

**CARE International UK submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry on the
Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, December 2024**
Written evidence submitted by Care International UK (IPC0016)

1. CARE International UK and focus of submission

- 1.1. CARE is a leading development and humanitarian organisation working with for social and gender justice and working with crisis affected communities, including women and girls, to lead the fight to end poverty and inequality. CARE works in 109 countries, reaching 167 million people through more than 1,600 projects. We put gender equality and women's leadership at the heart of everything we do.
- 1.2. CARE International UK is providing evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee to centre women and girls within the UK Government's response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and efforts to bring about a ceasefire. Our evidence is rooted in our deep expertise and the experiences of the women we work with. We have been working in the West Bank and Gaza since 1948. For decades, we have collaborated closely with local partners to help strengthen democracy and civil society, with a particular focus on promoting women's political participation and social entrepreneurship, supporting their skills and agency development.
- 1.3. Since the escalation of violence in 2023, CARE has reached more than 800,000 people in need in Gaza. The catastrophic humanitarian situation and deliberate obstruction of aid by Israel means that CARE's and our partners' access has been shrinking.¹ Within the limited space we have, we are now prioritising safe water and medicine, as well as providing mental health support, and shelter kits to people whose homes have been damaged or destroyed. We are supporting women to give birth in as safe as possible conditions, given the situation we are describing below and the fact that nowhere is safe in Gaza, and care for their children. We are also providing dignity kits for women and girls containing sanitary towels and other feminine hygiene products.
- 1.4. This submission therefore highlights the specific impacts and life-threatening risks faced by women and girls, the role they play as frontline responders and caregivers, and the role they should be enabled to play as peacebuilders.

2. What can – and should – the UK do, in cooperation with regional and international partners, to help bring about a ceasefire?

- 2.1. The humanitarian community has consistently called for an immediate and sustained ceasefire in Gaza for over a year.² In October 2023, CARE joined over 300 NGOs in a collective, open call for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and Israel to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and further loss of civilian lives; since then, over 550 organisations have signed the open letter.³ International calls for ceasefire have developed and strengthened consistently.⁴

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-humanitarian-access-snapshot-8-13-november-10-december-2024>

² <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/joint-ngos-statement-calling-unsc-urge-ceasefire-gaza#:~:text=Joint%20NGOs%20statement%20calling%20on%20UNSC%20to%20urge,on%20the%20risk%20of%20conflict-induced%20famine%20in%20Gaza>

³ <https://www.careinternational.org.uk/press-office/press-releases/ceasefirenow-care-joins-over-300->

- 2.2. We welcome the UK Government's position to now call for a ceasefire and lasting peace in Gaza.⁵ However, the initial reluctance of both the previous Government and the Opposition to call for one, weakened pressure on conflict parties in the critical early stages of the conflict. Furthermore, the UK's actions within the UN Security Council, such as vetoing and abstaining on resolutions, has contributed to a cycle of 'normalised' catastrophic violence including contraventions of international humanitarian law (IHL). This unwillingness to take robust action as a UN Security Council Member State has facilitated ongoing violations.⁶ The level of blatant violations of IHL and disregard for laws and norms have led to the conclusion that only a ceasefire can safeguard civilians and humanitarian workers from these unprecedented threats to their safety.⁷
- 2.3. The brutal attack in Israel on 7 October 2023 and the scale of civilian deaths, injuries, and destruction in Gaza every day since then have raised serious concerns of atrocity crimes.⁸ Indiscriminate attacks that disproportionately harm civilians in Gaza are happening at an unprecedented scale.⁹ ¹⁰ Parties to conflict must respect international human rights law (IHRL) and must not commit atrocity crimes.
- 2.4. Likewise, the delivery of safe, unimpeded humanitarian assistance to communities requiring it must be facilitated and ensured by conflict parties in the midst of war, in line with their

[organisations-calling-for-an-immediate-ceasefire-in-the-gaza-strip-and-israel/](#)

⁴ Examples of calls for ceasefire by key stakeholders:

