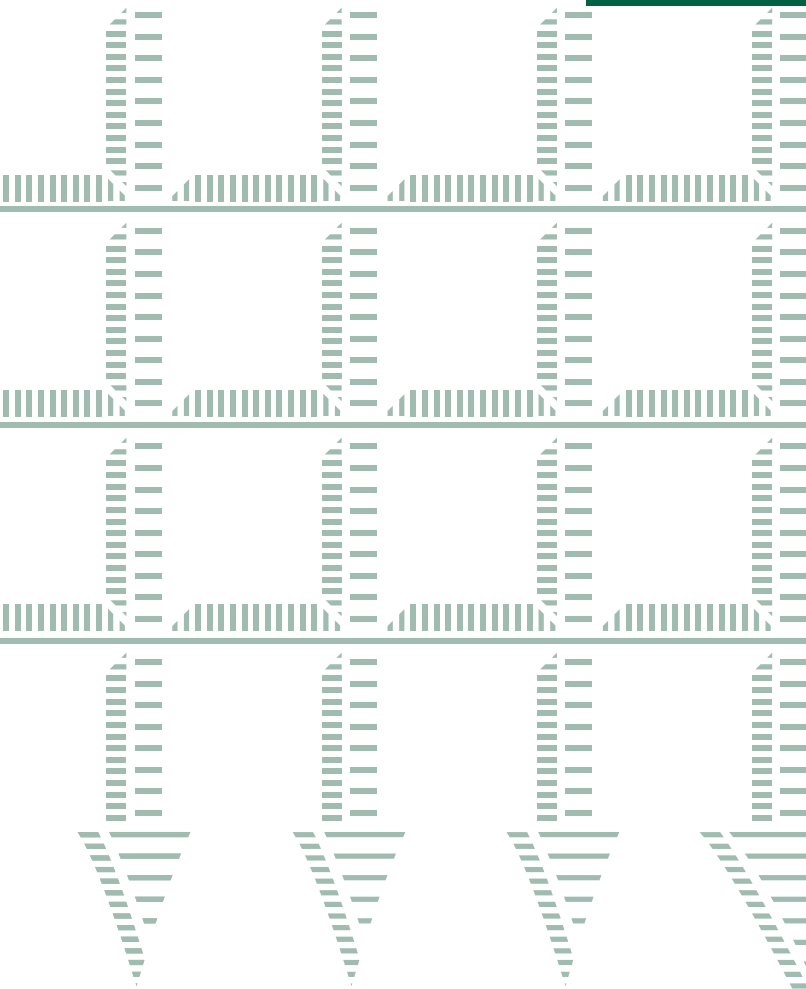


International Development Committee

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Government Response

Third Special Report of Session 2024–25

HC 797



International Development Committee

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Third Special Report

The International Development Committee published its Third Report of Session 2024–25, [Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#) (HC 373) on 17 January 2025. The Government’s response was received on 13 March 2025 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

1. The UK Government is grateful to the International Development Committee for its report on *Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, published on 17 January 2025.
2. The situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) has been a priority for this government since it took office. The Government has been consistently clear that we need to see a sustained ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages cruelly detained by Hamas, better protection of civilians, the upholding of international law, significantly more aid consistently entering Gaza, and a credible path to long-term peace and stability based on a two-state solution.
3. The Government strongly welcomes the ceasefire which took effect on 19 January 2025 and has been encouraging all parties to sustain the ceasefire and move it from phase 1 through phase 2 to phase 3, and into a lasting peace.
4. A lasting peace will require a political process, and a political horizon towards a two-state solution. Only that over time will ensure the long-term peace and security of both Palestinians and Israelis.

