

Israel plans new homes in West BankSep 4, 2006

Israel plans to build 690 new homes in two Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank despite an obligation under a US-backed peace "road map" to halt such construction on land Palestinians seek for a state.

The Israel Lands Administration, a government agency, issued a tender inviting bids on 348 plots in the Maaleh Adumim settlement and 342 in Beitar Ilit.

The tenders published by Israeli media on Monday were the largest number of housing bids for settlement building offered since Prime Minister Ehud Olmert took office on May 4.

A spokesman for the Peace Now settlement watchdog group said: "The government is building hundreds of housing units in the territories against its commitments to the road map and Israeli voters."

The Palestinians have failed to meet their own obligation under the road map to dismantle militant groups.

Olmert has suspended an election pledge to set Israel's final borders through a unilateral pullback from parts of the West Bank after Israel's month-long war with Hizbollah guerrillas in Lebanon that ended with an August 14 truce.

Hizbollah stunned Israel by firing nearly 4,000 rockets at its northern towns, raising concern among Israelis that a West Bank pullback could leave cities in the centre of the Jewish state vulnerable to similar attacks by Palestinians.

The World Court has branded all Jewish settlements on occupied land as illegal. Israel disputes this.

Some 240,000 Jewish settlers and 2.4 million Palestinians live in the West Bank, a territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war.

Source: Reuters

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