

Inquiry: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Yachad submission

Written evidence submitted by Yachad (IPC0029)

About Yachad:

1. Yachad is a British Jewish organisation that works within the mainstream of the British Jewish community to mobilise British Jews in support of a political resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Yachad is a member of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and works with supporters from across the religious spectrum of the community.
2. We work very closely with a number of other community organisations including those that provide youth provision for teens and young adults. We deliver education to members of the community, giving people opportunities to hear different perspectives on the conflict from Israelis and Palestinians on the ground, either through visits from our partners in the region to the UK, or through trips we facilitate to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories for members of the Jewish community. We work closely with Israelis based in the UK, many of whom have become increasingly political engaged over recent years. Core to our strategy is the work we do with partners in Israel the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It is essential that voices for political change, human rights and justice are uplifted and heard in the UK Jewish community, parliament and media.
3. We work with MPs from all major political parties to highlight the fact there are different perspectives within the mainstream Jewish community related to Israel-Palestine and to help develop more constructive foreign policy and positions. We provide support to MPs wishing to engage on this subject, helping them to navigate complex and nuanced issues. We also provide MPs with opportunities to meet with and learn from our partners on the ground, who are working on a daily basis in the region to help bring about a resolution to the conflict. We facilitate trips to the region for MPs to ensure they can see issues first hand and hear from a wide variety of experts.
4. In writing this submission, we have taken into account the thousands of voices of British Jews and Israelis in the UK and in Israel, who have been most active in calling for a ceasefire, hostage deal and long-term resolutions.

The UK government's position:

5. The current British Government's position reflects the view of many British Jews and Israelis, as well as the British public at large. The UK government has long supported a two-state solution, supporting Israel's right to exist in security, alongside a viable and secure Palestinian state. The British Government has called for an immediate and sustainable ceasefire, the release of all hostages, humanitarian aid to Gaza and long-term political resolutions.
6. Surveys consistently show that approximately two thirds of the Israeli public want an end to the war and a release of all hostages. According to the Institute of Israeli Democracy 62% of Israel's public believe that releasing the hostages is the primary as the primary purpose of the war, and most believe that the war must be ended as it puts hostages' lives at risk¹. 100 hostages remain in Gaza of which at least half are thought to be alive. Furthermore, surveys show that approximately 64% of the Israeli public does not have trust in the Israeli government².

¹ ["חרבות ברזל" סקר ספטמבר 2024: שנה לאירועי 7 באוקטובר ומלחמת](#)

² [...מהציבור הישראלי תומכים בהפסקת 54%: "אולפן שישי" סקר - N12](#)

7. We are now over 14 months into the war, which has cost tens of thousands of lives in Gaza – most of whom are woman and children. Countless more are injured and are living at risk of starvation or disease. The vast majority of civilian infrastructure is now uninhabitable.
8. Leading security experts in Israel, and even government members, have acknowledged that there is no reality in which there will be a ‘total destruction’ of Hamas – a goal Israel’s Prime Minister continues to repeat. There is broad agreement in Israel’s security establishment that this war must end. Ami Ayalon, former head of Israel’s security services (Shin Bet) has been vocal in saying that Hamas will not be destroyed by military means alone³. This has been echoed by another former head of Israel’s Shin Bet, Nadav Argaman, who has called for a swift end to the war and been a consistent critic of how the war has been handled.
9. The UK government can support Israel’s right to self-defence but has to decide if ‘supporting Israel’ means supporting Israel’s public and security needs, or standing behind a far-right government which has openly called to settle Gaza and displace the Palestinian population.

Humanitarian aid to Gaza:

10. Gaza is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis which the UK has a duty to help in relieving, both through diplomatic pressure and other means. The scale of destruction in Gaza has created conditions that UN agencies and humanitarian organisations have described as catastrophic, with severe shortages of food, clean water, medical supplies, and shelter. The UK government must take immediate action to:
 - Significantly increase direct humanitarian funding to established agencies and vetted NGOs operating in Gaza.
 - Demand that Israel allow UNRWA to continue operate in Gaza, as the only organisation with the capability and infrastructure to provide the required level of humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza. Other UN agencies have already warned that they cannot fully replace UNRWA’s activities.
 - Use its diplomatic influence to ensure Israel opens more border crossings and dramatically increases the flow of aid, whilst also pressuring Hamas, through its interlocutors, to ensure food, water and medicine reaches Israeli hostages.
11. It is important to note that there is a strong case for reform and change within UNRWA. Allegations of involvement of UNRWA employees in terrorism on October 7th must be taken seriously and appropriate action must be taken the UK can play a role in holding UNRWA accountable and ensuring necessary reform takes place.
12. The current system of aid delivery is wholly inadequate for Gaza's population of over 2 million people, the vast majority of whom are now internally displaced. Aid trucks face lengthy inspection delays and numerous bureaucratic obstacles. Many never make it through at all. The UK government should advocate for a streamlined inspection process that maintains security while eliminating unnecessary delays.
13. The crisis has been compounded by the destruction of Gaza's healthcare system, with most hospitals either damaged or unable to function effectively. The UK should prioritise the delivery of medical

