



EUROPEAN UNION

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Statement by the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on reports indicating the Israeli Government's intention to expand settlements

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, issued the following statement today:

"I am extremely concerned by reports of the Israeli government's announcement regarding the construction of approximately 3000 new housing units in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. The European Union has repeatedly stated that all settlement construction is illegal under international law and constitutes an obstacle to peace.

"On Thursday, speaking on behalf of the European Union as a whole and ahead of the decision of the UN General Assembly to accord Observer State status to Palestine, I urged both parties to work towards the resumption of direct negotiations without delay or preconditions. I called on all involved to pursue actions which could build confidence, not undermine it.

"I am therefore extremely worried by the prospects of settlement expansion on such a scale. The reaction of the international community to any such decision is likely also to be influenced by the extent to which such expansion may represent a strategic step undermining the prospects of a contiguous and viable Palestine with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both it and Israel.

"I repeat my call on Thursday to Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to work towards a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with renewed purpose. Both have previously stated their willingness to do so. I ask the government of Israel to show its commitment to the early renewal of negotiations to end the conflict and the occupation by not taking forward these plans."

P R E S S

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