

# **Wirtten evidence submitted by Muslim Council of Britain: Submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (IPC0079)**

## **Introduction**

The Muslim Council of Britain is the UK's largest and most diverse umbrella body for Muslim organisations, representing over 500 affiliates including mosques, charities, and educational institutions. With a strong history of advocating for human rights and justice, the MCB focuses on issues affecting Muslim communities in the UK and addresses global events that directly impact these communities domestically. Our expertise lies in engaging policymakers and amplifying the voices of those affected by systemic injustice. The MCB has a proven track record, including submitting parliamentary evidence on a wide range of important issues.

## **Introduction to the Questions**

On the thorny issue of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, the Muslim Council of Britain's position is quite simple: the UK must uphold its values and commitment to international law and human rights. Whilst the 7 October attacks have rightly been called out for the murder against innocent civilians, the mounting retributory violence has not been as forthcoming. As a result the State of Israel, the de facto occupying power, has not been held to account to what is now clearly understood to be a genocide against the people of Palestine. Just as the United Kingdom has asserted its values in Russia's illegal actions in Ukraine, so too must our government follow suit in the case of Israel lest it further damages our country's international standing.

The following sections address the first two questions posed by the Foreign Affairs Committee in its inquiry into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We draw on the insights of our affiliated network, who in turn represent a wide cross section of Britain's Muslim communities. For many in our community, the Israel-Palestine conflict directly or indirectly affects us in profound ways. Some of us have family in the region, others are moved by the widespread injustice meted out by a country that is supposed to be an ally of the UK, and, by extension, a country that abides by international law. We call on the UK to assert its role in facilitating a ceasefire, lessons learned from its historical policies, and strategies to ensure resilient peace efforts. The MCB's insights aim to contribute meaningfully to addressing one of the most devastating and enduring humanitarian crises in modern history.

## **1. What Can – and Should – the UK Do to Help Bring About a Ceasefire?**

The UK can play a pivotal role in facilitating a ceasefire by leveraging its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and its historical ties to the region.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **1. Affirm our Values and Rebuild Trust**

- a) The UK's stated commitment to the rules-based international order was severely undermined in the year after 7 October.<sup>1</sup> Now, the UK needs to publicly affirm its commitment to international humanitarian law, ensuring its policies are viewed as impartial and consistent.

#### **2. Engage Regional Partners**

- a) Strengthen support for Egypt and Qatar's leadership in ceasefire negotiations and humanitarian access, leveraging their unique positions to build trust and improve regional cooperation.
- b) Actively collaborate with key regional organisations, including the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), to drive sustained dialogue and facilitate strategic mediation efforts aimed at achieving long-term peace and stability.

#### **3. Champion UN-Led Ceasefire Efforts**

- a) Advocate for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire through binding UN Security Council resolutions that prioritise the protection of civilians and humanitarian aid delivery.
- b) Provide diplomatic support for UN mechanisms that ensure neutral ground for negotiations.

#### **4. Facilitate Humanitarian Access**

- a) Strengthen partnerships with humanitarian organisations to ensure aid reaches affected populations swiftly and effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> Mustafa Al-Soufi, *Refocusing UK foreign policy: a roadmap for effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding*, BOND (2024)

- b) Increase emergency funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) and other aid agencies to address the acute humanitarian crisis in Gaza.
5. **Initiate targeted negotiations on historical injustices**
    - a) Facilitate dialogue on long-standing grievances, including the blockade of Gaza, settlement expansions, and restrictions on movement, which perpetuate cycles of violence.
    - b) Collaborate with regional and international partners to address economic and social inequalities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories through targeted development programmes that promote stability and growth.
  6. **Advocate for the Release of Children and Innocent Detainees**
    - a. Lead international efforts to pressure Israel to release detained children and innocent civilians held without conviction.
    - b. Work with international partners to monitor and ensure the humane treatment of detainees and compliance with international law.
  7. **Prioritise Protection of Civilians and Critical Infrastructure**
    - a) Advocate for measures to ensure the protection of civilians, particularly women, children, and vulnerable groups, during and after ceasefire negotiations.
    - b) Demand that the Israeli government immediately cease targeting critical infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and essential water and energy supplies, in clear violation of international humanitarian law.
    - c) Immediately allocate substantial resources to vital humanitarian organisations such as UNRWA to provide urgent medical care, shelter, and food for displaced populations, ensuring the survival and dignity of affected communities.

