

# Israel Legalizes Palestinian Land Theft: 'Entire Land Is Ours'

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*Israel passed a law Monday retroactively legalizing about 4,000 settler homes built on privately-owned Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank, a measure that human rights groups have called "theft" and one that would end any hopes for Palestinian statehood.*

Hanan Ashrawi, a senior member of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the main Palestinian political umbrella body, said in a statement that the law gave settlers a green light to "embark on a land grab."

"Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his extremist, racist coalition government are deliberately breaking the law and destroying the very foundations of the two-state solution and the chances for peace and stability."

The U.N. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov said in a statement that the law "will have far-reaching legal consequences for Israel and greatly diminish the prospects for Arab-Israeli peace."

The news came just hours after Israel conducted airstrikes in the Palestinian Gaza strip injuring at least two Palestinians, the first attack by Israel in months that results in casualties.

Witnesses told Ma'an news agency that at least eight Israeli missiles were fired at several locations across the besieged Palestinian territory. Israel said it was responding to a rock thrown from the strip that landed in an open space and resulted in no damages or injuries.

Under the new law, settlers could remain on the land if they built there without prior knowledge of Palestinian ownership or if homes were constructed at the state's instruction. Palestinian owners would receive financial compensation.

But its passage may only be largely symbolic as it violates Israeli Supreme Court rulings on property rights. Israel's attorney general has said it is unconstitutional and that he will not defend it in front of the Supreme Court.

Ahead of the late-night vote, Likud minister Ofir Akunis told parliament, "We are voting tonight on the connection between the Jewish people to its land. This entire land is ours."

Although the legislation, passed by a vote of 60 to 52, was backed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition, political sources have told news outlets that Netanyahu privately opposed the bill over concerns it could provide grounds for prosecution by the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

But the far-right Jewish Home party, a member of the coalition looking to draw voters from the traditional base of Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, pushed for the legislation after the forced evacuation of 330 settlers last week from an outpost built on private Palestinian land.

With Netanyahu under police investigation on suspicion of abuse of office, Likud has been losing in opinion polls, therefore Netanyahu did not stand in the way of the vote because he did not want to alienate his supporters and boost Jewish Home's base.

The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem condemned the bill's passage, saying it "proves yet again that Israel has no intention of ending its control over the Palestinians or its theft of their land."

The group said that the passage of the law just weeks after the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution calling for the halt of settlement building was a "slap in the face" to the international community by Israel.



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