaigns for unapproved projects. Property lawyer Saad Khan points out that developers exploit gaps in buyer verification and delays in official enforcement. The CDA has now partnered with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to trace financial transactions and identify those benefiting from the schemes. Real estate consultant Faraz Ahmed adds that obtaining approvals legally can take up to two years, while illegal operators can start selling within weeks, giving them an unfair advantage.

Analysts are divided on the long-term impact of these measures. Supporters believe the tougher stance could restore confidence in Islamabad's property sector, but others warn that without addressing root causes—such as bureaucratic delays and the city's housing shortage—the problem could re-emerge. To counter this, the CDA has announced plans to digitize all land records and streamline approval processes, though critics remain skeptical about implementation. In Bhara Kahu alone, over 3,000 families have purchased plots in societies later

declared illegal, underscoring the human cost of these scams. Victims range from retired civil servants to overseas Pakistanis and middle-class families who have invested their life savings.

This enforcement drive represents more than a short-term operation it is a critical test of Islamabad's capacity to regulate its rapidly growing real estate market. By combining travel bans with planned legal and administrative reforms, authorities aim to dismantle a parallel, unregulated property market that has thrived for years. If successful, the campaign could set a precedent for transparency and accountability in Pakistan's urban development. Failure, however, would reinforce public perceptions that real estate rules remain optional for those with the right connections.

