

# **Liberal Democrats for Peace in the Middle East ([ldfpme.org.uk](http://ldfpme.org.uk))**

## **Written evidence submitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee about the Israeli Palestinian Conflict (IPC0042)**

### **Who we are**

1. Liberal Democrats for Peace in the Middle East (LDfPME) are a group of members of the Liberal Democrats who work for a just and equitable solution to the Palestinian Israeli conflict. We work to support peacemakers on both sides and to educate our Party & the wider British public about the current situation and the work of the many peace groups.
2. Whilst we are Lib Dems & help to formulate our Party's policy on Palestine & Israel, our views expressed in this document are ours and do not necessarily reflect the policy of the Liberal Democratic Party.

### **The Current situation**

3. The immediate trigger for the current war in Gaza was the Hamas incursion into Israel on 7th October 2023 when they killed nearly 1200 Israelis, many of whom were civilians (including children) and approximately 250 Israelis were kidnapped and taken back into Gaza as hostages.
4. This triggered an incursion into Gaza by Israel, ostensibly to release the hostages and to also destroy Hamas in Gaza. The incursion is still ongoing and has resulted in over 40,000 deaths<sup>i</sup> a number that includes Hamas fighters, adult civilians, and children. The fighting has also meant that many homes and civil facilities have been destroyed or severely damaged, resulting in many Gazans now living in temporary shelters, and food supplies have been greatly reduced. Medical facilities have also been severely damaged, which has meant that medical care for Gazans wounded by the fighting or suffering from malnutrition has been greatly restricted
5. The destruction of homes and civil infrastructure in Gaza will make reconstruction of the territory a long and difficult process. This along with continuing difficulties distributing humanitarian aid inside Gaza<sup>ii</sup> to those in desperate need, whether due to restrictions imposed by the Israeli Government, by Hamas, or by other armed gangs<sup>iii</sup>, some of whom are commandeering some aid shipments for selling on (at inflated prices) to Gazans makes the plight of civilians in Gaza incredibly difficult, especially as they face their second winter in the current war.
6. Approximately 100 Israeli Hostages taken in the Hamas incursion are still held inside Gaza<sup>iv</sup>. Also, there are thousands of Palestinian detainees held by the Israeli army in camps inside Israel<sup>v</sup>.
7. The lack of will by either the Netanyahu Government in Israel<sup>vi</sup> or the Hamas forces in Gaza<sup>vii</sup> to make any compromises in their demands before ending the fighting and the ongoing conflict makes finding a ceasefire agreement very difficult, if not impossible.

8. The fighting in Gaza has spread (albeit in a limited degree) to the Occupied West Bank where Hamas have engaged in terrorist attacks on Israeli military and civilian targets<sup>viii</sup>, while extremist Israeli settler terrorists have conducted “revenge” raids against Palestinian targets as well as continuing their attacks to remove Palestinian farmers from their land<sup>ix</sup>. The inability or unwillingness of the Israeli security forces to control this growing Israeli settler terrorist activity is also deeply worrying.

### **Other considerations**

9. The Israeli military occupation of territory captured from Jordan (the West Bank) and Egypt (Gaza) in the 1967 Six Day war has been going on for over 57 years.
10. The growth of settlements across the Occupied Territories, many of which are not just illegal under international law but also illegal under Israeli law<sup>x</sup>.
11. Being an occupying nation has contaminated Israeli society and given rise to extremists and terrorists inside Israel.
12. The lack of any functioning democratic institutions inside the Occupied Territories (the last elections for the Palestinian Presidency and the Palestinian Authority were nearly 20 years ago) is not allowing young Palestinians any legitimate avenue for expressing their views. This allows extremists to spread their view that violence is the only way among these young people.
13. The growing anti-war movement inside Israel led by, amongst others, Standing Together<sup>xi</sup>, and Women Wage Peace<sup>xii</sup>, which is calling for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, the release of hostages held by Hamas, and an end to the wider Palestinian Israeli conflict.
14. The demonstrations in Gaza by civilians against Hamas<sup>xiii</sup> for triggering this round of violence, the commandeering of aid and the oppression of the civilian population.

### **Ways forward now**

15. In order to allow the urgent flow of both short-term humanitarian aid into Gaza and to start on the longer-term massive reconstruction needed, an immediate ceasefire in the territory is needed as well as the withdrawal of both IDF and Hamas forces.
16. To monitor a ceasefire and to provide security on the ground after the withdrawal of the IDF and Hamas, an independent international security and humanitarian force is needed to assist the Palestinian Authority in regaining civil control over Gaza and in the distribution of international aid.
17. Given the deep mistrust of the UN by Israel<sup>xiv</sup> and the similar mistrust of the USA by Gazans and Palestinians<sup>xv</sup>, such a force will need to be drawn from countries that both sides can trust.
18. LDfPME suggest that this could be drawn from neighbouring Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia for example) under the auspices of the Arab League with logistic support provide by the EU and UK through the British bases in Cyprus.