5. Since 5 July 2024, the UK Government has:
- Called for the **immediate release of all hostages**¹ and used all diplomatic avenues available to us to press for **a sustained cessation of hostilities**, including through our role on the UN Security Council.
 - Continuously **supported hostage talks** and the efforts of the US, Egyptian and Qatari negotiators to agree a ceasefire, and to bring the conflict to an end.
 - Deployed a team of experts providing **ongoing support to the family members of hostages** in the UK and Israel, including the family of British National Emily Damari. Since July 2024, the Foreign Secretary and Minister for the Middle East have met or spoken with all the families of UK-linked hostages.
 - **Led calls for regional de-escalation**^{2,3} with our US, French, Egyptian and Qatari counterparts, and multilaterally with the G7 and at the UN.
 - Press for much greater **protection of civilians**, and for as much **aid to enter Gaza** as possible. The UK has now announced over £129 million this financial year, for the OPTs and Palestinian refugees in the region.
 - **Reinstated funding for UNRWA**.⁴ Since July 2024, the UK has provided £41 million for UNRWA, providing vital services to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank and to Palestinian refugees across the region. £1 million of this was earmarked to help UNRWA implement the recommendations from Colonna’s report on UNRWA neutrality.
 - **Supported an uplift in humanitarian aid post-ceasefire**⁵: on 28 January the Minister for Development announced £17 million in funding to ensure healthcare, food and shelter reaches tens of thousands of civilians and to support vital infrastructure across the Occupied Palestinian Territories and neighbouring countries.

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-calls-for-immediate-ceasefire-in-gaza-on-first-visit-to-the-middle-east>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gaza-ceasefire-moment-of-hope-uk-minister-to-tell-un>

3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/g7-leaders-statement-on-ceasefire-and-hostage-deal>

4 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-restart-funding-to-unrwa>

5 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-humanitarian-support-for-gaza-as-ceasefire-allows-operations-to-scale-up>

- **Suspended relevant export licences⁶** to Israel for use in military operations in the Gaza conflict, following a review which concluded there is a clear risk that UK export items might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of IHL.
- **Delivered lifesaving UK medicines⁷** via a Jordanian-led helicopter initiative, as well as tens of thousands of tents and relief supplies through land and maritime routes.
- **Imposed sanctions⁸** against those perpetrating and inciting human rights abuses against Palestinian communities in the West Bank; since July 2024, we have sanctioned three illegal outposts and four organisations.
- **Condemned reports of sexual violence** on and since October 7 and deployed a team of experts to help support the work of national and international bodies and NGOs in responding to conflict-related sexual violence.
- **Begun planning for the ‘next phase’ in Gaza**, preparing to take a leading role in this process.
- **Regularly convened partners** on the financing and coordination of recovery and reconstruction in Gaza, to promote effective donor support.

We are continuing to:

- **Steer an informal contact group** of key Foreign Ministers known as the “Quint plus Quint”, with meetings in Riyadh and New York.
- **Provide UK support**, which has enabled over 550,000 people in Gaza to access essential healthcare, 647,000 to receive food, and 284,000 to access essential water, sanitation and hygiene services.
- **Support medically evacuated Palestinians from Gaza⁹**, through £1 million for the Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population, delivered through WHO Egypt.
- **Assist British nationals. 505** British nationals, their dependents, and other eligible persons (EPs) have been helped to leave Gaza.

6 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-suspends-around-30-arms-export-licences-to-israel-for-use-in-gaza-over-international-humanitarian-law-concerns>

7 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/middle-east-minister-for-developments-statement-28-january-2025>

8 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-uk-sanctions-target-illegal-outposts-and-organisations-supporting-extremist-israeli-settlers-in-the-west-bank>

9 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-pushes-for-middle-east-stability-on-ministerial-visit-to-egypt>

6. This response addresses the Committee’s recommendations in the order in which they appear in the “Conclusions and Recommendations” section of the report.

