

## Written Evidence Submitted by Ir Amim (IPC0081)

### Ir Amim Submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

December 2024

#### Introduction

**Ir Amim** (“City of Nations” or “City of Peoples”) is an Israeli human rights and peace organization that focuses on Jerusalem within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The mission of Ir Amim is to render Jerusalem a more equitable and sustainable city for the Israelis and Palestinians who share it and to help secure an agreed resolution on the city. Ir Amim envisions a city that ensures the dignity and welfare of all its residents and safeguards the rights of both Palestinians and Israelis to their homes and the city, while upholding their historic, religious and political attachments to Jerusalem. Ir Amim aspires to a sustainable political future for Jerusalem as the shared capital of two peoples – achievable only through a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

In light of Ir Amim’s particular focus on Jerusalem, this written evidence will specifically relate to the third question posed in the call for evidence: *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?*

The submission of written evidence is organized as follows: reason for submission, background, and policy recommendations.

We hope that this submission will be useful and would be pleased to provide oral evidence as part of the inquiry.

#### Reason for Submission of Evidence

1. The brutal Hamas attack on October 7, 2023 and the ensuing devastating war in Gaza has painfully shattered the myth that “managing or shrinking the conflict” was a sustainable alternative to a negotiated political agreement. It further confirmed that the only way to achieve both lasting peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike is through a mediated political resolution based on a two-state framework. And there is no resolution without Jerusalem as the capital of two independent states.
2. However, Jerusalem’s designation as a “final status” issue in years of peace talks has emboldened consecutive Israeli governments to continue to create facts on the ground which preemptively determine the city’s political future and further undermine conditions for a sustainable political solution. Since the outbreak of the war, the current Israeli government has been exploiting the circumstances to create irreparable changes in Jerusalem, while attention is diverted to the catastrophic conditions in Gaza. These measures aim to thwart all prospects for a negotiated solution with two capitals in Jerusalem, while accelerating the displacement of Palestinians from their homes and the city.

3. That said, in light of the shifts in the global political landscape, we believe that the UK has a central role to play in spearheading efforts to re-establish a viable political process that recenters Jerusalem, accountability, and human rights.

## Background

4. Under the cover of the war, there has been a major surge in the promotion of new settlements and a dramatic spike in the rate of home demolitions alongside forced evictions of Palestinian families and settler takeovers of their homes. Measures further subverting the status quo and curtailing Muslim worship rights on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount have likewise increased. As such, the viability of a negotiated political agreement with a shared capital in Jerusalem is moving farther out of reach.
  - a. [Plans for five brand new settlements with over 8000 housing units have advanced since the start of Israel-Hamas war](#), one of which is under construction (Givat Hamatos A) and two of which were approved (Givat Shaked, Lower Aqueduct). Givat Hamatos--once a longstanding international redline due to its lethal impact on the two-state framework with two capitals in Jerusalem—is the first new settlement to be built in East Jerusalem in over 20 years.
  - b. In juxtaposition to these advancements, demolitions of Palestinian homes have reached unparalleled levels. Since the start of 2024, there have been a total of 176 home demolitions in East Jerusalem, which constitutes the highest annual rate of home demolitions in decades. Entire communities in areas targeted for settlement activities are at risk of largescale displacement, including the [neighborhood of Al Bustan-Silwan](#) located just south of the Old City, which is under concerted state and settler pressure. Some 150 houses home to 1500 Palestinians in Al Bustan are under threat of mass demolition due to Israeli plans to establish a tourist site in the area, which would serve to bolster the settler presence there and further alter the character of the space. In 2024, 23 homes were demolished in the neighborhood in addition to the Al Bustan community center, which provided vital services and programs to over 1000 residents, including hundreds of children.
  - c. In parallel to this, [five Palestinian families have been forcibly evicted from their homes](#) and supplanted with Jewish settlers. The cases of another 12 families are pending before the courts. Over the course of 2024, the Israeli courts ruled to evict a total of 18 families (households), numbering over 100 individuals--the vast majority of whom are from Batan al-Hawa-Silwan, where 700 Palestinians stand to be displaced from their homes in favor of settlers.
  - d. Land registration procedures, formally known as [settlement of land title](#) (SOLT), has become one of the most alarming issues facing Palestinians and the future of East Jerusalem today. It has become the latest tool to expand and finalize state and settler appropriation of land, while increasing the threat of Palestinian dispossession and displacement. Under the guise of a government procedure characterized for the ostensible benefit of Palestinians, the state is rather exploiting it to seize more land

for Jewish settlement, while further curtailing establishment of Palestinian rights to their lands.

