

Written Evidence Submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) (IPC0030)

Introduction

1.1 Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) is a UK-based charity committed to reducing the harm caused by armed violence through research, advocacy, and evidence-based policy recommendations. Since 2011, AOAV has documented the humanitarian impact of explosive weapons in populated areas, advocating for stronger international legal frameworks to protect civilians. This submission responds to the Foreign Affairs Committee's call for evidence on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and provides insights into how the UK can contribute to a ceasefire, learn from past policies, and promote lasting peace.

1.2 AOAV's expertise lies in analysing the humanitarian consequences of armed violence and identifying policy interventions to minimise civilian harm. Our organisation is uniquely positioned to offer evidence-based recommendations on the UK's role in addressing the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. This submission directly addresses the three key questions posed by the Committee:

- What can – and should – the UK do, in cooperation with regional and international partners, to help bring about a ceasefire?
- What can be learned from the record of UK Government policies to date?
- How can the UK assure the resilience of efforts to bring about lasting peace amidst global uncertainties?

1.3 AOAV recognises the urgency of this inquiry given the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the persistent insecurity faced by both Israelis and Palestinians. Our submission reflects our commitment to upholding international humanitarian law (IHL) and advocating for policies that prioritise civilian protection and sustainable peace.

1.4 The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to challenge international norms and the credibility of global governance mechanisms. The UK's unique position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a signatory to major international treaties obliges it to lead efforts to address the conflict. This submission not only outlines what the UK can do immediately but also emphasises long-term strategies to prevent further escalation and foster resilience.

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

2.1 Champion a Comprehensive Ceasefire Resolution at the United Nations

The UK should use its influence on the UN Security Council to advocate for a comprehensive ceasefire resolution. This resolution must include guarantees for the protection of civilians, unhindered access to humanitarian aid, and independent mechanisms to monitor compliance. Previous failures to pass such resolutions, including the vetoed November 2024 draft, underscore

the importance of proactive UK diplomacy. By working with key international stakeholders, the UK can build consensus and ensure the resolution's adoption.

2.2 Impose Targeted Sanctions on Violators of International Law

Sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for breaching international law are essential to deter future violations and signal accountability. These measures should target both Israeli and Hamas officials implicated in war crimes or human rights abuses. Sanctions reinforce the international community's commitment to upholding legal norms and protecting civilian populations. While sanctions alone may not end the violence, they send a powerful message that impunity for violations will not be tolerated.

2.3 Facilitate Humanitarian Corridors

The establishment of humanitarian corridors is vital to deliver aid and evacuate civilians from conflict zones. The UK should collaborate with regional and international actors, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross, to ensure these corridors are operational and secure. Humanitarian corridors not only alleviate immediate suffering but also build trust among conflicting parties. They are a practical demonstration of international commitment to protecting civilians.

2.4 Enhance Diplomatic Engagement with Regional Powers

Regional actors such as Egypt, Jordan, and Qatar play critical roles in mediating ceasefires and facilitating humanitarian access. The UK should deepen its diplomatic engagement with these countries, leveraging their influence to advance peace initiatives. Collaborative efforts can help create the conditions necessary for a sustainable ceasefire. The UK should also work closely with the European Union to align diplomatic strategies and enhance the coherence of international efforts.

2.5 Support Civil Society and Grassroots Peacebuilding

Grassroots organisations in both Israeli and Palestinian communities are vital for fostering dialogue and reconciliation. The UK should increase funding for these initiatives, recognising their role in addressing societal divisions and laying the groundwork for long-term peace. Supporting civil society strengthens the voices of those advocating for coexistence and mutual understanding. These groups often operate under challenging circumstances and need sustained international support to continue their work.

2.6 Promote Inclusive Political Dialogue

The UK should advocate for inclusive political dialogue that involves all relevant stakeholders, including marginalised groups. This approach ensures that any ceasefire agreement addresses the root causes of the conflict and considers the perspectives of those most affected. Political dialogue must be coupled with concrete steps to address longstanding grievances and inequities. Failure to do so risks perpetuating cycles of violence and instability.

2.7 Leverage Economic Tools for Stability

Economic incentives, such as development aid and trade partnerships, can be used to encourage compliance with ceasefire agreements and foster stability. The UK should align its economic assistance with broader peacebuilding objectives, prioritising investments that promote

development and resilience in Palestinian territories. This approach recognises that economic stability is a critical component of lasting peace.

2.8 Advocate for Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability for violations of international law is essential for deterring future breaches and fostering trust in peace processes. The UK should advocate for the establishment of independent investigative mechanisms to document violations and hold perpetrators accountable. This could include supporting international inquiries or establishing specialised tribunals to address specific crimes.