- On 6 November, the Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee [called](#) for an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire".
- At the UN, the call for ceasefire has been issued by the Secretary General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the UNRWA Director General, the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Action and Reconstruction, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO.
- In December 2023, Secretary General Guterres [invoked](#) Article 99, "the most powerful tool" he has, to put pressure on the UN Security Council and the international community at large to take action to achieve a ceasefire. This was the first time Article 99 was [invoked](#) in 30 years.
- Also in December, 153 UN Member States [voted](#) in favour of an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire" at the UN General Assembly
- In March 2024, the 27 EU leaders finally reached [unanimity](#) on the issue, calling for "immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable cease-fire". The European Parliament had previously, in January, adopted a [resolution](#) calling for a "permanent ceasefire", while Josep Borrell, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, had already [backed](#) the UNSG's call in December.
- In June 2024, with 14 votes in favour and the Russian Federation abstaining, the UN Security Council [adopted](#) US-drafted Resolution 2735, calling for an "immediate, full, and complete ceasefire".

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-foreign-secretarys-statement-on-the-ceasefire-between-israel-and-lebanese-hizbollah#:~:text=The%20UK%20was%20the%20first,pathway%20to%20a%20lasting%20peace>

⁶ <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240524-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

⁷ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-standing-committee/statement-principals-inter-agency-standing-committee-stop-assault-palestinians-gaza-and-those-trying>

⁸ *The term 'atrocity crimes' refers to three legally defined international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. In 2005, United Nations Member States made a commitment to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, a principle referred to as the 'Responsibility to Protect'. In this context, the term 'atrocity crimes' has been extended to include ethnic cleansing which, while not defined as an independent crime under international law, includes acts that are serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law that may themselves amount to crimes against humanity. [Doc.3 Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes_EN.pdf \(un.org\)](#)*

⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/israel-opt-new-evidence-of-unlawful-israeli-attacks-in-gaza-causing-mass-civilian-casualties-amid-real-risk-of-genocide/>

¹⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/06/un-report-israeli-use-heavy-bombs-gaza-raises-serious-concerns-under-laws>

obligations. However, with failing or flouted deconfliction¹¹ and the highest number of aid workers killed in a single conflict since records began, delivery of assistance and reaching communities that need it has become almost impossible.

- 2.5. Although humanitarian actors like CARE and our partners are working tirelessly to support women and girls on the ground in Gaza, the need for a ceasefire has never been greater. We are not merely witnessing a shrinking of humanitarian space, there is barely any space left to operate at all¹² after fourteen months of siege by Israel on the people of Gaza, depriving them of their basic necessities for survival.
- 2.6. Only by achieving a lasting ceasefire and addressing the root causes of this cyclical conflict arising from unlawful occupation, will the people of Israel and Palestine have the chance to live in peace, justice, and dignity. The conflict in Gaza is also an identified root cause of the ongoing regional conflagration – another reason why the international community must take urgent action in all possible regional and global fora to ensure that it comes to an end.
- 2.7. **We urge the UK to use all diplomatic levers at its disposal to urgently bring about an immediate ceasefire and bring an end to atrocities.** These levers should include, but are not limited to:
 - Using its influence as a Permanent Member of the Security Council, as well as other international fora such as NATO and the G7, to build international consensus for a ceasefire resolution.
 - Using its close diplomatic ties with the United States to urge an end to vetoes of UNSC ceasefire resolutions.
 - Apply diplomatic and political pressure to the Government of Israel to agree to an immediate ceasefire.
 - Expanding the suspension of arms export licences to the Government of Israel for use in military operations in Gaza, following a review of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law; this should include parts for fighter jets including the F-16.
 - Additionally, any ceasefire and ongoing peace negotiations must be rooted in respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) across Gaza and all Occupied Palestinian Territories.
 - All Member States and key stakeholders, including the UK who is also a signatory of the Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, must do everything in their power to prevent, condemn, and seek accountability for atrocity crimes by all parties. This includes applying diplomatic pressure to ensure Israel complies with the rulings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that ordered provisional measures to prevent genocide and should heed the findings in the advisory opinion.

3. What can be learned from the record of UK Government policies to date?

- 3.1. The UK Government's response to date has been largely gender-ignorant, insufficiently recognising the gendered impacts Palestinian women face and the role they play as responders. No

¹¹ <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/joint-ngo-submission-under-national-security-memorandum-20-state-humanitarian>

¹² <https://www.careinternational.org.uk/press-office/press-releases/gaza-new-israeli-orders-force-thousands-in-deir-al-balah-to-flee-again-and-disrupt-last-aid-hub/>

humanitarian funding committed by the UK Government in Gaza since October 2023 has been ringfenced for women's needs or women-led and women's rights organisations. This is despite extensive evidence that these organisations are best placed to respond not just to the needs of women and girls, but of entire communities. Additionally, a UK contribution to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supporting sexual and reproductive health did not come until months into the violence and represented only 5% of the UK's overall Gaza response funding.

