



URGENT

PWG NOTE – ANNEXATION IS ACCELERATING, RECOGNITION OF PALESTINE IS IMPERATIVE TO HINDER IT

On June 21st, *The New York Times* published an article based on a *Peace Now* newsletter, reporting on a conference held by Smotrich, Finance Minister and junior Minister of Defense in charge of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and leader of the Religious Zionism party. In this conference Smotrich briefed the audience on an administrative initiative taken by the Israeli Government to expedite implementation of its annexation plans. In a recording of his remarks, he is heard to say: "we came to settle the land, to build it, and to prevent its division and the establishment of a Palestinian state, God forbid. And the way to prevent this is to develop the settlements." Smotrich goes on stating that the government's main effort now is "structural changes that will alter the DNA of the system for many, many years to come."

Smotrich's candor reveals what *The New York Times* called "a carefully orchestrated program" to transfer authorities in the West Bank from the military to civilian hands, with Prime Minister Netanyahu's full consent. In its report on the *Peace Now* exposé, the NYT pointed out that the Israeli Government's official position is that "the West Bank's status remains open to negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders," but Smotrich's statements "may make that posture harder to maintain." On the Prime Minister's support for the illegal agricultural outposts and the government's efforts to reduce the Palestinian presence in Area C, Smotrich said: "he is fully with us". That fraudulent duplicity is aiming to keep the international community at check, while the Palestinians are violently evicted from their lands, making way for Israeli illegal settlement expansion.

We regard this hybrid annexation policy, expedited in the wake of the Gaza War, which is designed to mislead the international community – in particular the US administration, the EU and the UN Security Council, a danger to the future of Palestine, Israel and the region. It is aiming to deflect any strategic pressure to cease the de-facto/de-jure hybrid annexation of the Palestinian territories by producing a false imagery of the occupation as temporary.

We are gravely concerned regarding this initiative, which is geared to bar any imminent pressures from the Biden administration, the EU principal member states and the UNSC, to secure a two-state solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict.

We urge the US, EU and the democratic powers to work without delay to pave the way for a post Gaza War regional peace, based on Israeli/Saudi normalization and a regional alliance, confluent with the Arab Peace Initiative.

Finally, it is our conviction that recognition of the State of Palestine by the US and other democratic powers, and its full membership in the UNGA, is imperative if the two-state solution is to be salvaged from such preemptive initiatives to annex the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Declaring recognition of the State of Palestine within the June 67 borders with East Jerusalem as its future capital is crucial.

Recognition ahead of peace negotiations will enhance the status of the battered PA, allow the Palestinians to gain *Parity of Esteem* and provide the two parties with the chance to endure the hardships of peace negotiations.

CHAIRPERSON

Amb. (ret.) Ilan Baruch

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Ms. Susie Becher

ADVOCACY TEAM

Amb. (ret.) Prof. Eli Barnavi * Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal * Mr. Bradley Burston * Mr. Akiva Eldar * Prof. Galia Golan * Prof. Amiram Goldblum
Prof. David Harel * Prof. Dan Jacobson * Prof. Menachem Klein * Amb. (ret.) Dr. Alon Liel * Mr. Shemuel Meir * Prof. Yossi Mekelberg
Ms. Jessica Montell * MK Mossi Raz * Mr. Hillel Schenker * Prof. Itzhak Schnell * Prof. Dmitry Shumsky * Mr. Nadav Tamir

"We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians." (Nelson Mandela, 1997)