

## **New Israeli settlements may not help in achieving peace: White House**

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**Washington:** The US government has hinted a potential shift in its Israel policy. In statement issued here on Thursday, the Trump administration said that the Jewishâ€™s construction of new settlements on occupied Palestinian land â€™may not be helpfulâ€™ in achieving peaceâ€™.

### **File pic of israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu**

â€™While we donâ€™t believe the existence of settlements is an impediment to peace, the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing settlements beyond their current borders may not be helpful in achieving that goal,â€™ White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer said.

The official, however, clarified that President Donald Trump has not taken an official position on the matter.

The White House was responding to Israel's decision on Tuesday to build 3,600 new homes on Palestinian territory in the West Bank. The new authorisation came a week after Tel Aviv had given the green light to building another 2,500 homes.

This was the first critical statement about Israel made by the new US administration, which had appeared to be adopting a much more favourable stance toward Israeli policies than former President Barack Obama.

Before adopting an official position on the matter, the White House said that looks forward to discuss the problem directly with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on February 15 when he visits Washington.

Since Trump took office on January 20, Israel has authorised construction of 5,500 homes in settlements on the West Bank and 566 in the Palestinian zone of East Jerusalem.

The UN Security Council in December 2016 - with the abstention of the US - approved a resolution urging Israel to halt all settlement expansion activity, but Trump, who at the time was President-elect, criticised that diplomatic move.

European nations such as Spain and France have "condemned" the recent Israeli decisions to increase the size of its settlements in the occupied territories, while the UN and the European Union have expressed "concern."

Palestine, meanwhile, has asked the UN Security Council to "take responsibility" and act to force Israel's compliance with the resolution.

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