- 3.2. Funding targeted to meet the specific needs of women and girls is desperately needed as women and girls are affected differently by the occupation, blockade, siege and conflict, and face specific risks. In Gaza, women are 70% of frontline health workers¹³ and 60% of caregivers¹⁴. They often carry a disproportionate burden of caregiving, which has now become an almost impossible task due to relentless bombardment, repeated forced displacement, terrible shelter conditions. The healthcare system is decimated, a public health disaster is unfolding, people face famine and starvation, with the highest levels of IPC 5 acute food insecurity ever recorded, and water and shelter are increasingly scarce.¹⁵
- 3.3. The impact of the conflict on pregnant Palestinian women is unimaginable. According to independent experts in the UN system, over 180 women are giving birth daily without pain relief. The experts noted that Israeli forces destroyed Gaza's main fertility clinic destroying over 3000 embryos, and pregnant women in Gaza have experienced so much trauma since October that they are three times more likely to miscarry.¹⁶ Women who manage to avoid this are now three times more likely to die in childbirth.¹⁷
- 3.4. Doctors and midwives, themselves displaced, are helping women give birth in temporary shelters as the bombs fall around them. Women give birth with no medical assistance at all, in a tent, or even in the streets amid rubble with the light of a mobile phone.¹⁸ Evidence from CARE's own humanitarian operations highlight how pregnant women are not even safe from gunfire. Testimonies from Obstetrics and Gynaecology doctors working for CARE's partner, Palestinian NGO Juzoor for Health and Social Development¹⁹, revealed the catastrophic impacts on women following of the intense bombardment of Jabalia camp and other parts of northern Gaza:

"We have seen more than 23 pregnant women among the injured coming to the hospital since last week, wounded either by shrapnel or gunfire, suffering from fractures. Some were in a critical condition" - Dr. Taghreed Al-Imawi, Kamal Adwan Hospital.²⁰

- 3.5. The lack of safe shelter and sanitation facilities entails additional protection risks for women and girls, including the risk of gender-based violence (GBV). With the healthcare system decimated and a lack of safe shelter and sanitation facilities, women and girls' health, privacy, and dignity are

¹⁵ [Starving in Statistics: CARE's response to Gaza Food Insecurity Report | CARE International](#)

¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/05/onslaught-violence-against-women-and-children-gaza-unacceptable-un-experts>

¹⁷ https://gaza-projections.org/gaza_projections_report.pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.careinternational.org.uk/news-stories/birth-under-bombs-9-months-of-hell-in-gaza/>

¹⁹ <https://www.juzoor.org/news/2741.html>

²⁰ <https://www.care-international.org/news/israeli-siege-northern-gaza-hundreds-thousands-people-endure-catastrophic-conditions>

threatened by lack of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services²¹, or even basic menstrual hygiene management products.

- 3.6. In the West Bank too, women and girls face heightened risks and harms, particularly harassment at checkpoints and, due to settler violence, leading to restrictions on their freedom, education, and economic activity. Increased unemployment and economic hardship impact the safety and well-being of families, increasing the risk of GBV towards women and girls; this includes early marriage, girls' removal from education, and increased risks of domestic violence. Gains made in women's economic empowerment in the West Bank, including through contributions by CARE and our partners, with demonstrated reductions in GBV and early marriage²², risk being lost due to the impact of movement restrictions and insecurity on women's small businesses.
- 3.7. The heartbreaking, inhumane and unacceptable experience of people in Gaza and the West Bank, including of women who are being totally deprived of their dignity, is a stark contradiction to the successive UK Government strategies, rhetoric and pledges to support women and girls in crisis. It is also reflective of a failure to recognise the central role that women play in leading their families and communities before, during and after conflict.
- 3.8. **We urge the UK Government to urgently apply a gender lens to all conflict prevention, response and resolution efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.** Specifically, we ask the new Government to commission an **immediate and urgent gender review of the UK's response to date in Gaza and the West Bank**, informed by Palestinian civil society and women's rights and women-led organisations; whilst continuing to deliver vital gender responsive humanitarian assistance.
- 3.9. As part of this review, **the UK must significantly increase the amount and quality of humanitarian funding going directly to women's organisations in Gaza.** Increased funding in Gaza should include the following:
 - The decimated healthcare system and workforce in Gaza must be urgently restored, strengthened, and provided with all necessary resources to meet the health needs of the people of Gaza
 - Funding gender-responsive health services, including via local and regional women-led organisations, to deliver the Minimum Initial Service Package for Sexual and Reproductive Health and GBV;
 - Funding local and regional women-led organisations to establish a hotline for maternal mental health resources and telehealth consultations for women who are giving birth without a trained attendant present;
 - Holding INGOs and UN Agencies accountable through the UK ODA they receive for removing the barriers to women's participation and leadership in crisis settings, and specifically to increase the percentage of their funding that is reaching Palestinian women-led and women's rights organisations.