International humanitarian law and accusations of genocide

Conclusion and recommendation 1–2

7. ***Israel has killed many thousands of civilians across Gaza, while arrest warrants, including the charge of using starvation as a method of warfare against Gazan civilians, have been issued in respect of prominent Israeli politicians. The Committee awaits judicial resolutions on these matters. There is a danger that delays in applying full diplomatic pressure until the International Court of Justice has adjudicated on whether Israel’s actions in Gaza are genocidal or not may mean that many more civilians will die in the interim.***
8. ***The Government must detail how it intends to take immediate action to halt the attacks on Palestinian civilians and lands, notwithstanding its respect for judicial rulings on the matter. The Committee expects the Government to detail how it intends to do so in its response to this Report.***

Government Response: **Partially Agree**

9. Since the Government came to office, we have pressed relentlessly to bring this conflict to an end, free the hostages, protect civilians, uphold international law and establish a credible pathway to a two–state solution.
10. We are appalled by the deaths of civilians in Gaza, with over 48,000 killed in Gaza since the horrific 7 October Hamas attacks. We have repeatedly called on all parties to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and to uphold International Humanitarian Law.
11. The Government has repeatedly made clear its horror at the events of 7 October 2023 and the plight of hostages seized by Hamas. It is vital that all hostages are released, and that aid gets into Gaza.
12. Since the Committee’s report was published, the Government strongly welcomed the ceasefire that came into effect on 19 January, the release of hostages and the increase in aid entering Gaza.
13. We are deeply concerned that Israel has halted all aid into Gaza since 2 March. Humanitarian aid should never be contingent on a ceasefire or used as a political tool. On 5 March, E3 Foreign Ministers issued a

statement¹⁰ calling on Israel to abide by its international obligations to ensure full, rapid, safe and unhindered provision of humanitarian assistance to the population in Gaza, and making clear that a halt on goods and supplies entering Gaza, such as that announced by the Government of Israel would risk violating International Humanitarian Law. The ceasefire remains fragile and the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains precarious. We continue to press all sides to sustain the ceasefire and move it through its remaining phases and into a lasting peace.

14. Noting that the report was written before the ceasefire came into effect, the Government shares many of the concerns the Committee highlights about the restrictions on humanitarian access to Gaza and on access to healthcare for civilians in Gaza during this period.
15. The Government has been clear in our public messages and private engagement that the Government of Israel must abide by its international obligations and live up to its responsibility to ensure full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian assistance and the provision of basic services to the civilian population.
16. The Government has raised these concerns through our Ministerial and official contacts with the Government of Israel, and in Parliament. For example, the Foreign Secretary stated in Parliament in October 2024¹¹ that we condemned Israel's restrictions on aid into Gaza in the strongest terms, and called on Israel to let more aid in. The Foreign Secretary and Minister for Development raised aid access with the Government of Israel during visits in December 2024 and January 2025. In January 2025, the Minister of State for the Middle East raised our concerns about access to healthcare in Gaza with the Government of Israel. Our Permanent Representative to the UN also spoke at the UN Security Council¹² to call for the protection of healthcare workers and facilities and highlighted Israel's responsibility to ensure that civilians had access to medical care and medical practitioners could operate safely. The UK has also worked closely with international partners to deliver these strong messages, including through joint statements and letters in the E3 format with the governments of Germany and France.
17. The Government notes the Committee's comments on the legal process at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The Government is fully committed to international law and respects the independence of the court. It is the Government's long-standing position that any determination as to

10 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/e3-foreign-ministers-statement-on-humanitarian-access-in-gaza>

11 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/middle-east-foreign-secretarys-statement-28-october-2024>

12 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-deterioration-of-the-healthcare-situation-in-gaza-is-completely-unacceptable-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

whether genocide has occurred is a matter for a competent national or international court, and not for governments or non-judicial bodies. This avoids politicising what is a totemic and complex crime. As the Committee notes, the ICJ's case is ongoing, and we await their decision.

18. The Committee also notes the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in respect of Israeli (and Hamas) officials. The Government respects the independence of the ICC. There is a domestic legal process through UK courts that determines whether or not to endorse the warrant in accordance with the UK's ICC Act 2001. The Government is clear that there is no moral equivalence between Israel and Hamas, a proscribed terrorist organisation.
19. In response to the Committee's recommendation that the Government take immediate action to halt attacks on Palestinian civilians and lands, the Government will continue to urge all parties to uphold the ceasefire, protect civilians, sustain and increase the volume and types of aid reaching civilians in Gaza and ensure access to medical care for those who need it.

