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Israel to build 20,000 Jewish homes in East Jerusalem

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jerusalem ? Israel plans to build 20,000 new homes for Jews in a settlement in Arab East Jerusalem, angering Palestinians who want the land for a future state.

An Israeli official said yesterday that the plan foresees three separate Jewish neighbourhoods being set up on land Israel annexed after the 1967 Middle East War in a move that has not been recognised internationally. Some 200,000 Jews already live in the eastern part of Jerusalem among about 230,000 Palestinians who, under an agreement forged after Israel's capture of the city, are legal residents.

Yehoshua Pollak, a deputy mayor and chairman of the Jerusalem municipality's planning and construction committee, said the proposed units would provide housing mostly for young Israeli couples. Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat condemned the plan, saying: "This destroys the efforts exerted to revive the peace process. The Israeli government must choose between settlements and peace. They can not have both."

Jerusalem's municipality said no decisions have been made on construction. Pollak said it could take several years for the project to be ratified by municipal committees. The construction of the homes would create a Jewish residential bloc linking Jerusalem with two major Jewish settlement blocs north and south of the city.

The Jerusalem municipality several months ago scrapped a similar plan to construct 20,000 homes on hills in the western part of Jerusalem following opposition by environmentalists. Israel considers all of Jerusalem its eternal and indivisible capital. Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of any future Palestinian state.

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