



**Efrat Settlement:
"Lifeline" for Israel's E-1 and E-2
Settlement and Annexation Plans**





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May 2026

Introduction

The settlement of Efrat constitutes one of the most dangerous Israeli settlement projects in the southern West Bank, given its central role in reshaping the political and demographic geography, specifically in the Bethlehem governorate. Yet, little attention is given to the danger it poses to more than 11 Palestinian villages and towns within the Bethlehem Governorate and profoundly threatens their future as a Palestinian historic and urban center.

Since its establishment in 1983, the Efrat settlement has evolved beyond being merely a residential settlement for Israeli settlers; rather, it has become an integrated colonial tool aimed at consolidating Israeli control over the southern and eastern extensions of the city of Bethlehem, restricting its natural urban growth, and imposing permanent geographic and political alterations on the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).

The strategic significance of the settlement stems from its location between Jerusalem and Hebron, as well as its role aimed at creating continuous territorial contiguity across the “Gush Etzion” settlement bloc. This effectively contributes to the isolation of southern areas from the north.

The expansion of Efrat was accomplished through a variety of illegal policies and measures: the confiscation of Palestinian land, restrictions on Palestinian construction and urban development in Area C, the construction of bypass “settler-only” roads, the expansion of

surrounding settlement outposts, and the escalation of settler attacks and terror to induce forcible displacement.

The Historical Emergence of Efrat Settlement

Efrat settlement was officially founded on lands of Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank on April 10, 1983, as part of the illegal Israeli settlement project in the “Gush Etzion” area south of occupied Jerusalem.¹ Its establishment was initiated by religious and settler figures of American origin, most notably Rabbi Shlomo Riskin and Moshe Moskowitz, the settlement’s first local council head.² Riskin played a central role in shaping Efrat’s ideological identity and linking it to the Israeli biblical narrative surrounding the so-called “Judea and Samaria.”³ This religious-nationalist background formed the ideological foundation of the settlement enterprise in the area, which sought to portray settlement expansion as a “historical right” rather than a grave violation and a war crime to colonize and annex occupied territory.

Although Efrat was officially established in 1983, the [official website of the Efrat Local Council](#) documents a yearly archival record revealing that planning intentions and settlement schemes date back to 1967, reflecting the long-term strategic vision behind the establishment and expansion of the settlement.

The settlement was built on confiscated Palestinian lands belonging to the villages of Al-Khader, Wadi Al-Nis, Artas, and Khirbet Beit Zakariya, where Israeli occupation authorities seized thousands of dunums under various legal and administrative pretexts, including the designation of land as “state land.” Over time, Efrat evolved from a relatively small settlement into a major settlement center regarded as the “unofficial capital” of the “Gush Etzion” settlement “bloc”, particularly in light of its rapid urban expansion and ongoing construction projects aimed at increasing its settler population and strengthening its territorial continuity with the surrounding settlement bloc of Bethlehem, in stark violation of international law.

Palestinian Villages Affected by Efrat Settlement

¹ [My Efrat](#)

² [Efrat](#)

³ “And you, Bethlehem Efratah, least among the clans of Judah, from you one shall come forth to rule Israel for Me, one whose origin is from ancient times.” (Micha, 5:1), [My rat](#)

The expansion of the Efrat settlement has direct and indirect impacts on at least more than **11 Palestinian villages and localities** in the southern Bethlehem area. These include:

1) Al-Khader

The town of Al-Khader is considered one of the Palestinian communities most affected by the establishment and expansion of the Efrat settlement. Land confiscation began during the initial establishment phase between 1979 and 1983, when approximately 2,180 dunams of land belonging to the town were seized for the construction of the settlement. These policies continued thereafter. In 2004, more than 1,700 dunams of Al-Khader's land, particularly in the Khirbet al-Nahla area (Givat Eitam/E-2), were declared "state land," a designation confirmed in 2009. Additional land seizures were recorded in April 2018 (72 dunams) and July 2018 (200 dunams), reflecting a continuous pattern of land appropriation.⁴

