

Written submission to the Foreign Office Select Committee on the Call for Evidence on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from the Peace and Justice Project (IPC0053)

1. *This submission is made by the Peace and Justice Project.*

- 1.1. The Peace and Justice Project brings people together for social and economic justice, peace and human rights across the world.
- 1.2. The Project has been campaigning for justice, freedom, equality and dignity for Palestine and Palestinians since its inception in 2020.
- 1.3. The Project supports peaceful resolutions to international conflicts, promoting diplomacy and negotiation.

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

- 2.1. The UK should act on the Parliamentary vote of 2014¹ to recognise a Palestinian State as a matter of urgency.
- 2.2. As a full member of the UN Security Council, and because of its previous history in Palestine and the region, the UK has a special responsibility in this regard. As Dr Zomlot's evidence to this Committee outlined, full recognition is an essential first step in promoting peace within the region.
- 2.3. Recognition by the UK carries moral significance in initiating a redress for the previous wrongs inflicted by the UK on the Palestinian people and accords their rights for equality, justice and dignity.
- 2.4. The UK should support a ceasefire by immediately conforming to the judgements and recommendations made by the International Court of Justice² and the International Criminal Court³. A ceasefire would pave the way to the return of the hostages in Gaza, the release of the 8,000 Palestinians imprisoned since October 2023 and of civilians such as Dr Abu Safia, Director of the Kamal Adwan hospital.
- 2.5. The UK needs to publicly acknowledge that there is a plausible justification that Israel is causing a genocide in Gaza. Consequently:
 - 2.5.1. All licenses to supply arms to Israel should be rescinded.
 - 2.5.2. All military support to Israel should cease, including the daily intelligence flights from RAF Akrotiri over Gaza⁴.
 - 2.5.3. The UK should commit to issuing an arrest warrant for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Galant, should they try to enter the country, rather than waiting for the courts to decide⁵
- 2.6. The UK has the power to exert financial and moral influence on the Israeli government and the mindset of some of its citizens by enforcing sanctions on investment in Israeli companies. In particular the UK should:
 - 2.6.1. Change the legal restriction on UK local authorities who vote to divest their pension funds from Israeli financial entities from doing so⁷.

¹ Walker, N., Dickson, A., Gill, J. & P. Butchard. 2022. Research Briefing: UK Government recognition of the State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2022-0039/>.

² <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240524-sum-01-00-enc.pdf>

³ <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-rejects-state-israels-challenges>

⁴ <https://www.declassifieduk.org/keir-starmers-gaza-spy-plane-caught-on-camera/>

⁵ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-11-25/debates/03BDA24B-76D7-4486-809A-67C1A021C79B/Israel-GazaConflictArrestWarrants>.

⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/11/21/palestine-icc-warrants-revive-hope-long-delayed-justice>

⁷ Loft, P., Jozepa, I. & J. Mirza-Davies. 2024. Research Briefing: Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill 2022-23 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9822/>

- 2.6.2. Ban UK universities from entering into agreements with Israeli companies and Israeli universities⁸.
- 2.6.3. Ban the UK from economic support to or agreements with organisations supporting the actions of violent illegal settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).
- 2.6.4. Impose enhanced sanctions on Israeli officials and elected politicians who support violence against Palestinians in the OPT.
- 2.7. While the UK bears a special responsibility because of its record in Israel/Palestine, this does not entitle it to intervene directly in any future negotiations.
- 2.8. The UK could, however, use its considerable resources and experience in assisting in humanitarian aid to support Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.
- 2.9. In general, assistance should be provided either through or in cooperation with UNWRA. This both supports the UN and the principle of supporting international cooperation.
- 2.10. There is an opportunity to unleash the extensive medical skills of the British military.
 - 2.10.1. A hospital ship could be sent immediately to moor off the coast of Gaza with a remit to provide medical aid to Gaza. This would have helped, for example, the patients at the Kamal Adwan hospital, destroyed by the IDF on 28th December 2024.
 - 2.10.2. Further assistance could be given by British military medical teams on naval vessels converted temporarily to hospital ships.
 - 2.10.3. The UK could play a major role in arranging for medical evacuations to Britain's hospitals, making use of their advanced medical expertise. It goes without saying that any evacuees and their families should have the right to return to Palestine.

