

**WHY SETTLEMENTS CREATE AN OBSTACLE TO PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI
PEACE, WHILE UNDERMINING ISRAEL'S SECURITY AND ITS CHARACTER AS A
DEMOCRATIC JEWISH STATE**

AMERICANS FOR PEACE NOW PERSPECTIVES
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Peace Now has always believed that settlements in the occupied territories threaten our existence as a Jewish, democratic state, weaken the security of Israel, drain our economic resources, undermine our society's moral fiber, and serve to perpetuate Israeli rule over another people in a way that prevents Israel from reaching peace with the Palestinians. The settlements today pose an existential threat to the future of Israel.

Settlements undermine Israel as a Jewish, democratic state: The West Bank and Gaza are not empty—besides the settlers, they are now home to about 3.5 million Palestinians. And given demographic trends, those Palestinians, combined with Israeli Arabs who live inside the Green Line, will guarantee that Jews will soon be a minority in the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. When that day comes, Israel will cease to be a Jewish, democratic state. We will no longer be a Jewish country because Israeli Jews will be outnumbered by our Arab neighbors, and therefore we will be forced to become a bi-national state, with the prospects for a civil and stable bi-national state being virtually impossible. Or we will choose to forego all acceptable norms of democracy in order to maintain Jewish minority supremacy over an Arab majority. Both of these options should frighten all friends of Israel. But we will rapidly be forced to choose between these options unless firm measures are taken immediately to free us, our allies, and our neighbors from the stranglehold of the settlements.

Settlements weaken our security because each settler, each settlement, and each bypass road connecting Israel to the settlements requires protection from the Israeli military. Our soldiers are required to put their lives on the line every day to defend Israeli communities deliberately placed in the midst of Palestinian population centers in order to break up Palestinian territorial contiguity. In the West Bank, the Israeli line of defense is roughly ten times longer than the Green Line because of the need to protect the settlements and their supporting infrastructure.

A recent extensive study by a leading Israeli newspaper, Ha'aretz, found that Israel spent a little under a half billion dollars a year to maintain about 10,000 troops in the occupied territories prior to the Intifada. Ha'aretz also found that our Defense Ministry is spending roughly double that amount, more like \$1 billion, these days because of the ongoing violence. These are troops and money that could be committed to defending our border. Beyond stretching Israel's defense capabilities, the settlement movement costs Israeli taxpayers at least \$556 million in extra non-military spending each year, according to the Ha'aretz study. Total spending on settlements has amounted to over \$10 billion since 1967.

Settlements also harm Israeli interests by undermining the political authority of moderate Palestinian leaders, the sort of leaders who are interested in stopping terror. For these leaders to

be able to advance their political agenda, they need to prove to their constituents that a non-violent path of negotiations can lead to a future Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. They are battling every day for the hearts and minds of the Palestinian street. Settlement construction delivers a message layered in concrete and steel that Israel is not interested in negotiations.

Finally, **Peace Now is concerned about settlements because they work to ensure that Israeli and Palestinian populations are woven together throughout the territories and make it impossible to separate the two societies into two viable, independent states.** This is not an accident. This is the result of deliberate planning by the settlement movement and its supporters in different Israeli governments over the years, especially our current Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon.

Despite the fact that settlements are a significant obstacle to peace, there is no moral equivalence between settlements and terrorist attacks. At the same time, in a process that is supposed to see Israelis and Palestinians exchanging land for peace, settlements have a lot to do with what Israel is supposed to deliver through negotiations to the Palestinians, but has largely not provided. Far from meeting its obligation to freeze settlement growth, the Sharon government has recently launched a huge new housing incentive program for the settlements and an expansion of investment in tourism in the occupied territories.

Excerpted from Testimony Before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Near East Sub-Committee, by Dror Etkes, Director of Peace Now's Settlement Watch Project, Oct. 15, 2003. For full testimony visit <http://www.peacenow.org/nia/pr/10152003.html>