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

3.1 Partial Arms Embargo on Israel

The UK's decision in September 2024 to suspend 30 out of 350 arms export licences to Israel marked an important recognition of the need to limit the use of British-supplied weapons in violations of IHL. However, this action was insufficient in addressing the systemic issues. A comprehensive embargo on arms exports to Israel is necessary to ensure that UK-made weapons are not used to perpetuate civilian harm. AOAV's analysis reveals that over £448 million worth of arms have been licensed for export to Israel since 2015, including components for fighter jets, missiles, and military technology. This highlights the need for stricter controls and transparency.

3.2 Failure to Include F-35 Fighter Jets in Embargo

The exclusion of F-35 fighter jets from the embargo undermined the UK's credibility as a proponent of IHL. These jets have been implicated in operations that caused civilian casualties and damaged critical infrastructure. Expanding the embargo to include such systems would align UK policy with its legal and ethical commitments. The decision to exempt certain weapons highlights the need for a more consistent and principled approach to arms control. The UK's contribution of 15% of every F-35 jet produced underscores its role in enabling the Israeli air campaign.

3.3 Opaque Arms Export Practices

The UK's arms export licensing system lacks transparency, with open licences allowing unlimited quantities and value of arms exports. AOAV's Freedom of Information requests for details on arms licences granted since October 7th were denied, citing exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act. This opacity hampers accountability and undermines public trust. Clearer reporting and public disclosure of arms export data are necessary to ensure compliance with international law.

3.4 Inconsistent Diplomatic Efforts

The UK's diplomatic engagement in the Israel-Palestine conflict has at times been perceived as inconsistent, weakening its role as an impartial broker. For instance, the selective application of sanctions and limited support for civil society initiatives have raised questions about the UK's commitment to a balanced approach. Future policies must prioritise transparency, consistency, and equity.

3.5 Positive Impact of Supporting UNRWA

The UK's reinstatement of funding to UNRWA was a critical step in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. However, further efforts are needed to ensure that aid reaches those most in need. The UK should advocate for mechanisms that prevent blockades and administrative obstacles from hindering aid delivery. UNRWA's role in providing essential services underscores the importance of sustained international support.

3.6 Lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process

The UK's experience in facilitating the Northern Ireland peace process offers valuable lessons for the Israeli-Palestinian context. Key takeaways include the importance of sustained dialogue, inclusive negotiations, and confidence-building measures. Applying these principles can help address deeply entrenched divisions and foster durable solutions. The Northern Ireland example demonstrates that even protracted conflicts can be resolved through persistence and adaptability.

3.7 Need for Robust Oversight of Arms Exports

The lack of rigorous monitoring mechanisms to track the use of British arms in conflict zones has undermined accountability. Establishing an independent oversight body would enhance transparency and ensure compliance with export regulations. This body could also provide regular reports to Parliament, strengthening public trust in UK arms control policies. Such oversight is critical for preventing the misuse of exported weapons.

How can the UK assure the resilience of efforts to bring about lasting peace amidst global uncertainties?

4.1 Strengthen Regional Alliances

Building strong alliances with regional partners is essential for ensuring the resilience of peace efforts. Collaborative initiatives addressing shared challenges, such as water scarcity and climate change, can foster trust and cooperation between conflicting parties. The UK should also work closely with the European Union to align strategies and pool resources. Regional cooperation is a key element of sustainable peacebuilding.

4.2 Invest in Post-Conflict Recovery

Long-term peace requires a commitment to rebuilding infrastructure, restoring services, and fostering economic development. The UK should allocate resources to post-conflict recovery initiatives that prioritise inclusivity and local ownership. These efforts must address the root causes of instability to prevent future violence. Post-conflict recovery also presents an opportunity to strengthen governance and promote accountability.

4.3 Support Transitional Justice Mechanisms

Transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth commissions and reparations programmes, are vital for addressing past grievances and promoting reconciliation. The UK should advocate for these mechanisms as part of any peace agreement, ensuring that victims' voices are heard and accountability is upheld. Transitional justice is essential for healing societal divisions and fostering trust in peace processes.

4.4 Address Psychological and Social Trauma

The psychological impact of the conflict, particularly on children, must be addressed to break cycles of violence. The UK should support mental health programmes and community-based initiatives that promote healing and resilience. These efforts are critical for creating a foundation for lasting peace. Addressing trauma also reduces the risk of radicalisation and future conflict.