In total, it is estimated that around 20,000 dunams of Al-Khader's land have been confiscated or effectively isolated as a result of the expansion of the Efrat settlement, the construction of the Annexation wall, and the building of bypass roads. This has led to the loss of vast agricultural areas, restricted farmers' access to their lands, and limited the town's natural urban expansion, in addition to increasing its geographic isolation from Bethlehem and its surroundings.⁵

In the most recent context (2025), violations have intensified in the areas of Khirbet 'Aliya and Khirbet Abu Soda, both located within the Al-Khader surrounding. These areas are facing increasing pressure aimed at linking the Efrat settlement with nearby outposts and bypass roads, particularly Road 60, including active home demolition orders, new orders, and ongoing demolitions, as well as the imposition of a coercive environment based on daily surveillance by low-flying drones, continuous military presence, and restrictions on access to agricultural lands that are increasingly incorporated into the settlement expansion zone.⁶

2) Artas

Seized land of villages for the construction of the Efrat Settlement (dunams) around 1979–1983 in Artas is 421 dunams.⁷

⁴ [Al Khader Town Profile](#)

⁵ [Al Khader Town Profile](#)

⁶ [Strategic Encroachment: Israel's Annexation Push into Al Khader, South of Bethlehem – Balasan Initiative For Human Rights](#)

⁷ [Artas Village Profile](#)

Within the framework of the E-2 plan, Artas is experiencing an accelerating pattern of pressure on Palestinian landowners linked to the continued expansion of the Efrat settlement. Documented settlement activity in the area includes the installation of caravan units (first erected in 2024) and the construction of a synagogue overlooking the village and the Artas Monastery. In addition, there are plans to confiscate approximately 400 dunams of land in the area, which would further expand settlement control and intensify pressure on Palestinian landowners.⁸

The Artas Monastery (“Closed Garden Monastery”) is also facing de facto annexation pressures, as access to and use of significant portions of its surrounding lands are increasingly restricted in practice in favor of settlement expansion. Additionally, repeated incursions by Efrat settlers have been reported in the area of Solomon’s Pools, contributing to continued instability and restricted land use in the wider Artas area.⁹

3) Wadi Al Nis

Between 1979 and 1983, approximately 1,713 dunams of land belonging to Wadi al-Nis were confiscated for the establishment and expansion of the Efrat settlement. In the current and ongoing context, there are no officially declared land confiscation orders targeting Wadi al-Nis for the benefit of Efrat. However, the village continues to face sustained Israeli pressures that effectively restrict Palestinian access to land and natural development.

Settlers from Efrat regularly enter agricultural areas in Wadi al-Nis, particularly during plowing and olive harvest seasons, where farmers are subjected to harassment, intimidation, and threats, often in the presence or under the protection of the Israeli army. These practices contribute to the gradual restriction of land use through informal and coercive means rather than formal ‘legal’/ military orders. In addition, agricultural and development activities are frequently disrupted, including the construction of retaining walls, wells, and farm structures, which are halted or removed under various administrative measures such as “stop-work” orders, alongside occasional confiscation of agricultural equipment. Collectively, these practices have significantly undermined the agricultural livelihood of the village and function as an undeclared form of land control and restriction.

⁸ [Artas Village and Convent: A Living Heritage Facing Aggressive Annexation Policies – Balasan Initiative For Human Rights](#)

⁹ [Artas Village and Convent: A Living Heritage Facing Aggressive Annexation Policies – Balasan Initiative For Human Rights](#)

4) Khirbet Beit Zakariya \ Beit Sakariya

The seized land of villages for the construction of the Efrat Settlement (dunams) totals 45 dunams. While there is no precise or officially documented figure for additional land confiscations directly attributed to Khirbet Beit Zakariya, in practice, the village has become increasingly isolated and effectively enclosed within a settlement bloc consisting of approximately 12 settlements belonging to the “Gush Etzion” complex.¹⁰

This situation has resulted in severe geographical fragmentation, the loss of natural territorial continuity, and the effective restriction of access and movement between Khirbet Beit Zakariya and the surrounding Palestinian areas. Over time, this enclosure has significantly undermined normal spatial connectivity and contributed to the functional isolation of the village within the wider settlement system.