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0hw6wyj>

supplies and support for emergency medical facilities. Additionally, there must be provisions for allowing severely injured civilians to receive treatment outside of Gaza. Whilst it has been widely recognised that Hamas has used hospitals from which to operate, the cumulative effect of these attacks has led to a near-total collapse of Gaza's healthcare system. Doctors Without Borders reported a sharp deterioration in the health situation due to ongoing military actions and a prolonged blockade. The organisation described the healthcare system as experiencing "total destruction"⁴. Most of those injured or killed in this war have been civilians and the lack of functioning medical systems and structure has only led to further deaths⁴.

14. Beyond immediate aid, the UK should support the reconstruction of essential infrastructure, particularly water treatment facilities and power plants, without which the humanitarian crisis will only deepen. This infrastructure support must be provided regardless of political developments, as it addresses basic human needs protected under international law. Addressing Gaza's humanitarian crisis is not only a moral imperative but also crucial for regional stability and any future peace process. A population facing severe deprivation and lacking basic necessities cannot be expected to support or participate in peace-building initiatives.
15. There have been many Israeli hostages which returned in last year's ceasefire deal (November 2023) who have been vocal about abhorrent humanitarian conditions for hostages in Gaza – improving access to basic humanitarian needs in Gaza is a top priority for Gazans as well as the hostages and the international community must make it clear to Hamas that aid must be delivered to hostages that remain alive. Many hostages were confined in overcrowded spaces with minimal electricity and no mattresses, enduring severe food shortages. Some reported receiving only a single piece of bread per day, leading to significant weight loss and malnutrition⁵.

Sanctioning extremists:

16. Several members of Israel's current government have made explicit calls to resettle Gaza and annex the West Bank, in direct violation of international law. These actions will not only undermine prospects for peace but actively work against British foreign policy objectives in the region. The two ministers leading these calls are MK Itamar Ben Gvir and MK Bezalel Smotrich. The UK government has existing mechanisms to sanction individuals who actively work to undermine peace and stability in conflict zones. Ministers who openly advocate for forced displacement and illegal settlement expansion should face targeted sanctions, including asset freezes and travel bans. This would send a clear message that while the UK supports Israel's security, it will not tolerate actions that violate international law and human rights.
17. Crucially, if the UK supports Israel's long-term security, it must be clear that the messianic visions of the far-right extremists do not represent the desires of the Israeli public and are in direct contradiction with the consensus of the Israeli security establishment. This approach would align with existing British policy of opposing settlement expansion and supporting a viable two-state solution. It would also strengthen the position of those within Israel working towards peaceful resolution rather than permanent occupation.
18. The UK has the backing of wide and diverse elements of the Jewish community on this matter:

⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/totaling-up-the-damage-in-gaza-after-a-year-of-war-b0c21601>

⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/israel-gaza-hamas-war-hostages-ceasefire-9875e2b5b8679b16106a9106bd37003c>

- The Union of Jewish students recently passed a motion at its annual convention in December 2024 making it clear that it will lobby the UK government to take action against Israeli extremists which claim to represent the Jewish people and their interest while they clearly do not.
 - Over 500 Israelis living in the UK signed and delivered a letter to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in December 2024 calling for sanctions against Ministers Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, making clear their opposition to occupation, annexation and the ongoing war.
 - Over 750 British Jews have written to their MPs throughout November and December 2024 via a Yachad campaign, calling for sanctions against the same ministers.
 - Over 75 young British Jewish leaders have signed and delivered a letter in December 2024 to the Foreign Secretary and Middle East Minister calling for similar sanctions - of those who have signed, there are 16 different Jewish Societies represented and 5 different Jewish youth movements. There are also 12 current or former Jewish Society Presidents and Vice Presidents who have signed, and 5 who sit on the Board of Deputies.
19. The UK has also imposed sanctions on several Israeli settler organisations operating in the West Bank. These entities were accused of sponsoring violence against Palestinian communities and committing serious human rights abuses – as well as funding settlement expansion and building illegal outposts.
 20. Sanctions send a clear message to the Israeli government that the British government, as a key ally, will not stand idly by as elements of Israeli society violate international law and attempt to prevent Palestinian Statehood. The UK should continue to expand this programme of sanctions targeting a wider group of settler related entities such as regional councils who support the development of outposts.
 21. Targeted sanctions are not collective punishment on Israelis, but rather on the extremists within Israeli society which are dragging the region to further conflict. Making this distinction is a way of showing support for the Israeli public, most of whom want political resolutions and to live in security .
 22. From a Palestinian perspective, these sanctions demonstrate that the UK is a partner for Palestinian safety and sovereignty, and that it is willing to take serious actions when it comes to settler violence – which is on the rise and affecting Palestinian daily lives – from destruction of property, to forced displacement, to physical violence against Palestinians. This puts the UK government in a key position at a time when many Palestinians do not feel that they have support in the international community.

