

VPRS 80354

PEIRA

3/12/84

ISRAEL

CULTIVATION MAY BE EXPANDED TO JORDAN RIVER PLATEAU

TAL71029 Tel Aviv HA'ARETZ in Hebrew 17 Feb 82 p 1

[Report by Gid'on Alon]

[Text] The World Zionist Organization settlement department is opposed to cultivating agricultural land in the Jordan River bank [Ga'on Hayarden] area, east of the security fence in the Jordan Rift Valley. This was disclosed yesterday by the head of the settlement department, Matityahu Drobles, and the director general of the settlement department, Yehuda Deqel, in a meeting of the World Zionist Organization finance committee.

The head of the Jewish Agency settlement department, Prof Ra'anan Weitz, recently sent a letter on this issue to the chairman of the Inter-Institutional Committee on Settlements, Deputy Prime Minister Simha Ehrlich, in which he noted that "upon the lifting of the security restrictions on the cultivation of land east of the security fence in the Jordan Rift Valley, possibilities have emerged for exploiting the area known as Ga'on Hayarden. This additional land and other areas in the Jordan River Plateau [Kikar Hayarden] and in the center of the Jordan Rift Valley which have so far not been taken into consideration for agricultural exploitation would enable a considerable expansion of Jewish settlement in the Jordan Rift Valley area," Professor Weitz noted.

He emphasized that an initial survey showed that the additional arable land totals a net 29,000 dunam. "These areas are composed of state-owned land and they may be cultivated without any restrictions," Professor Weitz pointed out. He proposed to issue instructions to the pertinent institutions (the settlement department and the planning authority) to plan the settlement alignment in the Jordan Rift Valley with the aim of establishing another 10 settlements on these land reserves. Last Monday, the Inter-Institutional Committee on Settlements approved in principle Professor Weitz's proposal.

CSO: 4423/112