

# *Israeli cabinet votes to formalize annexation of West Bank's Area C*

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This file picture shows an illegal Israeli settlement in Gush Etzion, in the Israeli-occupied West

Tel Aviv, May 15 (RHC)-- The Israeli cabinet has decided to assume complete authority over land registration in Area C of the West Bank, which contains approximately 60 percent of the occupied region and accommodates the majority of illegal Israeli settlements.

This action, advocated by far-right Israeli minister of military affairs Israel Katz and finance minister Bezalel Smotrich, is being characterized by opponents as a practical annexation of Palestinian-owned territory.

The 1995 Oslo Accords stipulated that Area C would be under temporary Israeli control, with an expected eventual handover to the Palestinian Authority (PA) administration. Now, with the new cabinet resolution, any land registration efforts by Palestinians in Area C will be declared legally void by Israel.

Israeli authorities intend to commence official land registration procedures, carry out extensive land surveys, and may reclassify large swathes, thereby facilitating the expansion of settlements.

The resolution further instructs Israeli security forces to impede Palestinian land registration initiatives, reject external assistance for these endeavors, and establish a cross-ministerial committee to oversee land registration within a period of 60 days.

The new development aligns with the Israeli parliament (Knesset)'s upcoming deliberation on a bill designed to ease land purchases for settlers, even in areas inhabited by Palestinians. The initiatives coincide with recent land assessments conducted by the so-called civil administration's regulation unit, managed by Smotrich, which may result in the reclassification of privately owned Palestinian land as public land under Israeli jurisdiction.

"This is a dangerous step toward realizing the messianic vision of the annexationist administration," Israeli rights group Yesh Din said, warning that the move infringes upon international law and threatens the rights of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

Palestinian activists, such as Ayed Jafry from the central West Bank town of Sinjil, say the policy will further entrench dispossession. "We're now dealing directly with the occupation again," he stated. "This opens the door for settlers to seize land without oversight."

#### Legitimizing occupation

The UN said Israel's approval of a land registration process in the occupied West Bank risks further "legitimizing" its occupation over Palestinian territory. "We think it's a dangerous movement in terms of legitimizing the occupation. We believe that the West Bank is part of the occupied Palestinian territory," spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said at a news conference.

"I think anything that would move towards annexation would be, to put it mildly, counter to international law and not encounter to our efforts in the peace process," he said.

The senior UN official emphasized that the developments in the Palestine-Israel conflict are "moving in the wrong direction and we need to reverse course."

[ SOURCE: PRESS TV and REUTERS ]

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