## **2. What Can Be Learned from the Record of UK Government Policies?**

The UK's historical policies in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict present a mixed record of inconsistent actions and missed opportunities to advance peace. Key lessons from these policies highlight areas for improvement:

1. **Inconsistencies in Arms Export Policies**
  - a) While 30 arms export licenses to Israel have been suspended, the UK continues to authorise the export of equipment that risks violating international law. This includes exempting the F-35 fighter jet programme, unless going directly to Israel, despite proven International Humanitarian Law violations of these F-35 jets in Gaza, including bombing a densely populated safe zone in July 2023, killing 90<sup>2</sup>.
  - b) With approximately 320 export licenses still in place, a complete arms embargo - free from loopholes - is necessary to ensure that the UK is no longer complicit in Israeli war crimes.
2. **Delayed Recognition of Palestine**
  - a) The UK's refusal to grant Palestine full diplomatic recognition undermines its credibility as a neutral mediator. Recognising Palestine as a sovereign state, as 146 UN member states have done, is essential to demonstrate a genuine commitment to Palestinian autonomy and safety.
3. **Insufficient Sanctions on Violators**
  - a) The UK has failed to sanction extremist Israeli ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich whose radical rhetoric and policies exacerbate violence and instability, despite calls from MPs and civil society organisations. Smotrich and Ben-Gvir have claimed that starving civilians in Gaza "might be justified" and that violent Israeli settlers in the West Bank were "heroes", respectively<sup>3</sup>. The failure to impose sanctions starkly contrasts with standard international practices, where such measures are typically applied to leaders of regimes accused of human rights abuses and violations of international law.
4. **Inconsistent Support for Humanitarian Efforts**
  - a) The suspension and delayed restoration of funding to UNRWA<sup>4</sup> expose the need for consistent and reliable support to mitigate humanitarian crises and prevent further suffering.

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<sup>2</sup> CAAT, *Government exempts F-35 from export license suspension – on same day evidence emerges Israel used it in attack on Gaza 'safe zone'* (2024)

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Library, *Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: UK response to the conflict since July 2024* (2024)

<sup>4</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, *UK to restart funding to UNRWA* (2024) Available at:

## 5. Failure to Support Humanitarian Crisis Responses

- a) The UK has failed to take meaningful action in response to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, including widespread displacement, the destruction of infrastructure, and the dire shortage of medical and food supplies. A more proactive approach is needed to alleviate suffering and support vulnerable populations.

## 6. Abstention from Crucial UN Votes

- a) The UK has abstained from key UN votes over the past 14 months calling for ceasefires and humanitarian protections, including abstaining from a vote for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in December 2023<sup>5</sup> which undermines its credibility as a global leader committed to peace.

## 7. Lack of Condemnation for Civilian Casualties

- a) The UK's reluctance to condemn the killing of women, children, and innocent civilians in bombings of refugee camps, hospitals, and residential areas reflects a lack of even-handedness in addressing conflicts. Unequivocal and consistent condemnation of all violations of international law is essential to uphold fairness, ensure accountability, and maintain the integrity of international standards.

## 8. Failure to Accept Evidence of Genocidal Activity in Gaza

- a) Amnesty International<sup>6</sup>, Human Rights Watch<sup>7</sup>, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories<sup>8</sup> have documented credible evidence suggesting that actions in Gaza meet the criteria under the Genocide Convention (1948)<sup>9</sup> including the targeting of civilians, destruction of infrastructure, and the use of starvation as a weapon of war. Despite these findings, the UK has intentionally refrained from using the term genocide, undermining efforts to secure accountability under international law and evade responsibility for addressing egregious violations of human rights.

## The MCB's Call to Action for the Government

The UK has a unique responsibility and opportunity to lead efforts toward sustainable peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This requires not only addressing immediate needs, such as facilitating a ceasefire and delivering humanitarian aid, but also committing to long-term policies that uphold justice and international law.

- Advocate for an immediate ceasefire and sustained humanitarian access.
- Recognise Palestine as a sovereign state to reinforce the viability of a two-state solution.
- Strengthen accountability by supporting ICC investigations and imposing meaningful sanctions on violators of international law.
- Align its foreign policies with principles of impartiality, justice, and adherence to international humanitarian law.
- Ensure public statements and actions treat all victims equally, condemning violence against civilians, including women and children, while supporting adherence to UN resolutions.

By addressing these issues and implementing the recommendations outlined, the UK can restore its credibility as a principled actor in the conflict and contribute to a peaceful future in the region.

The MCB remains committed to working with policymakers, regional partners, and civil society to realise this vision.

**31<sup>st</sup> December 2024**

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-restart-funding-to-unrwa>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, *UN General Assembly votes by large majority for immediate humanitarian ceasefire during emergency session*, *news.un.org*. (2024) Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144717>.

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, *Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territory: 'You Feel Like You Are Subhuman': Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza* - Amnesty International, Amnesty International. (2024)

<sup>7</sup> Niku Jafaria, *Extermination and Acts of Genocide*, Human Rights Watch. (2024)

<sup>8</sup> *Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967*, OHCHR, (2024)

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, *The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948)*, pp. 1–5. (2019)