Forcible Transfer and Settlements

Conclusion and recommendations 3–5

20. ***Israel's policies and practices, including forcible evictions, considered by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion to be contrary to the prohibition of forcible transfer under the Fourth Geneva Convention, weaken the likelihood of a viable Palestinian state.***
21. ***Following the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, the Government must use the correct term of "forcible transfer" and not describe the removal of Palestinians from their land in the West Bank as "displacement".***
22. ***The Government must work with international allies to demand an end to Israel's forcible transfer policy and to seek legal redress for Israel's actions at the relevant international courts. This must include accountability for those settlers who illegally encroach on Palestinian lands, the bodies running the settlements and the politicians and figures in authority who support, encourage and authorise those settlers to do so, in line with the sanctions introduced by the Government of Canada.***

Government Response: **Partially Agree**

- 23.** The Government is currently considering the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Policies and Practice of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Government is fully committed to international law and respects the independence of the ICJ. We are considering the Opinion carefully with the seriousness and rigour it deserves. While this is under consideration, we are not currently able to respond to the committee’s recommendation in paragraph 32 on terminology.
- 24.** We are of the clear view that Israel should bring an end to its presence in the OPTs as rapidly as possible—and it should do so whilst making every effort to create the conditions for negotiations towards a two–state solution. Only that over time will ensure the long–term peace and security of both Palestinians and Israelis. The Government is also seriously concerned by Israel’s current extensive military operations in the West Bank and the 40,000 Palestinians reportedly displaced. Palestinians must be allowed home and civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected. The Government recognises Israel’s security concerns, but it must show restraint and ensure that its operations are commensurate to the threat posed.
- 25.** The Government has been clear that settlements are illegal under international law and condemns categorically settler violence which is wholly unacceptable. This violence undermines the rights and livelihoods of Palestinians and prompts further instability in the West Bank. We continue to make clear our objections to the expansion of settlements and settler violence with Israeli ministers and officials. The UK also supports initiatives such as the West Bank Protection Consortium which supports Palestinian communities affected by settler violence and displaced by settlement growth and violence.
- 26.** The UK has a longstanding policy to not comment on future sanctions measures; to do so would reduce their impact. The UK has implemented sanctions under the Global Human Rights Regime to hold violent settlers and their supporters accountable for heinous human rights abuses towards Palestinian communities. On 15 October 2024, the Foreign Secretary announced new sanctions targeting three illegal settler outposts and four organisations that have supported and sponsored violence against communities in the West Bank.
- 27.** We coordinate sanctions activity with our allies to maximise collective impact. This does not mean we will always take identical and simultaneous action—our respective sanctions regimes sometimes differ, as do the strategic objectives they serve. Where possible, the UK works closely

with like-minded partners on sanctions policy and approaches, to ensure maximum impact. This often means working with the European Union and Five Eyes partners, including Canada.

UNRWA

Conclusion and recommendations 6–8

28. ***If UNRWA is prevented from undertaking its crucial functions and no replacement is arranged, the humanitarian situation across Gaza and the West Bank will deteriorate rapidly, possibly irreparably, and will almost certainly lead to further conflict and increased displacement.***
29. ***The Government must do it all it can to ensure that UNRWA is permitted to continue to deliver its mandate. Should Israel press ahead with the ban, the UK Government must work with international allies to pressure Israel to lay out immediately its plans to deliver all services currently supplied by UNRWA.***
30. ***Because of the UK's historic ties to the region, the Government must lead on a co-ordinated motion at the United Nations that sets out clear and enforceable consequences should Israel undermine the UNRWA mandate.***

Government Response: **Partially Agree**

31. The UK recognises the vital role UNRWA plays in delivering the humanitarian response in Gaza, as well as providing essential services to Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) and across the region. This financial year the UK has provided £41 million to support UNRWA; including £1 million to support UNRWA to implement management reforms in response to the independent Colonna report on UNRWA neutrality.
32. The statement that the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Ministers of France and Germany made together on 31 January¹³ sets out the UK government's policy position regarding the Government of Israel's implementation of legislation forbidding any contact between Israeli state entities, officials and UNRWA; and prohibiting any UNRWA presence within Israel and East Jerusalem. The UK continues to support UNRWA's mandate to provide essential services and humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. UNRWA is the primary service provider

13 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/e3-foreign-ministers-statement-on-the-implementation-of-legislation-against-united-nations-relief-and-works-agency-for-palestine-refugees-in-the-near>

to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and is an integral part of the response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The UK deeply regrets the closure of UNRWA's Head Quarters and the Kalandia training centre in East Jerusalem and the disruption to UNRWA's services in the West Bank following Israel's military operations.

