

UK Condemns Israeli E1 Housing Expansion

August 15, 2025

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The British government has joined the European Union and Germany in condemning Israel's plan to build thousands of new housing units in the contested E1 area near Ma'ale Adumim, east of Jerusalem.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy said the plans would undermine prospects for peace and breach international law. "The UK strongly opposes the Israeli government's E1 settlement plans, which would divide a future Palestinian state in two and mark a flagrant breach of international law. The plans must be stopped now," he said in a statement to Reuters.

The E1 project is set to significantly increase housing in the area, with 3,515 new units planned for the Tzipor Midbar neighbourhood in Ma'ale Adumim. This will bring the total number of new units to 6,916, potentially doubling the city's population by an estimated 35,000 residents over the coming years.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, also criticised the move. She said it breached international law and further damaged the chances of a negotiated two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians. "The EU reiterates its call on Israel to halt settlement construction," she said.

Germany echoed this view. The country's foreign ministry issued a statement saying it "strongly rejects" the Israeli government's announcements on thousands of new settlements in the West Bank. Berlin called for an immediate end to construction plans, warning that they threatened peace prospects.

The E1 zone lies between Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim, and development there has long been a contentious issue in Israeli-Palestinian relations. Critics argue the expansion would effectively bisect Palestinian territories in the West Bank, making the creation of a contiguous Palestinian state more difficult.

On Thursday, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, also a Defence Ministry official, attended the launch ceremony for the project. He described the development as a "strategic step" to link Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and to ensure territorial continuity between the two cities. Smotrich dismissed European criticism as "hypocrisy" and claimed the expansion would strengthen Israel's capital.

"This move strengthens Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim, and takes the terrible idea of dividing Israel off the agenda. It's a celebratory and historic day," Smotrich said.

While international condemnation remains strong, Israel has signalled no intention to reverse the decision. The project is expected to proceed in stages over the coming years, altering the demographic and strategic landscape of the area.

Diplomatic tensions are likely to persist, as the E1 plan has been a flashpoint in Israeli-Palestinian politics for decades. The UK's intervention aligns it with the EU's long-standing opposition to settlement expansion in occupied territories, underlining the continuing differences between European nations and Israel on the issue.