5) Al-Ma'sara

Al-Ma'sara is a Palestinian village located about 13 km south of Bethlehem, with a population of approximately 9,000 residents. Its lands, estimated at 6,000 dunams, extend from the Efrat settlement in the west toward surrounding Palestinian villages, placing it directly within the sphere of settlement expansion in the southern Bethlehem area.¹¹

The village is increasingly affected by its proximity to the Efrat settlement and the “Gush Etzion” bloc, with ongoing restrictions on land access and movement. Local reports indicate that Al-Ma'sara is at risk of large-scale isolation due to planned infrastructure and the expansion of the Annexation Wall, which could cut off more than 3,500 dunams of agricultural land, severely impacting livelihoods and resources.¹²

These measures, combined with road construction and land bulldozing linked to settlement infrastructure, contribute to the gradual fragmentation of the village's agricultural landscape and its increasing spatial isolation from Bethlehem and surrounding communities.

6) Jannatah

¹⁰ . [Beit Sakariya Village Profile](#)

¹¹ [Palestine Remembered - قرية المعصرة - خربة المعصرة \(מעסרה\) قضاء بيت لحم](#)

¹² [Palestine Remembered - قرية المعصرة - خربة المعصرة \(מעסרה\) قضاء بيت لحم](#)

Jannatah is located in the southern rural area of Bethlehem within a sensitive geographical zone surrounding the eastern and southeastern expansion of settlement activity in the governorate. Recent field data indicate that the wider area, including Jannatah and neighboring localities such as Abu Nujaym, Jurat al-Sham'a, Tuqu', and Harmala, falls within the broader context of the so-called "E2 Plan," a settlement framework aimed at expanding the Efrat settlement bloc and isolating Bethlehem from its natural geographical continuity.¹³

According to recent field reports, the area of "Al-Mawaleh," administratively linked to the Jannatah/Abu Nujaym vicinity, has witnessed attempts to establish temporary settlement outposts on privately owned Palestinian land, despite documented ownership, legal procedures, and formal complaints submitted by landowners. These practices form part of a wider pattern of gradual, informal expansion that typically precedes permanent settlement consolidation.¹⁴

A growing presence of settler groups has been witnessed in the area. Most of these settlers originate from the nearby settlements of Efrat and Teqoa, moving frequently toward the surrounding agricultural lands. This has contributed to an increasingly volatile environment characterized by repeated incursions and attacks aimed at restricting Palestinian access to land and imposing new on-the-ground realities that advance settlement expansion.¹⁵

7) Um Salamuna

The village of Umm Salamuna is located in the southeast of Bethlehem, within a geographical zone directly adjacent to the settlement expansion axis. On the ground, a gradual strategy of creating de facto realities has been implemented.

Settler movements originating from the Efrat settlement toward the surrounding agricultural lands have been increasingly taking place in the village. These incidents are accompanied by documented attacks in neighboring villages within the same geographic belt (Tuqu', Jurat al-Sham'a, Harmala, and Abu Nujaym). These attacks have involved direct violence and terror against civilians, including cases of live fire, physical assaults, and injuries among Palestinian residents.

¹³ Microsoft Word - Jannatah Town VProfile EN- Flora[1].doc

¹⁴ [Israel's E2 Plan: Relentless Settlement Expansion and SDefense inettler Violence – Balasan Initiative For Human Rights](#)

¹⁵ [Israel's E2 Plan: Relentless Settlement Expansion and Settler Violence – Balasan Initiative For Human Rights](#)

Regarding the Annexation Wall, the revised plan issued by the Israeli Ministry of Defense in April 2007 indicated that approximately 1.7 km of the wall would be constructed on the lands of Umm Salamuna village, resulting in the isolation of 326 dunams (14.9% of the village's total area) within the western "seam zone." This area is effectively annexed to the Israeli side through the construction of the Wall and includes eleven Israeli settlements and seven Palestinian localities (villages and hamlets).¹⁶

The construction of the wall on Umm Salamuna's lands began in December 2007, during which Israeli bulldozers bulldozed large areas of agricultural lands planted with olive, almond, fig, and grape trees to implement the project. In addition, settlers from the neighboring settlements of Efrat and Migdal Oz contributed to further damage to the village through the uprooting and destruction of fruit trees and additional harm to the agricultural sector.¹⁷

