

Prime Minister Sharon: 90 Days Are Almost Up - Where Are the Outpost Proposals?

On March 13, 2005, the Israeli cabinet voted to approve the recommendations of attorney Talia Sasson's report on illegal settlement outposts and to set up a ministerial committee to deliver a detailed proposal for action within 90 days.

June 11th marks the end of the 90 day period. Yet there's no sign of the outpost action proposal in sight. The Israeli people deserve better.

Outposts are new settlements that were built in the occupied territories without prior legal approval from the Israeli government. They are intended to create contiguity between veteran settlements in the West Bank and to establish facts on the ground that will make it more difficult to reach a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. According to Peace Now's Settlements Watch project, about 120 outposts have been established over the years, and around 100 of them are still standing.

Sasson found that the outposts, which violate Israel's own laws and which sometimes involved outright misappropriation of lands owned by Palestinians, were established with the assistance of several government ministries, which helped provide them with utilities, infrastructure, and security. She also found that the government often looked the other way and failed to exercise its authority in preventing outposts from being established in the first place.



"The government must take into its hands responsibility for what is happening in the outposts in the territories and not sit on the sidelines watching as the settlers do whatever they want, without anyone stopping them," Sasson said. "They are all illegal. It is important to emphasize that it's not merely [required] to evacuate the outposts but to cease the entire procedure of budgeting and transferring state funds to the outposts. The very heart of the report is about the enforcement of the law, which is not a political issue, but a legal one, of tremendous importance for a democratic state."

Under the Road Map to Middle East peace, Israel is obligated to immediately dismantle outposts established since March 2001. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon also gave his personal word to President George Bush that these outposts will be removed. While a few uninhabited outposts have been taken down, most of those that should be evacuated-about 50 in total-have not been touched.

Israel's unwillingness to deal with the outposts therefore represents more than just a threat to the peace process and Israel's credibility with the United States. It's a threat to Israeli democracy and rule of law.

Peace. Democracy. Rule of Law. Join Peace Now in Israel and Americans for Peace Now in keeping the spotlight on this crucial issue. Learn more about outposts, settlements, and how you can contribute to the cause at www.peacenow.org.

Save the Date: September 22, 2005

**APN Peace Awards Dinner honoring Ruth Messinger, Mark Rosenblum and Gail Pressberg.
For further info call Hiam Simon at 212-62-PEACE.**

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