²¹ https://careinternationaluk.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/Birth_under_Bombs_-_9_months_of_hell_in_Gaza_-_advocacy_brief_FINAL.pdf

²² <https://childmarriagedata.org/country-profiles/state-of-palestine/>

3.10. More broadly, we urge the Government to adequately fund the UK's National Action Plan to provide essential resources for the Women, Peace and Security agenda across the UK's humanitarian work.

4. How can the UK assure the resilience of efforts to bring about a lasting peace at a time of uncertainty caused by conflicts elsewhere and changes in leadership in the international community?

4.1. To secure lasting peace, ending and addressing the effects of Israel's military occupation are crucial. The ongoing occupation, including the suffocating siege on the Gaza Strip, home demolitions, and evictions of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, violates the fundamental rights, freedom, and future of Palestinians. These repetitive violent escalations threaten lives and undermine the human security and human rights of both Israelis and Palestinians.

4.2. In addition, resilient peace cannot be achieved without the meaningful involvement of all affected population groups, including minorities, youth, and women; this is even more important in the context of changing political leadership in the international community. Women are the backbone to crisis response, providing vital domestic and community lifelines. Yet they are grossly overlooked when it comes to dialogue and decision-making, including when it comes to peace. After surveying more than 13,000 women in 15 countries since 2020, in 2024 CARE published research showing that 91% of women led or actively participated in community response. 79% of women are finding ways to make communities safer, 71% are providing health services, and 46% are diversifying incomes to care for their families.²³ Gaza and the West Bank are no different, where women's participation will be critical to a resilient peace.

4.3. There is strong evidence to demonstrate that the involvement of women and girls in peacebuilding is key to ending conflict and building long-term, sustainable peace and stability.²⁴ Moreover, research shows that where women lead and participate in conflict prevention, response, recovery, and peacebuilding, societies are more stable, and peace is more durable.²⁵ Women's participation in peace negotiations, for example, results in peace agreements being 20% more likely to last at least 2 years and 35% more likely to last at least 15 years. While the participation of civil society, including women's organisations, in peace processes makes them 64% less likely to fail. Despite such strong evidence, however, women continue to be excluded from peace-building processes. In 2022, women represented only 16% of negotiators in active peace processes led or co-led by the UN, a decline from 23% in 2020.²⁶

4.4. **We urge the UK Government to champion and resource the full, meaningful and safe participation and leadership of Palestinian women-led and women's rights organisations in any peace negotiations and peacebuilding structures at all levels.** The Government must ensure that any future political process also meaningfully includes local Palestinian women's rights and women-led organisations, feminist movements and civil society.

²³ https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/WomenInWar_Report_2024.pdf

²⁴ <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>

²⁵ <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>

²⁶ <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>

- 4.5. More broadly, the UK has a strong political legacy in leading the international Women, Peace and Security agenda, including leading efforts to introduce UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Building on this historic leadership and using its current position as penholder on Women, Peace and Security at the UN, **we urge the Government to integrate women-led and women's rights organisations into international negotiations and peace processes.**
- 4.6. We welcome Minister Dodds reaffirmation of the new Government's commitment to the Women, Peace and Security agenda.²⁷ The Government must now **dedicate strong Ministerial-level leadership to championing and advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda across Government and in the UK's international diplomacy.** Strong UK leadership on the Women, Peace and Security agenda is not only critical for contributing to peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also has the potential for wider, strategic impact on global security in the national interest.

20th December

²⁷ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-07-25/HL342/>