8) Khirbet al-Nahla

Khirbet al-Nahla is located southwest of Bethlehem and is experiencing increasing settlement-related pressure directly linked to the expansion of the Efrat settlement under the E2 plan. On 9 March 2024, a senior Palestinian resident (Male, 66 years old) documented extensive damage to his farm in Khirbet al-Nahla carried out by settlers.¹⁸ The damage included the destruction of a 25-meter-long tin fence, the dismantling of three water tanks, 20 lighting units (projectors), and two doors, in addition to the smashing of solar panels, cutting of electrical cables, overturning the contents of an agricultural structure, and the destruction of an electric motor and farming equipment. This reflects a pattern of direct targeting of agricultural infrastructure in the area.

At the broader planning level, reports indicate Israeli plans to construct up to **2,500 settlement housing units** in Khirbet al-Nahla near the Efrat settlement, to prevent any future urban expansion of Bethlehem, particularly in light of existing restrictions imposed from the north by the "Har Homa" settlement, thereby reinforcing a strategy of encircling the city from the south as well.¹⁹

¹⁶ Microsoft Word - Umm Salamuna EN - Flora..[1].doc

¹⁷ Microsoft Word - Umm Salamuna EN - Flora..[1].doto preventc

¹⁸ [خرية النحلة، محافظة بيت لحم: مستوطنون يلحقون أضرارًا بمزرعة ويسرقون معدات | بتسليم](#)

¹⁹ [مخطط إسرائيلي لبناء 2500 وحدة استيطانية قرب بيت لحم](#)

Historical data further shows extensive land confiscations in the area. In 2009, approximately 1,700 dunams of land north of Bethlehem near the Efrat settlement were confiscated by Israeli authorities. In 2004, around 1,300 dunams of land in Khirbet al-Nahla and Wadi Rahhal were declared “state land,” on the grounds of non-cultivation. However, landowners reported that settlers from Efrat had already prevented access to these lands since the 1990s and early 2000s.²⁰

9) Khallet al-Louza

Settlers have attempted to seize around 1,200 dunams of land spanning Khalayel al-Lawz, Khallat al-Qatn, and Khallat al-Nahla, with the aim of separating Bethlehem from its southern countryside and creating territorial continuity between the Efrat and Teqoa settlements. Following October 2023, approximately 200 dunams were reported to have been seized in the area, alongside intensified restrictions on agricultural access.²¹

Residents report recurring settler attacks, particularly during the olive harvest season, including threats, tree burning, crop destruction, and physical intimidation, often under the protection of Israeli forces. Movement restrictions, including earth mounds, concrete blocks, and iron gates, further limit access to agricultural lands and disrupt livelihoods.²²

BIHR field testimonies (April 2026) also document severe assaults by settlers from the Efrat settlement, including physical attacks, home invasions, intimidation of women and children, and attempts to prevent residents from accessing or returning to their homes.

10) Hindaza

While there are no officially documented land confiscation orders targeting Hindaza for the benefit of the Efrat settlement, field documentation indicates increasing pressure linked to nearby settlement activity and surrounding outposts.

According to field documentation (BIHR, 22 April 2026), settler caravans were observed overlooking Hindaza, reflecting a gradual expansion of settlement presence in the area. Residents also reported repeated incidents during April and May 2026 involving settler

²⁰ [العليا الإسرائيلية تنتظر في التماس ضد مصادرة 1000 دونم من أراضي بيت لحم](#)

²¹ [الضفة؛ محاصرة الفلسطينيين في معازل بين النهر والبحر](#)

²² [مستوطنون يستولون على أرض شرق بيت لحم وبتلفون مزارع وعات شمالاً](#)

groups originating from the outpost established on the Artas hill, including settlers from the Efrat settlement.²³

These groups were reported to have descended toward a shared water well serving the Hindaza area and deliberately tampered with the water source used for agricultural and basic domestic needs. These incidents raise serious concerns regarding the security of essential resources and the increasing pressure on local livelihoods.²⁴