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

- 3.1. The inevitable conclusion of studying intervention by the UK into the land of Palestine/Israel is that it has been instrumental in the oppression of Palestinian people through historical denial of their human rights, in particular rights to their own lands, and to equality, dignity and justice. Given the limitations on space in this submission, and because many of the facts are well-known, the lessons derived can be summarised under the following themes: facilitation of ethnic cleansing; granting Israel impunity with regard to war crimes and denigrating the cultural image of Arabs and in particular Palestinians, thereby contributing to their dehumanisation.
- 3.2. Palestinian nationalism, in common with neighbouring states, grew in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The secret Sykes-Picot agreement, signed between Britain and France, brought Palestine into the British sphere of influence. Jews at that time formed only a small minority in Palestine. Despite this, and despite the only Jew in the British cabinet disagreeing with its adoption, the Balfour Declaration promised multicultural Palestine as a homeland for the Jewish people⁹. Pappé notes how the unification of its north and south into one administrative unit under the British mandate in 1918, while solidifying Palestine as a state within defined geographical borders, opened up the possibility for an eventual take over by the Zionist movement, which claims the whole of the territory of Eretz Israel as its own¹⁰.
- 3.3. The Zionist project of ethnic cleansing, which was overt and explicit in 1948¹¹, has continued to the date of this submission. The ethnic cleansing of the Nakba started before the end of the

⁸ The Universities Pension Fund, USS, has agreed to divest from £80m of Israeli assets <https://www.ft.com/content/db6956be-3da3-46b7-84d6-3b8740a88fc6?segmentId=2c1df321-36a4-1206-2c08-112c059dd69d>

⁹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-a-curious-love-triangle-spurred-uks-cabinet-to-pass-the-balfour-declaration/>

¹⁰ Pappé, I. 2017. *Ten Myths About Israel*. London: Verso.

¹¹ Plan Dalet includes the words “Destruction of villages (setting fire to, blowing up, and planting mines in the debris), especially those population centers which are difficult to control continuously. Mounting search and control operations according to the following guidelines: encirclement of the village and

British mandate with expulsions from Palestinian villages and for Palestinian communities in major towns such as Haifa, Jaffa, Safed, Tiberias and Jerusalem itself. The brutality of such expulsions, which included the massacre at Deir Yassin, has been spelt out in accounts by historians¹². It is sufficiently recent for there to be eyewitnesses and protagonists who are still alive. The recent documentary about the ethnic cleansing of one village and its occupation by Jewish settlers, Tantura, leaves no room for doubt¹³. The British, in withdrawing from Palestine and handing over responsibility to the UN, took no effective action to prevent these atrocities and the expulsion of nearly 1m people from their homes and lands.

- 3.4. Israel's current policy towards Gaza and the West Bank continues the processes of ethnic cleansing. The Generals' Plan which aims to clear all Palestinians from the north of the Gaza Strip is being enacted in real time in December 2024¹⁴. The reports of reputable organisations such as Human Rights Watch, Medical Aid for Palestinians and other NGOs provide ample evidence of the territory being made uninhabitable. 1.9m Palestinian civilians have been displaced in Gaza, many from families who were displaced from their homes by the Nakba and the 1967 war. Meanwhile the Government urges 'restraint'.
- 3.5. The process of turning the West Bank into a series of Palestinian enclaves has accelerated in the last two years. There are now 150 illegal settlements and approximately 700,000 illegal settlers. 1757 Palestinian homes have been destroyed since October 2023, displacing approximately 4,500 people¹⁵. The UK has taken extremely limited action against individuals and organisations despite UN resolutions and this limited action has had little to no effect.
- 3.6. Further violations of Palestinian human rights have been implemented in the West Bank with the imposition of checkpoints and barriers, instituting an apartheid system of passes for Palestinians and a separate road system for Israelis. Palestinians who object to the demolition of their homes, their olive groves being set on fire and their livelihoods destroyed are given no support by the IOF and there are documented instances of Palestinians who are victims, being interned instead of the perpetrators, the settler Israelis¹⁶. Juveniles are held in Israeli detention and tried by military courts¹⁷. The UK Government offered a statement condemning violence in 2021.
- 3.7. The UK Government consistently states that it upholds international law. Yet the Israeli State continues to disregard human rights and international law with impunity. In 2006 the Israeli's killed 660 civilians in the occupied territories, mostly in the Gaza Strip, amongst whom were 141 children. 1,500 Palestinians were killed in Operation Cast Lead in 2008, 2,200 in Operation Protective Edge¹⁸. While the EU and the UN condemned such disproportionate use of force, such imprecations did not prevent the current war in Gaza. In the current hostilities, evidence is emerging that the Israeli Defence Force treats all Palestinians in Gaza as enemies and has authorised middle ranking soldiers to kill civilians where it deems necessary¹⁹.

