

Israeli Ministers Attend ‘Return to Gaza Conference’, Speak in Support of Resettlement

A video of ministers Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich dancing at the conference could be used as evidence in future ICJ hearings, rights lawyer says

By [Middle East Eye](#)

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Thousands of Israelis, including ministers from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s party, gathered in Jerusalem on Sunday for a conference calling to resettle the Gaza Strip.

At least 12 Israeli ministers participated in the conference about rebuilding Israeli settlements in Gaza and encouraging the displacement of Palestinians from Gaza, Israeli journalist Barak Ravid [reported](#).

Ministers Itamar Ben Gvir, Bezalel Smotrich and several others from Netanyahu’s Likud party gave “supportive speeches”, he said.

Itay Epshtain, a special advisor for the Norwegian Refugee Council, shared a video in which National Security Minister Ben Gvir and Minister of Finance Smotrich stood arm-over-shoulder, dancing at the conference.

The human rights lawyer said that the image “would form part of the compelling evidence of noncompliance” with the International Court of Justice’s recent order to take all measures within its power to prevent acts of genocide and to punish acts of incitement.

[#Israeli](#) Ministers (including [#Smotrich](#) and [#BenGvir](#)) dancing at the conference would form part of the compelling evidence of noncompliance with the [#ICJ](#) order. pic.twitter.com/TQWDxWe0lu

— Itay Epshtain (@EpshtainItay) [January 28, 2024](#)

Epshtain said that within the first hour of the conference, a plan was presented for the re-establishment of 15 Israeli settlements and the addition of six new ones.

The proposed settlements are located in destroyed Palestinian communities.

Israel withdrew its military and settlers from Gaza in 2005 after a 38-year occupation, and Israeli **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** has said it does not intend to maintain a permanent presence again, but that Israel would maintain security control for an indefinite period.

There has been little clarity, however, about Israel's longer-term intentions, and countries including the United States have said that Gaza should be governed by Palestinians.

Earlier this month, the US State Department warned against statements from Smotrich and Ben Gvir, which advocated for the resettlement of Palestinians outside of Gaza, calling the rhetoric "inflammatory and irresponsible".

"We have been told repeatedly and consistently by the government of Israel, including by the prime minister, that such statements do not reflect the policy of the Israeli government," the State Department said in a statement at the time, adding that such statements should "stop immediately".

The conference was organised by the right-wing Nahala organization, which advocates for Jewish-only settlement expansion in territories including the West Bank, which are classified as illegal by international law and human rights groups.

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