11) Jurat al-Sham'a

On Wednesday, 4 March 2026, the Israeli occupation authorities delivered a military order to residents of the village under the title “Security Instructions,” requiring the removal of wild vegetation and the uprooting of olive trees and their transfer to an alternative location from a plot of land measuring approximately 7.8 dunams in the area known as “Shu’ab Qays.” The order was justified on security grounds and aimed at establishing a security zone alongside Road 3157, intended to protect settler movement between settlements in the Gush Etzion bloc.²⁵

According to the details of the order, landowners were given a very short timeframe of only 24 hours to submit objections before implementation. On 6 March 2026, Israeli bulldozers returned to the site and began removal operations, after which landowners were instructed to carry out the uprooting themselves within an extended deadline ending on 8 March 2026. As a result, farmers were forced to uproot approximately 483 fruit trees, including olive, grape, and almond trees, in addition to dismantling a 100-square-meter agricultural greenhouse.²⁶

In addition, Israeli authorities conducted land surveying and marking operations in the area with the aim of expanding settler roads and connecting them to the vicinity of the “Gush Etzion” settlement bloc, resulting in the further appropriation of agricultural land from Jurat al-Sham’a and surrounding villages. There have also been repeated attempts by settlers to place mobile caravans on privately owned land as part of efforts to establish a new settlement presence in the area.²⁷

²³ [Artas Village and Convent: A Living Heritage Facing Aggressive Annexation Policies – Balasan Initiative For Human Rights](#)

²⁴ [Artas Village and Convent: A Living Heritage Facing Aggressive Annexation Policies – Balasan Initiative For Human Rights](#)

²⁵ [الاحتلال الإسرائيلي يستهدف مشاريع تنموية في قرية جورّة الشمعة جنوب شرق بيت لحم - POICA](#)

²⁶ [الاحتلال الإسرائيلي يستهدف مشاريع تنموية في قرية جورّة الشمعة جنوب شرق بيت لحم - POICA](#)

²⁷ [Dpal مستوطنون يضعون كرفانات في أراضي جورّة الشمعة جنوب بيت لحم | أخبار - 4](#)

12) Wadi Rahhal

The measures imposed by the occupying authorities on 31 December 2016, particularly the fencing of lands adjacent to the settlement of Efrat, illustrate the direct and cumulative impact on the village of Wadi Rahhal.²⁸ These actions have resulted in land confiscation, severe restrictions on residents' access to their agricultural lands and livelihoods, and the deepening of the village's spatial isolation. This process is reinforced by recurrent settler attacks, including harassment of residents, assaults on property, demolitions, and repeated incursions into the village by Efrat settlers, often under the protection of Israeli forces. Together, these practices form part of a systematic settlement-expansion policy that provides comprehensive infrastructure for settlers while deliberately marginalizing Wadi Rahhal and denying it basic services.²⁹

13) Western Rural Area (Husan, Battir, Wadi Fukin)

Although there is no direct impact from Efrat on these areas yet, we cannot separate it from the context of settlement expansion in Beitar Illit, and Efrat operates as an interconnected system within the "Gush Etzion" bloc, intensifying geographic pressure on nearby Palestinian villages, including Husan, Battir, and Wadi Fukin. This has led to the gradual reduction of agricultural land and the disruption of natural urban and rural continuity between Bethlehem and Hebron.

The Liberal Marketing of Efrat Settlement & the Whitewashing of settler colonialism

Since its early years, Israeli settlement institutions have focused on developing advanced urban infrastructure and public services within the settlement of Efrat to encourage long-term settlement,³⁰ consolidate the Israeli presence around the city of Bethlehem, and portraying the settlement as a distinct model compared to other Israeli settlements in the West Bank, one that appeared more "moderate," socially open, and politically "liberal".³¹

²⁸ [الاحتلال يضع أسلاكاً شائكة حول الأراضي المحاذية لمستعمرة "إفراة" في قرية واد رحال](#)

²⁹ [سكان منطقة واد رحال بين مخالب الاستيطان وتهميش المسؤولين](#)

³⁰ [Efrat: The story of one of Israel's most unique, successful settlements | The Jerusalem Post](#)

³¹ [Efrat: The story of one of Israel's most unique, successful settlements | The Jerusalem Post](#)

