

XX February 2009

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States of America
Washington, DC

Re: Israeli Settlement Expansion around East Jerusalem: The “E-1” Plan

Dear Mr. President,

I wish to call your attention to a matter of utmost seriousness and urgency. There are growing indications that Israel is preparing to move ahead with implementation of the so-called “E-1 Plan”, one of the most—if not *the* most—dangerous settlement expansion projects in the occupied Palestinian territory~~West Bank~~.

The E-1 Plan is a massive settlement expansion plan located between the settlement of Ma’ale Adumim and Palestinian East Jerusalem that would effectively complete the encirclement of Palestinian East Jerusalem, thereby foreclosing the possibility of a two-state solution. The plan, which covers an area of 12.4 km² (3,074 acres) of previously-confiscated Palestinian land, calls for the construction of 3,500 housing units (capable of housing some 14,000 settlers), 10 hotels, an industrial park, entertainment and sports centers, a regional cemetery and various other commercial and government facilities.

The goal of the E-1 Plan is to consolidate Israeli control over the whole of Jerusalem by connecting Ma’ale Adumim with other settlements inside East Jerusalem and with West Jerusalem. The strategic location of E-1, overlooking both the Holy City and the Jordan Valley, and its massive size would ensure Israeli control over the vital corridor connecting the northern and southern parts of the West Bank, as well as over all of Metropolitan Jerusalem, which accounts for 30-35 percent of the Palestinian economy.

If implemented, the plan would permanently sever East Jerusalem and its 250,000 Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank and cut the West Bank in two, thereby eliminating the possibility of a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem as well as a viable Palestinian state. In addition, the E-1 Plan would deprive East Jerusalem of the last remaining area for the city’s future growth and economic development.

As you know, successive U.S. administrations have strongly opposed the E-1 Plan and have communicated their opposition to the Government of Israel, both privately and publicly, on numerous occasions. Understanding the catastrophic implications of the E-1 Plan for the two-state solution, and hence on prospects for Arab-Israeli peace more broadly, President Bush secured a commitment from then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon not to proceed with the plan.

While construction of the residential component of the E-1 Plan has not yet begun, large-scale Israeli construction and infrastructure development inside the E-1 area has been underway since June 2004, including internal and access roads, as well as the construction of two fully functional police stations, in violation of both the Roadmap and Israel’s explicit commitments to the U.S. government.

According to recent press reports, Israel has invested nearly NIS 200 million (US \$50 million) in the past two years in infrastructure preparation within the E-1 area in order to pave the way for future residential construction and other aspects of the plan. The fact that road signs placed along the highway connecting Ma'ale Adumim and E-1 to Jerusalem now declare, "Welcome to Maveseret Adumim," the name of the planned new residential settlement in E-1, which does not yet exist, is yet another ominous indication that residential construction inside the E-1 area may be imminent.

Unfortunately, Prime Minister Olmert has pledged to move ahead with the implementation of E-1, as have virtually all of his predecessors since the plan was introduced in 1994. For his part, Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu, who is now poised to become Israel's next prime minister, has been outspoken in his enthusiastic support for E-1's implementation, a point he emphasized recently by launching his election campaign from the site of the E-1 area.

As you know, Israeli settlement activity constitutes the *single* greatest threat to the two-state solution. And nowhere is the threat to the viability of a future Palestinian state and our shared vision of two states living side by side in peace and security more serious than in and around East Jerusalem. No credible negotiations or peace process can take place whilst Israel continues to unilaterally pre-determine the outcome of such negotiations on the ground. This has been reaffirmed by our recent experiences following the Annapolis conference, during which Israeli settlement activity and other violations of Israel's Roadmap obligations increased dramatically, even as we continued to negotiate.

Therefore, in light of these developments, and the stated intentions of both the current Israeli government and its likely successor to move ahead with the E-1 Plan, it is crucial that the United States *reiterate its strong opposition to any further construction or development in the E-1 area*, as well as reaffirm Israel's clear and unambiguous Roadmap obligation to "freeze all settlement activity", at this time.

Such a declaration, particularly when made by the President of the United States, would undoubtedly go a long way in creating an environment that is conducive to a resumption of negotiations. In furtherance of this goal, we are prepared to work with your Administration to identify effective means for implementing a genuine settlement freeze by Israel.

Please accept the assurances of our highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]

Mahmoud Abbas
President of the Palestinian National Authority
Chairman of the Executive Committee, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)

cc. Quartet Members
Lt. Gen. Paul Selva, Monitor for Roadmap Compliance