

Netanyahu Ministers Join Thousands of Israelis in 'Resettle Gaza' Conference Calling for Palestinians' Transfer

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We need to find a legal way to voluntarily emigrate [Palestinians],' said Israel's far-right national security minister, before a Likud lawmaker explained that in war, 'voluntary is a state you impose [on someone] until they give their consent'; conference blasted by Israeli opposition head: 'it undermines a potential deal and endangers IDF soldiers'

National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir speaking at the conference on Sunday. Credit: Olivier Fitoussi

Thousands of participants gathered in Jerusalem Sunday for a far-right conference calling for the re-settlement of the Gaza Strip and the transfer of the Palestinian population living there.

Entitled "Conference for the Victory of Israel – Settlement Brings Security: Returning to the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria," the conference included speeches from many public figures, including Knesset members and ministers from the current coalition government, as well as rabbis, settlement activists, families of soldiers currently fighting in Gaza, and heads of southern councils.

During the conference, participants were presented with details of Jewish settlements, maps, and the stages of preparation, along with calls for decision-makers to acknowledge that a war victory can only be claimed through the Jewish resettling of the Gaza Strip.

Far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir of the Otzma Yehudit party and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich of the Religious Zionist party attended the event, featuring as key speakers.

Itamar Ben-Gvir (center) with other Israeli lawmakers at the 'Resettle Gaza' conference on Sunday. Credit: Olivier Fitoussi

"If we don't want another October 7, we need to go back home and control [Gaza]. We need to find a legal way to voluntarily emigrate [Palestinians] and impose death sentences on terrorists," said Ben-Gvir during his speech to the conference.

"I turn to you, PM Netanyahu: this is time for brave decisions," continued Ben-Gvir.

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said Jewish children who were forced out of Gaza when Israel disengaged from the Strip in 2005 must return as settlers: "We are rising, we have a nation of lions [and many children] are returning there as combat fighters. We must make sure they return there as settlers to protect the people of Israel."

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich speaking at the conference on Sunday.

Other coalition lawmakers in attendance included Likud MK Haim Katz, Yitzhak Goldknopf of the United Torah Judaism Party, Orit Strock of the Religious Zionist Party, and Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi of Likud.

On the prospect of “voluntary emigration” of Palestinian civilians from Gaza, which was brought up numerous times by Israeli coalition lawmakers since the war began, Minister Karhi explained that, in war, “‘voluntary’ is at times a state you impose [on someone] until they give their consent.”

Likud minister Haim Katz said that, “Today, after 18 years [from disengagement from Gaza], we have the opportunity to rebuild and expand the land of Israel. This is our final opportunity.”

The first speaker at the conference was Rabbi Uzi Sharbag, a former leader of the radical far-right terrorist Jewish Underground movement of the 1980s, whose members were arrested on terrorism charges for allegedly plotting to bomb the Dome of the Rock and other targets.

Approximately 20 ministers and lawmakers from Prime Minister’s Benjamin Netanyahu’s coalition said last week they would attend the event.

Israelis attend right-wing conference in Jerusalem, with map featuring renewed Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip, on Sunday. Credit: Olivier Fitoussi

Netanyahu was asked on Saturday if he agreed with their stance, to which he answered that “they are entitled to their opinions.” Pressed further, Netanyahu said his position on re-settling the Gaza Strip “has not changed.” Netanyahu has voiced opposition in the past to the idea of rebuilding Jewish settlements in Gaza.

Israeli opposition head Yair Lapid blasted the event, and said the government “reaches a new low tonight.”

Lapid stated that the conference “is a disgrace on the head of Netanyahu and the party that was once at the center of the national camp and is now being dragged aimlessly after extremists.”

“This poses an international damage, undermines potential negotiations, endangers IDF soldiers, and reflects a grave lack of responsibility,” Lapid added.

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P.S.

• Haaretz. Jan 28, 2024:
<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-01-28/ty-article/ministers-from-netanyahus-party-join-thousands-of-israelis-at-resettle-gaza-conference/0000018d-512f-dfdc-a5ad-db7f35e10000>