The marketing of the settlement rested on two primary pillars. The first was described as “moderate religious Zionism.”³² In its early stages, the settlement attempted to cultivate an image of a modern and relatively socially diverse settlement community. Over time, however, this character gradually diminished, and Efrat evolved into one of the most prominent strongholds of the religious Zionist movement in the West Bank. With the growing influence of far-right and religious extremist movements within Israeli society, the contradictions underlying Efrat’s “moderate” image have become increasingly visible. Israeli election results in 2022 showed that nearly half of the settlement’s residents voted for the far-right Religious Zionism Party, reflecting a growing ideological shift within the settlement itself.³³

In line with this liberal branding strategy, the U.S. consulate is opening a branch in Efrat in the West Bank for the first time since 1967, in a move widely seen as further entrenching and normalizing unlawful occupation and settlement realities on oPt.³⁴

The second pillar is the adoption of a promotional discourse of “building bridges instead of walls.” Settlement officials historically emphasized that Efrat was not surrounded by a fortified wall or closed security fence, unlike many other settlements, claiming that its founders rejected the idea of living “behind barriers” while residing on what they considered their land.³⁵ Israeli settlement authorities in Efrat have also claimed to allow certain Palestinian farmers access to agricultural lands located between the “Tamar” and “Zayit” neighborhoods, which are privately owned by Palestinians, presenting such measures as evidence of “coexistence” and economic cooperation.³⁶ However, Palestinian landowners have stated that many of them are in fact denied regular access to their lands, despite some owning hundreds of dunums in the area. Several landowners have reportedly submitted petitions before Israeli courts seeking permission to access and cultivate their own properties, illegally stolen and de facto annexed, often with limited or no effective remedy.³⁷

Despite the ‘humanitarian and social initiatives’ within Efrat Settlement, the attempt to promote it as such largely fails, given that it is an illegal settlement, built illegally on occupied territory and part of a broader settler-colonial structure based on unlawful land

³² [Efrat: The story of one of Israel's most unique, successful settlements | The Jerusalem Post](#)

³³ Judy Maltz (November 16, 2022). "Election results show that 'moderate' settlement Efrat is anything but". *Haaretz*.

³⁴ [In first, US embassy to provide consular services at popgoven that a is-ups in 2 West Bank settlements | The Times of Israel](#)

³⁵ [Efrat: The story of one of Israel's most unique, successful settlements | The Jerusalem Post](#)

³⁶ [Efrat: The story of one of Israel's most unique, successful settlements | The Jerusalem Post](#)

³⁷ Based on field observations and testimonies collected by BIHR, [Strategic Encroachment: Israel's Annexation Push into Al Khader, South of Bethlehem – Balasan Initiative For Human Rights](#)

confiscation, deliberate restrictions on Palestinian urban development, and control over natural resources and mobility, resulting in the overall de-development of Palestinian society and economy.³⁸ Available data indicate that more than 4,300 dunums of Palestinian land were confiscated for the expansion of the settlement; construction, bypass roads, and infrastructure networks - destroying livelihoods and the rural economy in the process.

The reliance of some Palestinians on employment or services in settlements does not reflect an equal relationship. Rather, it reflects exploitation of their labor and a deliberate de-development policy; it is connected to Israeli policies that have weakened the Palestinian economy and created a form of forced economic dependency among the occupied population, in addition to the broader impacts of settlement expansion, including the isolation of Palestinian communities, land expropriation, and the disruption of geographic continuity.³⁹

This contradiction is further highlighted by Efrat's discharge of untreated wastewater toward the lands of Al-Khader, which has led to the pollution of agricultural areas and groundwater sources that Palestinian communities depend on for their livelihoods and agricultural activities.⁴⁰

Efrat within the “Givat Eitam” (E-2), E-1 Settlement Projects, and By-pass Road 60

