

Israel airs East Jerusalem building plans

by UPI

JERUSALEM -- The Israeli government said Tuesday it intends to build 1,110 apartments in and around East Jerusalem, which Palestinians see as the capital of a future state. About 360 units will be constructed in the Har Homa settlement in the West Bank near Bethlehem, the International Middle East Media Center reported. Har Homa settlement was initiated illegally during the 1990s on land belonging to Palestinians from the Bethlehem area and nearby villages, the center said. The remaining 750 housing units would be added to Besghat Za'ev settlement north of Jerusalem. Israeli officials said the housing is aimed at young Jewish couples and to encourage Israelis to move into "city suburbs" as part of the "Greater Jerusalem" plan, which would encircle the city with a wall and settlements, separating it from the rest of the West Bank. Regarding this information, U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said, "I'm sure that our people are going to go in, ask for some clarification to understand exactly where in this process this announcement lies." McCormack said the announcement points up the importance of "getting to a final status agreement" between Israel and the Palestinian Authority regarding a number of issues, including a Palestinian state.

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