

# MEMMO

Dec. 4, 2009

## Settlement Moratorium Shows Israel's Peace Commitment

In a landmark effort to galvanize peace talks, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last week began a 10-month West Bank settlement moratorium. The United States praised this unprecedented move, but the Palestinian Authority (PA) continues to rebuff Israel—claiming the Israeli initiative failed to meet its preconditions to resume negotiations. PA President Mahmoud Abbas should accept calls from Congress and the Obama administration to immediately resume direct talks with Israel without preconditions. The Arab states also must step forward in support of peace and normalization with Israel.

### The United States has praised Israel's moratorium as an important step for peace with the Palestinians.

- Netanyahu announced a 10-month moratorium on the construction of new homes in the West Bank on November 25, calling it a “far-reaching and painful step.”
- Netanyahu called on the Palestinians to match Israel's efforts, saying “There is no more time to waste. Israel has taken a far-reaching step toward peace, it is time for the Palestinians to do the same.”
- The Obama administration has praised Israel's decision. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Israel's moratorium “helps move forward toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”
- U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell said the United States sees the move as “significant and could have substantial impact on the ground. For the first time ever, an Israeli government will stop housing approvals and all new construction of housing units and related infrastructure in West Bank settlements.”
- Mitchell also stated that the two sides must resume negotiations without preconditions: “As we and others have said many times, the way to move forward is to enter negotiations without preconditions and reach agreements on the two-state solution, a Jewish state of Israel living side by side in peace and security with an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian state.”



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### Israel has already begun to implement the moratorium decision.

- The government has already sent inspectors to at least 70 West Bank communities. The inspectors have issued stop-work orders for more than 60 construction projects.
- The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has handed down injunctions to two-dozen West Bank local and regional councils, stripping them of their power to issue construction permits and ordering them to

enforce the new building rules. Where illegal construction has been found, authorities have impounded construction equipment.

- Defense Minister Ehud Barak has announced the recruitment and training of 40 additional building inspectors to enforce the new moratorium, with more to come. The ministry has also taken aerial photographs of the settlements in order to document construction.
- Israel has taken other key steps to promote talks with the Palestinians. Netanyahu has explicitly endorsed a Palestinian state and called for immediate negotiations without preconditions. Since April 2008, Israel has removed nearly 250 roadblocks in the West Bank to ease travel and boost commerce.

**The PA and Arab states have rejected Israel's moratorium and refused to begin talks unless Israel meets all of their preconditions.**

- Despite Israel's unprecedented steps, the PA continues to condition the resumption of negotiations on a total settlement freeze. In the past, both Yasir Arafat and Abbas negotiated with Israel even while building in settlements continued.
- Yasser Abed Rabbo, a spokesman for Abbas, rejected Israel's moratorium, saying, "Netanyahu's plan shows that Israel is not serious about peace," while Egypt's Foreign Ministry called the halt in construction "an insufficient move."
- In addition to their ultimatum on settlements, Palestinian leaders are also now demanding as a precondition for talks that Israel agree that the frame of reference for negotiating a final agreement be an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders and to start talks where they left off in early 2009.
- At that time, PA leaders rejected then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's most far-reaching peace proposal to date. According to Abbas himself, the offer included 97 percent of the West Bank and a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem, among other provisions.

**Negotiations and cooperation can lead to a better future for both Israel and the Palestinians.**

- As both a trusted friend to Israel and as a mediator, the United States can and should play a helpful role in bringing the parties together. Ultimately, though, the conflict must be resolved between the parties themselves through direct negotiations, not through an imposed solution from the outside.
- To complement a negotiating process, Israel and the Palestinians should continue with cooperative efforts to spur economic development, ease movement and access for Palestinians in the West Bank and improve security with the continuing help of U.S. Gen. Keith Dayton and Jordan.
- Palestinian and other Arab leaders should help create a climate of peace by refraining from attempts to isolate Israel in international fora or by returning to violent resistance against Israel.