

UK, EU Condemn Israeli Settlement Expansion

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A group of foreign ministers, including the United Kingdom's David Lammy, have condemned Israel's decision to advance a major settlement project in the occupied West Bank, describing it as a breach of international law that threatens regional stability.

The plan, approved this week by Israel's Higher Planning Committee, authorises the construction of 3,500 housing units in the E1 area east of Jerusalem, expanding the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim. Critics warn the development risks cutting the West Bank in

two, limiting Palestinian access to Jerusalem, and making the prospect of a viable Palestinian state almost impossible.

In a joint statement, 21 foreign ministers declared: “This plan will make a two-state solution impossible by dividing any Palestinian state and restricting Palestinian access to Jerusalem. Instead, it risks undermining security and fuels further violence and instability, taking us further away from peace.”

The UK has consistently maintained that settlements in occupied territory are illegal under international law, in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, which calls for an end to such activity. The latest statement urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government to reverse the decision and recommit to negotiated solutions.

Israeli officials have argued that construction in E1 is a sovereign decision. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich welcomed the advancement, declaring it “finally buries the idea of a Palestinian state.” He dismissed international criticism, adding: “Anyone in the world who tries to recognise a Palestinian state will receive an answer from us on the ground.”

The E1 area has been at the centre of diplomatic tension for more than two decades, with successive Israeli governments weighing the political costs of construction. This week’s approval, however, suggests work could begin within a year.

Palestinians and human rights groups have long opposed settlement building, warning it not only undermines peace efforts but also deepens humanitarian challenges in the West Bank. International observers argue that the expansion is likely to further strain Israel’s relations with allies who continue to advocate for a two-state solution.

The UK’s position is part of a wider international push to prevent escalation in the region. European governments, as well as the United States, have expressed concern that unilateral moves by Israel risk worsening violence at a time when tensions remain high.

Meanwhile, Israeli military operations in Gaza have intensified, with reports of continued air strikes as the war nears its second anniversary. The escalation has drawn mounting calls for restraint from the United Nations and humanitarian organisations, who warn that prolonged conflict will only deepen suffering on both sides.

While Israel maintains that settlement expansion and military actions are necessary for its security, its international partners continue to stress that only a negotiated political

settlement can bring lasting peace. The joint condemnation reflects growing unease among Israel's closest allies about policies that they argue threaten both regional security and the future of a two-state solution.