4.5 Engage Youth in Peacebuilding

Young people play a crucial role in shaping the future. The UK should invest in educational and vocational programmes that empower youth and provide them with opportunities to contribute positively to their communities. Engaging youth in peacebuilding efforts fosters hope and reduces the appeal of radicalisation. Youth-focused initiatives are a long-term investment in stability and progress.

4.6 Enhance Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

Robust monitoring mechanisms are essential for ensuring compliance with peace agreements. The UK should support the establishment of international observer missions and utilise technology to track progress. Regular reporting and accountability measures will strengthen the resilience of peace efforts. Monitoring mechanisms also provide early warnings of potential violations.

4.7 Promote Gender-Inclusive Peacebuilding

Women are disproportionately affected by conflict but often excluded from peace processes. The UK should champion gender-inclusive approaches, ensuring that women's voices are represented in negotiations and post-conflict recovery efforts. Gender equality is integral to achieving sustainable peace. Including women in peacebuilding enhances the effectiveness and inclusivity of solutions.

4.8 Adopt Stronger Arms Control Measures

The UK should urgently review its arms export controls to Israel, incorporating stricter measures that reflect international legal obligations under treaties like the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The ATT requires an objective assessment of whether arms exports could contribute to violations of international humanitarian or human rights law. Evidence provided by AOAV and other organisations suggests a significant risk of UK-made components being used in unlawful attacks on civilian infrastructure in Gaza. Strengthening arms control will enhance the UK's credibility and align its practices with its commitments to civilian protection under the Dublin Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA).

4.9 Encourage Corporate Responsibility in Arms Manufacturing

British arms manufacturers, including BAE Systems and Leonardo UK, have played a pivotal role in supplying components used in Israeli military operations. The UK government must hold these corporations accountable for their contributions to human rights violations. Encouraging compliance with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and conducting rigorous audits of their supply chains could ensure alignment with ethical standards. Transparency in corporate operations is essential to restoring public trust in the government's arms export policies.

4.10 Improve Access to Legal Remedies for Victims

Victims of armed conflict often face barriers in seeking justice and reparations. The UK should support international efforts to establish accessible legal mechanisms for civilians affected by the conflict. These efforts could include advocating for expanded jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) or supporting specialised tribunals for crimes committed in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Providing pathways for legal recourse will contribute to accountability and reinforce international legal frameworks.

4.11 Integrate Environmental Considerations into Conflict Resolution

The environmental impact of the conflict, including damage to critical infrastructure and natural resources, exacerbates humanitarian crises. The UK should incorporate environmental concerns into its peacebuilding initiatives, supporting sustainable recovery efforts that address water scarcity, agricultural restoration, and renewable energy solutions. Addressing these challenges holistically will ensure that peacebuilding efforts promote resilience and long-term stability.

Summary and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This submission highlights the critical need for the UK to adopt a multi-faceted approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Key points include the urgent need for a comprehensive ceasefire, enhanced accountability mechanisms, and robust support for humanitarian and post-conflict recovery efforts. The submission underscores the role of arms exports in perpetuating violations of international law and calls for stricter controls and greater transparency.

5.2 Recommendations

1. **Ceasefire Advocacy:** Advocate for a comprehensive ceasefire resolution at the UN, ensuring provisions for humanitarian access, civilian protection, and independent monitoring.
2. **Stronger Arms Embargo:** Expand the arms embargo to include all military exports to Israel, particularly F-35 fighter jets and related components.
3. **Sanctions and Accountability:** Impose targeted sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for breaching international law, ensuring robust accountability mechanisms.
4. **Transparency in Arms Exports:** Reform the arms export licensing system to enhance transparency, including public disclosure of export data.
5. **Support for Grassroots Peacebuilding:** Increase funding for civil society initiatives that promote dialogue and reconciliation between Israeli and Palestinian communities.
6. **Youth and Gender-Inclusive Peacebuilding:** Invest in educational, vocational, and gender-inclusive programmes to foster long-term stability and inclusivity.
7. **Post-Conflict Recovery:** Allocate resources for rebuilding infrastructure, restoring services, and addressing psychological trauma in conflict-affected areas.
8. **Corporate Responsibility:** Ensure British arms manufacturers adhere to international ethical standards, conducting rigorous audits of their operations.

9. **Legal Remedies for Victims:** Advocate for accessible legal mechanisms for victims of conflict, including expanded ICC jurisdiction and specialised tribunals.
10. **Environmental Integration:** Address environmental challenges in conflict resolution efforts, promoting sustainable recovery and resilience.

5.3 AOA's Commitment

AOA remains committed to supporting the UK's efforts to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We stand ready to provide additional evidence, expertise, and collaboration to advance the Committee's objectives and promote sustainable peace.

30th December 2024