Efrat is considered the parent settlement from which the “Givat Eitam” project emerges, referred to as “E-2”, which is comparable to the E-1 project east of Jerusalem. The project develops through the eastern expansion of Efrat on a strategic hill east of the village of al-Nuḥla (Khallet al-Nuḥla), south of the city of Bethlehem, covering approximately 1,341 dunums declared “state land” in 2004, in addition to 309 dunums claimed by the Jewish National Fund (JNF).⁴¹ The plan envisions the construction of between 2,500 and 7,000 housing units, effectively doubling the size of the Efrat settlement and creating a new settlement that is geographically separated from the existing built-up area, in clear disregard of Palestinian territorial contiguity and total contempt of the prohibitions under international law.⁴² In this context, E-2 is understood as a complementary component to the function of E-1, where the former targets the southern West Bank (Bethlehem and Hebron), while the

³⁸ [This Is Ours – And This, Too : Israel's Settlement Policy in the West Bank | B'Tselem](#)

³⁹ [This Is Ours – And This, Too : Israel's Settlement Policy in the West Bank | B'Tselem](#)

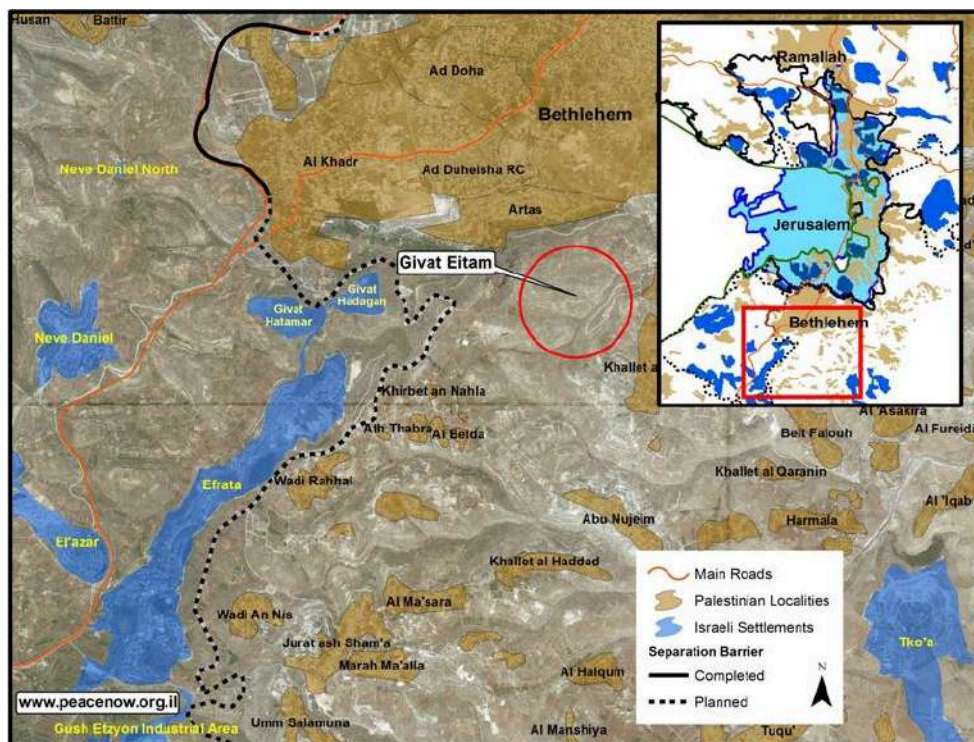
⁴⁰ [Microsoft Word - Al Khadr TProfile EN-Flora\[1\].doc](#)

⁴¹ [סיפור ההכרזה בעיטם:](#)

⁴² [סיפור ההכרזה בעיטם:](#)

latter aims to separate the northern West Bank from the south through the Jerusalem perimeter.

At the infrastructural level, Efrat's strategic role is evident in its location east of Road 60, the only main artery connecting the southern West Bank with Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Any expansion of Efrat or the implementation of the E-2 project would therefore entail a restructuring of this vital route, effectively severing it and fragmenting Palestinian geographical continuity, thereby undermining any possibility of future regional connectivity. In contrast, the plan seeks to secure continuous Israeli settlement contiguity from the Green Line in the west through the "Gush Etzion bloc" and onward to settlements east of Bethlehem. Within the context of Bethlehem, the E-2 project is viewed as a "final blow" to the Governorate, as it is already encircled from the north by settlements (Gilo and Har Homa) and from the west by the Annexation Wall, leaving the southern side as the only remaining space for natural urban expansion. With the completion of Efrat's expansion, this final outlet would be entirely closed, resulting in a complete geographic siege of the city.⁴³



(Map by Peace Now)

Along with the planned expansion, Israel's strategy was centered on creating facts on the ground.