### **Longer term actions to promote peace in the area**

19. Give the long-standing commitment by UK Governments of all colours to a two state solution (Palestine and Israel) , this should be put into action by the immediate recognition by the British Government of the State of Palestine provisionally based on territory defined by the 1949 Armistice lines and the River Jordan (for the West Bank) and Mediterranean Sea (for Gaza) with the Palestinian Authority as its legitimate Government.
20. The Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to start negotiations towards a final peace agreement to allow both Israelis and Palestinians to be free peoples in their own homelands.
21. Such negotiations should include:
  - a. territorial swaps to finally define an international border between the two states,
  - b. a corridor to allow for free and unfettered access between the West Bank and Gaza, and access to the Mediterranean for shipping,
  - c. the final status of Jerusalem (see below) as the capital of both Palestine and Israel,
  - d. security arrangements to give both sides confidence that there will be no encroachment by the other into its sovereign territory,
  - e. arrangements for the sharing of water,
  - f. the distribution of electricity,
  - g. arrangements for the control of the airspace above both countries,
  - h. arrangements for the return of Palestinian refugees from the 1948 Nakba/War of Independence and the 1967 Six Day War,
  - i. arrangements to allow Palestinian citizens who choose to live inside Israel and Israeli citizens who chose to live inside Palestine to do so freely and to enjoy normal civil rights.
22. The British Government, in recognition of its historic role in the area and in the creation of the current conflict, to offer whatever assistance is needed by both Israel and Palestine to achieve such a peace agreement.

## **Jerusalem**

23. Jerusalem is a Holy City for Jews, Muslims, and Christians with many sites that are holy to one or more of these religions. Any solution to the wider conflict must take this into account and allow for free access to each religion's holy sites.
24. Jerusalem is and will remain the capital of the State of Israel.
25. Jerusalem will also be the capital of the State of Palestine.
26. The modern city of Jerusalem should have a single united municipal authority for all normal municipal functions that will give both Palestinian and Israeli residents of Jerusalem freedom of movement within the city.
27. The Old City of Jerusalem and its immediate surrounds to be an open area for the adherents of all religions to access to their holy sites freely without hindrance.

## **Final Comments**

28. Events in the area can move quickly & unpredictably so by the time this document is discussed some of the assumptions in it may no longer be valid
29. However, it is important to note that while religion has a role to play in it, fundamentally the conflict between Palestine and Israel in the clash of two nationalist dreams, the desire of both the Jewish & Palestinian nations to be a free people in their own homeland.
30. No solution, however well thought out, will succeed unless the people in both nations are willing to accept it and have the trust in the people on the other side also to accept it.
31. It is also worth noting that any solution will cost much to implement both in financial terms and in the sacrifices both sides will need to make.
32. On both sides, there are and will continue to be, loud voices of extremists and terrorist groups willing to sabotage any peace deal. This means that the voices for peace, both inside Palestine and Israel but also from around the world must be louder and willing to be prepared to aid both sides to show that peace to be a better option
33. There have been many injustices over the last 100+ years of the conflict, going back to before the British Mandate for Palestine was created. Both sides have been guilty and been victims of such injustices. However, the biggest injustice is, that without a solution that allow both Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace, we condemn future generations on both sides to continue to grow up amidst violence, to live under threat of attack, to learn to kill and be killed, to have their futures blighted by this conflict. For the sake of Palestinian and Israeli children, we must help both nations find a way to a peaceful future.
34. We all live on a cusp of two different timelines, one is where building can still happen, enjoyment can be had for all, learning and working together as a team, sharing and living happily with prosper lives in communities where neighbours help each other, the other is where all end up in shadows and dust, resentment spills over and hate continues.

Continuation of this war will only help aid the groups that stem from the far right and the left in the quest for the demise of people who are indifferent. This will give them more power to spread hate, giving terrorists a dream fulfilled.

We look back at some of the past vibrant areas in civilization with shared mixed communities and know this was done before and can be again before other factions took over, we must not let divide and hate rule. Pilgrimage and safe passage must always be at the forefront of our minds along with rebuilding together as the alternative is further warfare, violence, killing and humanitarian disaster

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<sup>i</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/12/1158206>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/gaza-aid-deliveries-humanitarian-crisis/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c93qevdpzvqo>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/hostages-and-missing-persons-report>

<sup>v</sup> [https://www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees\\_and\\_prisoners](https://www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees_and_prisoners)

<sup>vi</sup> <https://aspensiaonline.it/netanyahu-big-win-over-the-axis-of-resistance-gives-palestinians-a-fatal-blow/>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/11/09/politics/qatar-gaza-ceasefire-pause-mediator/index.html>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://acleddata.com/2024/10/06/after-a-year-of-war-hamas-is-militarily-weakened-but-far-from-eliminated/>

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/13/nx-s1-5137001/violence-by-extremist-israeli-settlers-increases-in-the-occupied-west-bank>

<sup>x</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli\\_outpost#Illegal\\_outposts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_outpost#Illegal_outposts)

<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.standing-together.org/en/about-en>

<sup>xii</sup> <https://www.womenwagepeace.org.il/en/about/>

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx82xx9pj5do>

<sup>xiv</sup> <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2024/0215/Gaza-Why-distrust-of-UN-has-deepened-at-a-moment-of-greatest-need>

<sup>xv</sup> <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/143376>

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