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Russia's UN Envoy Condemns Israel's Settlement Plan in East Jerusalem

By The Moscow Times

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A labourer works on an apartment building under construction in a Jewish settlement known to Israelis as Har Homa and to Palestinians as Jabal Abu Ghneim in an area of the West Bank that Israel captured in a 1967 war and annexed to the city of Jerusalem, Oct. 28, 2014.

Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, has called on Israel to halt the construction of new settlements in occupied east Jerusalem, describing the actions as "illegal."

"Israeli settlement construction in the occupied territories of the West Bank and east Jerusalem is illegal ... [Construction] should be frozen, and without delay," Vitaly Churkin said Wednesday according to a statement on Russia's UN delegation's website.

Churkin was speaking at an emergency session of the UN Security Council called Wednesday after Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced plans to build 1,000 new homes in east Jerusalem.

According to the Russian diplomat, the Security Council could be doing more to help Israel and Palestine negotiate a peace settlement in the area.

"There could be many options: A [UN] Security Council mission to the Middle East that the Palestinian delegation and other Arab delegations asked for three years ago, or a resolution establishing the end of occupation [within the] time frames suggested by Palestine," Churkin was cited as saying.

France, Spain and Britain on Thursday also publicly condemned Israel's announcement, with British Minister for the Middle East Tobias Ellwood calling it an "ill-judged and ill-timed decision," in a statement published on his department's website.

But Israel's ambassador to the UN, Ron Prosor, dismissed the criticism, calling Jerusalem Israel's "eternal capital," Reuters reported Thursday.

"I'm here to convey one simple truth: the people of Israel are not occupiers and we're not settlers. Israel is our home and Jerusalem is the eternal capital of our sovereign state," he said.

Israel occupied east Jerusalem in 1967, annexing it 13 years later in a move yet to be recognized by the international community.

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