⁴³ [סיפור ההכרזה בעיטם](#)

Settlers first established an “agricultural farm” in 2011, east of the Palestinian village of Khirbet al-Nahla, with authorization from the Israeli Ministry of Defense, serving as an initial outpost. In 2014, a new road was constructed linking Efrat to the farm to facilitate access and development, clearly illustrating the use of infrastructure as a political tool to consolidate control before the completion of formal legal procedures.⁴⁴

Applicable Legal Framework & Analysis

The Efrat settlement in its entirety, including its associated expansion projects, just as all Israeli settlements in the oPt, is considered illegal under international law. This position was conclusively affirmed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its 2004 Advisory Opinion, which held that all Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have been established in flagrant violation of international law, constitute a breach of the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination, and impede the application of international humanitarian law in the oPt. It was further reinforced in the ICJ’s 2024 Advisory Opinion, which, besides concluding that Israel’s presence in the oPt is unlawful, reaffirmed the illegality of Israel’s settlement regime in the oPt and reiterated that it is contrary to international law, including prohibitions on annexation and the obligation not to recognize or assist in maintaining an unlawful situation.

This characterization is further grounded in international humanitarian law, in particular [Article 49\(6\) of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949](#), which prohibits an occupying power from transferring parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies. Settlement-related policies linked to Efrat, including land confiscation and the restructuring of demographic and spatial realities, may also engage responsibility under international criminal law and could amount to war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, particularly in relation to the transfer of the occupying power’s civilian population into occupied territory.

From the perspective of international humanitarian law and human rights law, the continued expansion of Efrat constitutes serious violations of the rights of the protected population, including the rights to housing, freedom of movement, development, and self-determination, among other fundamental rights.

⁴⁴ [סיפור ההכרזה בעיטם](#)

The expansion of Efrat relies on an internal Israeli legal and administrative system that reinterprets land ownership rules in the West Bank to enable the reclassification and reallocation of occupied land for illegal settlement purposes. The central mechanism in this framework is the “State Land Declaration” policy, which is based on an Israeli interpretation of the [Ottoman Land Law of 1858](#), allowing land that is unregistered or uncultivated for certain periods to be designated as “state land.” Although presented as a neutral administrative procedure, its practical application demonstrates a direct link to settlement expansion plans, particularly in the area surrounding Efrat and the “Gush Etzion bloc”. Military orders and structural planning regimes are used as complementary tools to reorganize land use, restrict Palestinian access, and gradually integrate these areas into the settlement infrastructure, thereby transferring effective control over the land to the settlement. This is particularly evident in the case of Efrat’s expansion toward Givat Eitam (E-2), where available data indicate a structural imbalance in the allocation of “state land,” with the overwhelming majority allocated for Israeli use and only a minimal portion designated for Palestinian needs, reflecting a systematic pattern in land administration within the context of occupation.

In this context, certain institutional actors, such as the Jewish National Fund (JNF – Himnuta), have contributed to the creation of facts on the ground through early-stage activities on land prior to the completion of formal legal procedures, thereby entrenching a de facto annexation. The reclassification of Givat Eitam as “state land” was subject to prolonged legal challenges spanning several years; however, these challenges ultimately resulted in the Israeli High Court of Justice upholding the administrative decision.

From the perspective of international humanitarian law, the rules governing occupation require the occupying power to administer the territory for the benefit of the protected population and to refrain from introducing permanent demographic or territorial changes. Nevertheless, practices associated with Efrat indicate that land allocation is conducted in a manner that prioritizes manifestly illegal settlement expansion at the expense of Palestinian lands, particularly in the Bethlehem area.

The findings presented in this report indicate that the Efrat settlement has become a significant and expanding settlement complex, exerting severe pressure on Bethlehem, and a serious process of erasure affecting one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

At the same time, extensively documented settler violence and terror contribute to an increasingly coercive environment for the Palestinian population, restricting freedom of movement, land use, and residence, and reinforcing patterns of gradual displacement.

