

Olmert reins in settlement construction

by UPI

JERUSALEM -- Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has ordered that new settlement construction on contested land must be cleared by him personally. In a letter to the ministers of defense, housing and agriculture, Olmert wrote: "Your approval is not sufficient; from now on, all construction ... must be OK'd by me." Under heightened international scrutiny as peace talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas continue, Israel's construction of housing units in East Jerusalem drew criticism from the U.S. Bush administration, IsraelNN.com reported. In their quest for an independent nation, Palestinians say East Jerusalem should be its capital. U.S. President George Bush is scheduled to visit Israel next week. The news agency said Olmert's construction freeze was widely seen as a pre-emptive move to avoid further criticism of being antagonistic during the peace process. Danny Dayan of the right-leaning Israel Our Home party criticized Olmert and his Kadima party over the building moratorium, and called for opposition parties "to shorten the government's days and topple it; it has lost its right to exist."

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