

**Settlement Outposts Becoming Permanent**  
**By GAVIN RABINOWITZ**  
**The Associated Press**  
**Friday, November 14, 2003**

GIVAT ASSAF, West Bank - It began with a single tent at a busy West Bank junction two years ago. Now, a playground with a Donald Duck ride and neat lawns between trailer homes give this settlement outpost an air of permanence.

Israel has agreed to remove more than 100 such outposts as part of the U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan, but has taken little action. Instead, the government has quietly funded construction in some and plans to grant legal status to others.

It has been Israel's declared policy for several years not to build new settlements. However, peace activists fear outposts like the one at Givat Assaf are growing into exactly that.

"First a road is built, then a caravan goes up, a few months later there are a dozen trailers," said Dror Etkes of Peace Now, a watchdog group that monitors settlement growth. He pointed to Maale Adumim, which started out as an archaeological camp and now has 28,000 residents.

Givat Assaf, near the Palestinian town of Ramallah, started with a protest tent near the site where Israeli motorist Assaf Hirschowitz was killed by Palestinian militants. Today, it is home to 11 families.

Recently, Givat Assaf got its first permanent structure, a ritual bath built by the religious affairs department at the prime minister's office.

The bath, made up of a concrete pool, a water tank and two solar heaters, is topped by a trailer and used by married women for ritual purification.

Yitzhak Levy, the deputy minister in charge of religious affairs, said that as far as he knows, construction is legal. "We don't build unless we have a building permit from the local councils," Levy said.

But settler council spokesman Yehoshua Mor-Yosef said the council views all outposts as legal. "If it is just up to the local councils, we give permits," he said.

Residents of the outpost feel they have the government's support, said Ehuviel Nizri, 22, who lives in Givat Assaf with his wife and 9-month old son.

"We get the support, it is not always direct and I'm not sure they always ask (Israeli Prime Minister Ariel) Sharon," Nizri said, pointing to army guards. Electricity and running water have been installed.

Phone lines are lacking, but only because of technical problems, Nizri said as he walked along the rough gravel path, complete with street sign.

The new playground was donated by a wealthy American supporter, Nizri said.

Etkes, the Peace Now spokesman, said such construction is taking place in dozens of outposts. Government ministries either don't know the law forbidding construction on these unrecognized outposts or "pretend they don't," Etkes said.

Many Orthodox Jews among the settlers believe Israel has a God-given right to the West Bank. Others believe new settlements are vital to Israel's security, establishing a presence along the roads where Israelis have been killed in Palestinian ambushes and in the hills overlooking their homes.

The debate over the outposts has also intensified because Israel is building a security barrier that dips deep across its frontier with the West Bank, sometimes surrounding the settlements.

### **White House Repeats Criticism of Israeli Barrier Path in West Bank**

The White House on Thursday renewed its criticism of the way Israel is constructing the security barrier.

President Bush has said Israel had a right to defend itself, but has appealed to Sharon to make sure the fence does not interfere with the lives of Palestinians on the West Bank or take over territory that might be part of the state he has promised the Palestinians in 2005.

On Thursday, Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, said "the fence continues to be a problem."

"First of all, the president has made it pretty clear that his vision of the two-state solution would be one in which you didn't need a security fence," she told reporters at the White House.

Israeli media reports said Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz - who has jurisdiction over the settlements - plans to legalize 30 of the more than 100 outposts. Mofaz met with Rice in Washington Thursday, and an Israeli official traveling with him said Rice had been expected to bring up the issue.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, also said that Mofaz would present Rice with a list of more than 40 outposts Israel says it has removed. It wasn't immediately known, however, if he did so.

For Palestinians, all Jewish settlements - the 150 veteran communities where about 220,000 Israelis live in addition to the outposts - are illegal encroachments on land they claim for their own state.

The first phase of the road map calls on Israel to remove the outposts and freeze all settlement construction, while demanding that the Palestinians dismantle militant organizations and end attacks against Israel.

The road map was stalled for months, but with the creation of a new Palestinian government under Ahmed Qureia on Wednesday, talks may resume soon. Israel could again start removing the outposts as a gesture to the Americans, Sharon adviser Zalman Shoval said Wednesday.

In June, soldiers and police got into a bloody fistfight with settlers as they dismantled an outpost called Mitzpeh Yitzhar and removed several other outposts.

Critics said the evacuations were a charade aimed at creating the appearance of compliance with the road map. Many of the evacuated posts were isolated empty structures that were quickly replaced by the settlers.

One Palestinian village has lodged an appeal with Supreme Court against Mofaz, charging that one of the outposts scheduled to be legalized is on village land.

"It started three years ago with one trailer on the edge of their land, now there are eleven," said lawyer Shlomo Lacker, who represents the village of Michmas.

The renewed talk of evacuations does not bother the settlers, who vow to rebuild the outposts as quickly as they are taken down.

"The land of Israel is our house," says Mor-Yosef. "If you tear down one room in our house, we will build another."