- 33.** On 05 March, the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Ministers of France and Germany called on the Government of Israel to abide by its international obligations to ensure full, rapid, safe and unhindered provision of humanitarian assistance to the population in Gaza.¹⁴ A halt on goods and supplies entering Gaza, such as that announced by the Government of Israel would risk violating International Humanitarian Law. Humanitarian aid should never be contingent on a ceasefire or used as a political tool. We continue to press for continuity of operations and recognise that no other entity or UN Agency currently has the capacity or infrastructure to replace UNRWA's mandate and experience.
- 34.** Our primary focus is working with international allies and the Government of Israel to ensure continuity of operations in the OPTs. Ahead of implementation of the legislation on 30 January, E3 Foreign Ministers wrote to Israeli Foreign Minister Sa'ar in November to outline their concerns. The Foreign Secretary also raised this with Foreign Minister Sa'ar during his visit to the region in January. The Minister for Development also set out our concerns with Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Haskel during her visit to the region in December. Ministers and senior officials remain in close contact with their Israeli counterparts as well as the UN Secretary General, the UN OCHA Emergency Relief Co-Ordinator, UNRWA Commissioner General and Deputy Commissioners General. Most recently the Foreign Secretary spoke to the UN Secretary General on 30 January.
- 35.** The UK has taken a leading role in its support for UNRWA and its mandate at the UN and in other multilateral fora. We have joined with like-minded partners at the UN Security Council to express our concerns, remind Israel of its international obligations and call on them to ensure UNRWA can continue its life-saving work.¹⁵
- 36.** The UK continues to make clear our political support for UNRWA's mandate. In line with our strong commitment to the international rule of law, the UK voted in favour of the Norway-penned UN General Assembly resolution which requested an ICJ advisory opinion on Israel's legal obligations to ensure the UN and international partners can provide Palestinian civilians can get basic, life-saving supplies.

14 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/e3-foreign-ministers-statement-on-humanitarian-access-in-gaza>

15 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uk-urges-israel-to-ensure-that-unrwa-can-continue-its-lifesaving-operations-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

International Law

Conclusion and recommendations 9–12

37. *Israel continues to decry in public any potential investigation or ruling by international courts, giving the impression that it does not pay due regard to international law.*
38. *The Government must set out immediately the steps it will take, in line with global allies, to ensure that Israel is held accountable for any ongoing breaches of international humanitarian law.*
39. *The Government must set out how it intends to work with the international community to bring an end to Israel's illegal occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.*
40. *The Government, in partnership with its allies, must demand that Israel abides by its obligations under the Geneva Conventions and customary international law and facilitates access to detainees for officials of the International Committee of the Red Cross.*

Government Response: **Partially Agree**

41. This Government is fully committed to upholding international law. As noted above, it is the Government's long-standing position that any determination as to whether international crimes have occurred is a matter for a competent national or international court, and not for governments or non-judicial bodies.
42. As soon as the Government took office, the Foreign Secretary ordered a review into Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law, given the grave situation in Gaza. This assessment, and subsequent assessments, concluded that there was a clear risk that certain UK exports might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations international humanitarian law (IHL). We took decisive action and suspended export licences for items that could be used in military operations in the Gaza conflict subject to the specific measures set out to Parliament excluding exports to the global F-35 programme from the scope of the suspension. It is not possible to suspend licensing of F-35 components for use by Israel without prejudicing the entire global F-35 programme, including its broader strategic role in NATO and wider implications for international peace and security. We are closely monitoring developments in Gaza following the ceasefire agreement and will keep this position under review.
43. The Government continues to raise our IHL concerns forcefully and directly with the Israeli government at ministerial and official level, including in relation to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure including

healthcare facilities, humanitarian access and ICRC access to detainees and their treatment. However, we have been clear that it is a matter for the international courts to determine whether there have been any breaches in IHL. As set out above, the Government respects the independence of the ICJ and the ICC.

