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## Australia Joins Global Condemnation of Israel's West Bank Settlement Expansion

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Australia has joined more than 20 countries, including the United Kingdom and Canada, in condemning Israel's decision to expand settlements in the occupied West Bank. The joint statement, co-signed by Foreign Minister Penny Wong, described the move as “unacceptable” and said it undermines international law while adding further instability to the region.

The coordinated response follows Israel's approval of thousands of new housing units across West Bank settlements. Governments in Europe and North America swiftly criticised the move, warning that continued settlement activity undermines prospects for a two-state solution. By signing on to the joint statement, Australia aligned itself with long-standing allies who argue that progress toward peace requires restraint and dialogue rather than unilateral actions.

Penny Wong said that Australia's position is grounded in support for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. She stated that settlement construction erodes trust between

both sides and risks deepening existing divisions. According to Wong, Australia will continue to support diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving peace through direct talks.

The response has come during a period of heightened diplomatic tension between Australia and Israel. Earlier this year, the Albanese government recognised Palestinian statehood, a decision that was met with sharp criticism from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu accused Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of damaging Australia's international standing, a claim that Australian officials rejected.

The decision to sign the latest statement reflects a continuation of the Albanese government's approach to foreign policy. Observers note that Canberra is placing greater emphasis on international coordination and law-based principles. While some previous Australian governments adopted more cautious language on Middle East affairs, the current administration has taken a firmer position on settlement activity.

Within Australia, reactions have been mixed. Supporters of the government's stance argue that the condemnation is consistent with Australia's role as a responsible international actor. Critics warn that the position could affect relations with Israel, a country with which Australia has long-standing cultural, economic, and security ties. Opposition figures have accused the government of placing those ties at risk.

Jewish community groups in Australia have also responded. While some urged caution to avoid inflammatory rhetoric, others noted concern about the potential impact on local community relations. Officials from both sides have appealed for calm, stressing the importance of maintaining dialogue and avoiding heightened tensions domestically.

Diplomatic analysts say Australia's latest move signals a shift toward greater involvement in global issues. By recognising Palestinian statehood and joining statements critical of settlement expansion, Canberra is positioning itself more assertively in international debates. This could improve relations with countries supportive of Palestinian recognition while complicating ties with Israel and, potentially, the United States.

For the Albanese government, the challenge now lies in balancing principle with pragmatism. Officials maintain that Australia's message is clear: progress requires negotiations, and settlement expansion makes that more difficult. Whether the joint condemnation will influence developments on the ground remains uncertain, but it

underscores Australia's willingness to adopt a stronger voice on an issue that has divided international opinion for decades.