- e. Moves by [the Israeli government that systematically violate the long-standing status quo arrangements](#) on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount dramatically intensified over the past year in an unprecedented manner. While Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to pay lip service to the status quo, the government is in fact facilitating a radical change of arrangements on the Mount, hiding behind the policies spearheaded by National Security Minister Ben Gvir and his authority over the Israel police. This includes unparalleled restrictions on Muslim access to Al Aqsa, increased Jewish prayer on the Mount, and a significant rise in close coordination between the Israel police, government officials and Temple Movement activists. If the Israeli authorities continue to back these actions and fail to reinstate and enforce the status quo, it could lead to a dangerous escalation with far-reaching consequences for stability in Jerusalem and beyond.

### Policy Recommendations

5. In light of these alarming developments, the UK alongside likeminded international actors should undertake concerted tangible moves to recenter Jerusalem in the context of the renewed global discourse around recharting a political pathway. This should include, but not limited to, steps taken within the framework of the [Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution](#).
6. Alongside this, it is critical for the UK to work to halt all unilateral actions that erode conditions necessary for negotiations, in particular, all measures that attempt to entrench Israeli control of East Jerusalem and predetermine the city's political future. These include settlement construction in the city; *de facto* and *de jure* annexation steps, including those implied by the separation barrier's route (the settlement blocs of "[Greater Jerusalem](#)"); land registration procedures; violations of the status quo on Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount; systemic discrimination in housing and planning policy; processes of displacement; as well as attempts to alter the city's demographic composition through the revocation of residency rights, legislation, and territorial changes.
7. Specifically, the UK should also take the lead in addressing *the here and the now* - the current one-state reality of perpetual occupation, Jewish supremacy, and unequal rights. One of the most severe expressions of this in Jerusalem is the denial of equal rights to housing, shelter, and property alongside the practice of home demolitions and evictions, which increasingly serves as a tool for Palestinian displacement. As affirmed by the ICJ's Advisory Opinion, such policies and practices constitute prohibited discrimination under international law and can amount to forcible transfer. While acts of forced displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank are often perpetrated by violent settlers, which accelerated against the backdrop of the war, in East Jerusalem, these measures are nearly exclusively carried out by the state in the form of demolitions and evictions. The UK alongside international partners should therefore take measures to hold Israel accountable for these

human rights violations and breaches of international law, which likewise subvert any possibility of a shared capital in Jerusalem of two sovereign states.

8. Although these processes are often carried out under a veneer of legality, they are underpinned by institutional discrimination enshrined within the Israeli legal system that directly infringe on the rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem.
  - a. Home demolitions are selectively imposed on Palestinians under the guise of building regulation enforcement due to lacking building permits impossible to procure, leaving hundreds of Palestinians homeless per year. The practice of demolitions is a direct outcome of systematic discrimination in Israeli planning policy. Such a practice is a form of forced displacement that ultimately breeds more enmity and hostility, while perpetuating the cycle of violence, revenge, and conflict.
  - b. Evictions of Palestinian families and settler takeovers of their homes are carried out in collusion with the state through the exploitation of discriminatory laws which afford land reclamation rights to Jews while depriving Palestinians of the same privileges. Takeovers of Palestinian homes lead to the creation of settler enclaves in the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods which are accompanied by the daily presence of armed settlers and private and state security forces. Together, these actions generate constant friction, violence, and severely disrupt life in Palestinian communities, leading to further destabilization of the city.

In order to safeguard Palestinian rights to their homes and the city, the UK must specifically compel the State of Israel to halt demolitions, forced evictions of Palestinian families and settler takeovers of their homes.

9. In parallel, Israel must be urged to afford Palestinians with the basic right to shelter through promoting equitable housing opportunities, residential development and protection of property rights in East Jerusalem. This includes, implementing planning and building policies which allow Palestinian communities to grow and develop adequately and should respect the integrity and contiguity of Palestinian space. Likewise, it is essential to suspend all land registration procedures (SOLT), which are being exploited as a new potent tool for mass appropriation of land for Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, while increasing Palestinian dispossession and displacement.
10. To this end, it is likewise essential for the UK and the international community to insist on the right of Palestinians in Jerusalem and beyond to develop their own institutions and entities and freely manage their own affairs without fear in the immediate term and in lead up to statehood.
11. Alongside of this, massive investments, along with broad local and international support, including from the UK, are necessary to strengthen local Israeli and Palestinian civil society working towards peacebuilding and advancing human rights in Jerusalem. In this regard, we welcome UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's recent pledge of support for an international

fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace and a commitment to host an inaugural meeting in London to support civil society in the region.

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