44. We are of the clear view that Israel should bring an end to its presence in the OPTs as rapidly as possible—and it should do so whilst making every effort to create the conditions for negotiations towards a two-state solution. The Government continues to work closely with our international partners on opportunities for lasting peace and a two-state solution. In the immediate term, we are working with partners to support the surge of aid into Gaza, and we are building consensus for a post-conflict governance and security framework in Gaza that supports the conditions for a permanent and sustainable peace.
45. The Government is profoundly disturbed by reports of the mistreatment of Palestinian detainees held in Israeli detention facilities, including those detained at Sde Teiman Prison. We have raised these concerns with the Government of Israel. The Minister for the Middle East has also raised our concerns about medical staff from Gaza who have been detailed in Israel, and urged Israel to clarify the reasons for their detention, including cases such as Dr Hussam Abu Safiya. We have called on Israel to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) unfettered and immediate access to detention facilities. The IHL assessments continue to raise concerns about possible breaches of IHL, in the treatment of detainees, which was a contributing factor to the suspension decision.
46. The Government reaffirms our support for the ICRC as the only humanitarian actor with the experience, capability, independence and mandate to carry out their important responsibilities. We believe it is critical that the ICRC is given regular access to detainees to deliver on their independent visiting role, as enshrined within the 1949 Geneva Conventions. We continue to raise this with the Israeli government as a priority, including alongside our partners.

Recognition

Conclusion and recommendation 13–14

47. ***UK Governments of all colours have postponed the recognition of a Palestinian state. We are concerned, because of Israel's ever-expanding settlements in the West Bank, that this recognition is becoming impossible to achieve.***

- 48. *The Government must set out the steps it will take to recognise the state of Palestine, including conditions that need to be met and a timeline of planned actions.***

Government response: **Partially Agree**

- 49.** The people of the West Bank and Gaza must be given a credible route to a Palestinian state and a new future. That is why this Government supports a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people.
- 50.** Palestinian statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people. It is not in the gift of any neighbour and is also essential to the long-term security of Israel. We are committed to recognising a Palestinian state as a contribution to a renewed peace process which results in a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.
- 51.** In parallel, we are working to support and strengthen the Palestinian Authority as it delivers its reform agenda in preparation for recognition. This includes through £129 million in UK ODA to the OPTs this financial year, including £10 million in financial support and £5 million in technical assistance. The government has also appointed Sir Michael Barber KB as the UK's Envoy for Palestinian Authority Governance, to help strengthen the PA's delivery capacity and improve service provision.

Correspondent Banking

Conclusion and recommendation 15–16

- 52. *Israel's threats of terminating correspondent banking relations are unacceptable and significantly reduce the confidence and stability of the West Bank economy.***
- 53. *The UK Government must work with allies to exert further pressure on Israel to put correspondent banking relations on a more stable footing.***

Government response: **Agree**

- 54.** Correspondent banking arrangements between Israeli and Palestinian financial institutions are essential for cross-border trade and the fulfilment of payments. A failure to extend the indemnities necessary to facilitate these arrangements would have caused serious financial instability in

the West Bank and increased money laundering risks. In 2024, E3 foreign ministers issued two consecutive joint statements calling for the extension of these indemnities by at least one year.^{16,17}

55. The FCDO welcomed the decision by the Government of Israel in November 2024 to extend the required indemnifications by 12 months, following concerted diplomatic and technical efforts by the UK and international partners. We will continue to work with partners to support the annual extension of these indemnifications, which will provide the certainty needed for commercial activity within the West Bank to continue.

16 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/e3-foreign-ministries-call-for-the-urgent-renewal-of-israeli-palestinian-correspondent-banking-services>

17 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/israeli-palestinian-correspondent-banking-services-e3-foreign-ministers-joint-statement>