

**Author: Dr Sara Saigol**

**Written evidence from Dr Sara Saigol (IPC0023)**

Youth leader/worker for a national charity and GP. Living in Manchester. Working in Manchester and Birmingham.

**1. Current Statistics**

The horrific act of hostage taking and killing by Hamas on 7th October 2023 has led to the retaliatory killing of at least 45 000 Palestinians; a third of these are children. According to Oxfam every three hours on average, Israeli explosive weapons hit homes, shelters, hospitals, schools and aid distribution points. Famine is eminent in northern Gaza. And children are dying from malnutrition. According to UNICEF, Gaza is the world's most dangerous place to be a child. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-geneva-palais-briefing-note-gaza-worlds-most-dangerous-place-be-child>

Over 300 humanitarian workers have been killed by the Israeli military, including water engineers working with Oxfam partners. <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam-in-action/current-emergencies/whats-happening-in-gaza-and-israel/>

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), at least 141 [journalists and media workers](#) have been killed in Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, and [Lebanon](#) since the war began, making it the [deadliest period for journalists](#) since CPJ began gathering data in 1992. <https://cpj.org/2024/12/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/amp/>

According to UNRWA, around 70% of the population in Gaza is drinking salinised and contaminated water. People are suffering from dehydration and waterborne diseases due to salinated and polluted water consumption from unsafe sources.

However, the Occupied Palestinian Territories have endured more than 56 years of Israeli military occupation and 16 years of blockade in the case of Gaza. Even before this crisis, 81.5% of Gazans lived below the national poverty line. 64% were food insecure. 80% of the population depended on humanitarian assistance. Israel

restricts the movement of goods and people in and out of the Gaza strip and Human Rights groups have called the blockade a form of 'collective punishment.

## **2. Background**

After the First World War, the League of Nations placed Palestine under the administration of Great Britain as the Mandatory Power. This was meant to be a transitory phase until Palestine attained the status of a fully independent nation, a status provisionally recognised in the League's Covenant. Almost five years before receiving the mandate from the League of Nations, the British Government gave commitments to the Zionist Organization regarding the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The Palestine issue lies at the heart of the Middle East problem, the most serious threat to peace with which the United Nations must contend. Recognition is spreading in world opinion that the Palestinian people must be assured their inherent inalienable right of national self-determination for peace to be restored.

The Balfour Declaration:

1. Was not in accordance with the spirit of the pledges of independence given to the Arabs both before and after it was issued.
2. Determined the status of Palestinians in close consultation with a political organization whose declared aim was to settle non-Palestinians in Palestine.

### **3. What are International Human Rights?**

#### Article 3

In the case of armed conflict, each party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provisions:

1. Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms...shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.

To this end, the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons:

(a) Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;

(b) Taking of hostages;

(c) Outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;

(d) The passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognised as indispensable by civilised peoples.

2. The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for.

An impartial humanitarian body, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, may offer its services to the Parties to the conflict.

On 7<sup>th</sup> October, almost 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals were killed, including at least 282 women and 36 children. More than 250 people, including 38 children, were taken hostage. These targeted attacks constitute serious violations of International Humanitarian Law.

Throughout the last year Israel has committed serious violations of International Humanitarian Law which may rise to the level of crimes against humanity. This includes a level of destruction that is indicative of Israel's use of disproportionate force in relation to military objectives and a failure to discriminate between military targets and the civilian population. The Israeli military has relentlessly targeted infrastructure indispensable to civilian survival. Civilians have been forcibly displaced dozens of times to so-called 'safe zones' that fail to meet basic humanitarian needs and have also been regularly bombed or attacked. <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/media/press-releases/more-women-and-children-killed-in-gaza-by-israeli-military-than-any-other-recent-conflict-in-a-single-year/>

#### **4. How Can Peace in the Region be Attained?**

All hostages and prisoners of war should be released.

All parties should lay down their arms.

As per the UN, Israel should comply with international law and withdraw its military forces, cease all new settlement activity, evacuate all settlers from occupied land, and dismantle parts of the separation wall it constructed inside the occupied West Bank. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/09/1154496>

Israel should allow all Palestinians displaced during the occupation to return to their place of origin and make reparation for the damage caused by its occupation. Israel and Hamas “must be held to account for any violations” of international humanitarian and human rights laws. “By ignoring international law in establishing or facilitating the establishment of settlements, and directly or indirectly transferring Israeli civilians into these settlements, successive Israel governments have set facts on the ground to ensure permanent Israeli control in the West Bank.”

The building of settlements has isolated Palestinians villages from one another in the West Bank, in contravention to international law.

Justice should be achieved by holding power to account where human rights violations have occurred. The UK must be seen to further and uphold human rights as per international standards and not according to partnerships and allyships.

Calls for democracy from neighbouring nations in the Middle East and elsewhere should be respected and the will of people not undermined through support of autocratic dictators.

Attacks by Israel on individuals and the sovereign states of Syria, Lebanon and Iran should be condemned in line with international law.

Those who have committed war crimes must be arrested and tried in court.

The UK should be seen to support and implement the judgments of the ICC and international respected bodies.

Halima Begum, Oxfam GB's Chief Executive sums up our role well:

“The UK Government continues to allow the export of arms to Israel despite knowing that they risk being used to perpetrate war crimes and fuel this appalling bloodshed. By continuing to allow the delivery of F-35 components for Israeli fighter jets, the UK remains complicit in the unlawful killing of Palestinian civilians...In the West Bank, since last October, more than 680 Palestinians have been killed either by Israeli settler or military violence. More than a thousand settler attacks on Palestinians have been recorded, with direct attacks on agricultural land resulting in the destruction of crops, irrigation systems and greenhouses, including internationally funded and Oxfam-supported projects. The Israeli military has forced the demolition of more than 2,000 Palestinian homes with massive damage to public infrastructure including roads.

Oxfam is calling for an immediate, permanent ceasefire, the release of all hostages and unlawfully detained Palestinians, an end to all arms sales to Israel and full access across Gaza for humanitarian aid <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/media/press-releases/more-women-and-children-killed-in-gaza-by-israeli-military-than-any-other-recent-conflict-in-a-single-year/>

## **5. My concerns as a GP and Muslim youth worker**

October 2023 to the present moment has been a time of exceptional anxiety and distress for Jewish, Muslim and other communities. As an experienced GP, my daily role is to preserve and safeguard life. Watching tens of thousands of lives being taken in the most appalling circumstances in a conflict that goes back to the early 1900s has been incredibly stressful. Seeing the loss of civilian life, watching it live streamed on my phone, witnessing the breakdown of systems that preserve life e.g. hospitals as well as attacks on healthcare workers has been appalling. I would say this has been one of the hardest years in my professional life.

I have Palestinian friends who have lost beloved family members due to the IDF; one family have lost over a score relatives. There is an unbearable anxiety in checking each morning as to whether family members are still alive and whether they have enough nourishment.

As a youth worker in a large national Muslim family organisation, I work with hundreds of young Muslims who are at schools, universities and working in various professions. Students have commented that there is no space to express their concerns about a political crisis that they have watched play out on their phones. There is little space to express solidarity in the face of a monumental humanitarian crisis. I am concerned that the lack of safe spaces to have conversations about the world we share, contrasted to how we have navigated the Ukraine crisis, may lead to repressed emotions and anxieties. Some students have also expressed concern at returning IDF soldiers working and ministering as university chaplains.

Young Britons are reporting that they are concerned international justice and the institutions built to ensure war crimes and ethnic cleaning do not repeat, have not delivered.

*28<sup>th</sup> December 2024*