conducting a search inside it. In the event of resistance, the armed force must be destroyed and the population must be expelled outside the borders of the state." March 10, 1948. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/plan-dalet-for-war-of-independence-march-1948#google_vignette.

¹² <https://jacobin.com/2024/05/ethnic-cleansing-palestine-israel-nakba>.

¹³ <https://www.tantura-film.com/>

¹⁴ Ofir, J. 2023. Influential Israeli national security leader makes the case for genocide in Gaza, Mondoweiss, 20th November, <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/11/influential-israeli-national-security-leader-makes-the-case-for-genocide-in-gaza/>.

¹⁵ Figures supplied by Mustafa Barghouti.

¹⁶ Kassman, J. 2022. Report: A nice hot day in Palestine, Morning Star, 16th November.

<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/f/jenny-kassman-solidarity-work-palestine>.

¹⁷ Save the Children. 2024. <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/palestinian-children-israeli-military-detention-report-increasingly-violent-conditions>

¹⁸ Pappé, Ibid.

- 3.8. Attitudes towards the Arab world in general and towards Palestinians in particular historically have been derogatory in the UK. These attitudes permeated post-war society and linger on in the form of Islamophobia. The Israeli government passed the Nation State Law in 2018 which enshrined Jewish supremacy within the state and downgraded the status and rights of 20% of its non-Jewish, mainly Arab citizens. EU states protested about this law, which repudiates Israel's claim to be similar to Western democracies, with all citizens having equal rights, regardless of ethnicity²⁰. The British government remained silent.
- 3.9. The conclusions that can be drawn are those British interventions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contributed to the ongoing decades of conflict in Israel/Palestine. The expressed aim of Likud, the governing party in the coalition, is to establish a Jewish supremacist state 'from the river to the sea'²¹. The conflict is not between two equal protagonists. Statements demanding that Israel exercises restraint appear to have had little or indeed no effect.
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. Currently there are wars relating to Israel/Palestine in the Yemen and Ukraine. The situation in Syria and in Lebanon, at the time of writing in December 2024, is still fragile. The key to a lasting peace in the region starts with Ukraine and Russia. The UK should exert its influence to resolve this conflict, supporting Slovenia or another European country to host peace talks between Ukraine and Russia.
- 4.2. The RAF has garnered much intelligence in its daily flights across Gaza. To further the enforcement of international law, these intelligence reports should be made available to the courts and other responsible bodies, where requested. They would be particularly valuable in the prosecution of war crimes.
- 4.3. Public opinion polls have consistently demonstrated support for an unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and 60% think that Israel's military actions have gone 'too far'²². Given public unease about the UK's role, it is highly appropriate that the Government should instigate an independent inquiry, similar to Chilcot, into Government policies towards Israel and Palestine for the last four decades.
- 4.4. The UK should provide reassurance, nationally and internationally, of its commitment towards a just peace through recognising the contributions made by Palestinian refugees to an intelligent, informed discourse about the conflict. These contributions have been made by individuals and organisations.

31st December 2024

¹⁹ Kubovitch, Y. 2024. 'No Civilians. Everyone's a Terrorist': IDF Soldiers Expose Arbitrary Killings and Rampant Lawlessness in Gaza's Netzarim Corridor, Haaretz, 18th December.
<https://archive.ph/RHuUy#selection-401.0-401.130>.

²⁰ See <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-passes-nation-state-law-enshrining-jewish-supremacy>.

²¹ Likud's 1977 election manifesto: "Between the sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty."

²² <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/uk-attitudes-toward-conflict-israel-and-gaza>