International Court of Justice Advisory opinion on the Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem:

23. In July 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion declaring Israel's occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip as unlawful under international law. The court emphasized that Israel's prolonged occupation and settlement activities violate the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and contravene international legal principles. It also stated that all states are obligated to ensure they are not in any way aiding or assisting the maintenance of the continued presence of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories.

24. As a democratic country committed to the rule of law and human rights, the UK must consider the gravity of this ruling and how it will affect the UK-Israel relations. In particular, the UK must examine whether continuing to allow goods that are produced in settlements in the West Bank to enter the UK market would be considered as assisting and prolonging the occupation.

Empower Israeli protesters, NGOs and civil society:

25. The UK government should actively engage with and support Israeli civil society organisations working towards peace, justice, human rights and democracy. Since October 7th, and throughout 2023, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have demonstrated against their government's policies and in support of democratic institutions, peace initiatives, and hostage families. Many of those affected by Hamas' atrocious attacks on October 7th are leading members of the peace and democracy camp.

26. Many of these organisations are key partners for Yachad who have spoken regularly to Members of Parliament cross-party, providing briefings and insight into the reality on the ground – in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. These include organisations such as Gisha, Breaking the Silence, Standing Together, Molad, leading human rights lawyer Michael Sfard, former head of the Shin Bet Ami Ayalon, and countless others.

27. The UK can support their efforts through:

- Providing diplomatic recognition and platforms for Israeli civil society organisations, human rights organisations and progressive political movements. By giving them international recognition and legitimacy, this helps give them legitimacy in Israel.
- Facilitating dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian human rights and political activists and British parliamentarians – ensuring their voices are made louder and more relevant than those voices in government working to deepen the conflict.
- Offering protection mechanisms for human rights defenders and peace activists facing harassment as well as sanctions within Israel.
- Supporting joint Israeli-Palestinian civil society initiatives– such as the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace.
- Maintaining regular consultation with Israeli and Palestinian peace, equality and democracy advocates to inform UK policy.

28. By empowering these voices, the UK helps demonstrate that supporting Israel's security does not mean unconditional support for policies that undermine peace – on the contrary. This approach would strengthen those working towards democratic values and peaceful resolution while countering the narrative that criticism of specific government policies is anti-Israel.

Ensuring the UK-Israel partnership is based on shared democratic values:

29. The United Kingdom and Israel have long enjoyed a close relationship underpinned by shared democratic values, including the rule of law, freedom of expression, and the protection of minority rights. These shared principles form the foundation of the UK's strong political, economic, and cultural ties with Israel. However, in recent years, we have witnessed growing internal challenges to these democratic values in Israel.

30. Proposals put forward by the current Israeli government, including attempts to undermine the independence of the judiciary, have raised significant concerns both domestically and internationally. These legislative efforts have sought to weaken Israel's Supreme Court and limit its

ability to act as a check on executive power. Such reforms represent a worrying departure from democratic principles. Pro-democracy protests have brought together hundreds of thousands of Israelis from diverse background in an unprecedented expression of civic activism. For months, these demonstrators filled cities across Israel, defending their democracy and calling for the preservation of its independent institutions – primarily the justice system, the police and the media.

31. This wave of protest underscores the deep commitment of Israeli citizens to their country's democratic character. It also highlights the extent to which many Israelis, including many of Yachad's partners and allies, are actively resisting attempts to erode democratic norms.
32. Currently, the Israeli government is passing or proposing laws on a weekly basis that weaken democracy and put free-speech at risk, and also to deepen the occupation and enact annexation. Just a few examples of these include:
 - Emergency Regulations for Media Content Control: Communications Minister Karhi sought emergency powers to halt media broadcasts and seize equipment if content is deemed harmful to national security or public order.
 - Use of stun grenades against protesters: In November 2024, the Israel Police revised its protocols regarding the use of stun grenades during protests.
 - On November 22, 2024, Defence Minister Katz announced the cessation of administrative detention orders against Jewish settlers in the West Bank – the measure will now only be used against Palestinians.
 - In November 2024, following the re-election of U.S. President Donald Trump, Minister Smotrich instructed his department to prepare for the annexation of the occupied West Bank. He described Trump's victory as an "opportunity" to extend Israeli sovereignty over the entire Palestinian territory.
33. By leaning on the UK's historic and principled relationship with Israel, the British government has a unique opportunity to engage constructively with Israeli policymakers and civil society. The UK can make clear that democracy, the rule of law, and human rights are essential not only for Israel's stability and security but also for achieving a lasting resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict and ending the occupation. The UK government should also make it clear that the long-standing relationship between Israel and the UK is based on these shared principles of liberal democratic values and that these cannot be cast aside without damaging the relationship.

30th December 2024