

**Written evidence submitted by Christian Aid (IPC0103)**

*1. Background:*

- 1.1. Christian Aid is the official relief, development, and advocacy agency of 41 sponsoring churches in Britain and Ireland. Christian Aid has been working with the poorest and most vulnerable people in the Middle East since the early 1950s. Christian Aid works through local partner organisations and Palestinian civil society throughout the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), including illegally annexed East Jerusalem, inside Israel and in refugee camps across Lebanon. We hear daily from partners and communities about their insecurity and experiences and through their experience and expertise our partners are able to access some of the most vulnerable communities and ensure that their voices and needs inform our programmes. Our established partners in Gaza are responding, under intense pressure, with medical relief and community-led initiatives such as food, shelter, sanitation, and cash. However, it is extremely dangerous to move around, and supplies of essentials are running perilously low.
- 1.2. Please contact: Sophie Powell, Chief of UK Advocacy and Policy, [spowell@christian-aid.org](mailto:spowell@christian-aid.org)

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alternative, which accepts the premise of annexation and forced transfer, should be unequivocally condemned and rejected.

- 1.3. The desperate humanitarian situation needs addressing and the UK must ensure that life-saving humanitarian aid reaches all who desperately need and reverse the risk of famine. This must include utilising all diplomatic and political levers to halt the implementation of the ban of UNRWA – the primary provider of critical aid and services across the OPT.
- 1.4. The UK must meaningfully support the ICJ provisional measures and ensure they are implemented as obligated, which will be in line with the UN’s request for third states to fulfil its international obligations to prevent discrimination, persecution and genocide, They also should cease any action, political, economic, cultural, or military – that supports the illegal occupation in line with the ICJ’s Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024 that the occupation is unlawful and must end.
  - 1.4.1. The UK Government must do all within its power to prevent coercive and hostile environments, including demanding that all forced displacement in IoPT be reversed, and recognising the right of refugees to return home.
  - 1.4.2. The UH Government should integrate frameworks of atrocity prevention into UK government strategies to ensure they centre their treaty and ethical obligations in all their responses to the situation across OPT. Resource in-country representatives with atrocity prevention and response training, expertise, guidance and leadership.
  - 1.4.3. International leaders must convene an urgent political meeting of international leaders (UNSC) which commits to underwrite a genuine law-based peace process, guarantees sufficient funding for locally led reconstruction and pledges to protect the security and dignity of Palestinians and Israelis as equals.

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

- 2.1. Government policies must be backed up by clear actions that support their implication or concretely challenge the actions that frustrate them. Not doing so supports a culture of impunity across the occupied Palestinian territory.
- 2.2. Successive UK Governments have reaffirmed<sup>7</sup> that the UK considers Israeli settlements across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, to be illegal. Following most Israeli announcements of new housing tenders in settlements, the UK offers condemnation and has gone so far as to sanction a minority of violent settlers<sup>8</sup> but little else. Settlements grow and become more entrenched, with the Israeli Government ‘legalising’ outposts<sup>9</sup>.
- 2.3. The UK also supports a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians and committed to ‘a full diplomatic role...recognising a Palestinian state’<sup>10</sup>. Settlement expansion and Israeli control of occupied Palestinian territory as its own, renders such an outcome illusory – a reality which is not lost on Palestinians who see their rights and legitimate aspirations ignored.
- 2.4. In line with the ICJ advisory opinion on occupation, it is essential for the UK to act in full conformity with their obligations under international law not to recognise as lawful, nor aid or assist, the situation created by Israel’s “unlawful presence” in the OPT – not least in response to illegal settlements. The UK must also act in cooperation with others to lawfully bring this illegal situation to an end.
- 2.5. The UK should review the existing UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement and its associated trade privileges, as well as its current negotiating strategy with Israel on a new free trade agreement, so as to ensure that the UK government is acting in full compliance with its international obligations in response to Israel’s internationally wrongful acts.
- 2.6. In the first instance, the UK should ban trade between the UK and Israel’s illegal settlements in the West Bank, making the import of goods or services originating from these lands a criminal offence.

<sup>7</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-03-23/debates/4CD25F23-98DA-4B1D-8970-DB3C012FD6A5/OccupiedPalestinianTerritoriesIllegalSettlements#contribution-477298A8-1025-45E8-951F-DB0A64F6CE3E>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-uk-sanctions-target-illegal-outposts-and-organisations-supporting-extremist-israeli-settlers-in-the-west-bank?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications-topic&utm\\_source=ce14944d-c2a2-402a-8c3b-0362b1c99554&utm\\_content=immediately](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-uk-sanctions-target-illegal-outposts-and-organisations-supporting-extremist-israeli-settlers-in-the-west-bank?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications-topic&utm_source=ce14944d-c2a2-402a-8c3b-0362b1c99554&utm_content=immediately)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/cabinet-okays-legalizing-5-outposts-sanctioning-pa-officials-minister-says/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-07-19/debates/CEEB9B68-0D16-45BD-85E3-AA2F02F415DE/IsraelAndGaza#contribution-7C03A336-9D74-412B-AB60-6625EC6B7641>

This would constitute concrete action against the ongoing illegal expansion of settlements. It would also align the UK's trade policy with its political stance and incorporate international law into our trading relationships.

- 2.7. Given the gravity of Israel's breaches of international law as determined by the ICJ, in addition to recent violations of international humanitarian and human rights law made by several independent international bodies on Israel's use of force and accompanying policies in Gaza, we further believe the UK government should suspend its existing trade agreement with Israel and current negotiations over a free trade agreement, pending the outcome of a thorough review and the end of widespread and systematic human rights violations committed by Israeli authorities in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel.
- 2.8. The UK is the current Security Council pen holder on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Given the clear lack of protection afforded Palestinians, the UK should prioritise addressing this. The Foreign Secretary David Lammy told the FASC on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025<sup>11</sup>, that "it has not been possible to make an assessment of Israel's compliance with the principle of proportionality. This is in part due to the opaque and contested information environment in Gaza." Lammy further noted the challenges of "accessing the specific and sensitive information necessary from Israel in relation to each incident, such as intended targets, anticipated military advantage, and anticipated civilian harm."
- 2.9. This claim is unacceptable in the face of the actions outlined in this submission of Israel's illegal actions in Gaza- and indeed more broadly across the OPT. The Government's must demonstrate a greater willingness to confront Israel's actions and ensure that both justice and protection apply to Palestinians as they do to any other population.
3. ***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?***
  - 3.1. Christian Aid believes there is a moral imperative for the international community to redouble its efforts to hold all those to account who target innocent civilians. We further believe that while both Palestinians and Israelis have the right to self-determination, Palestinians are being systematically denied that opportunity by the actions of the Israeli state.
  - 3.2. Christian Aid is not a legal advising body, and we will not pre-empt the decisions of the appropriate courts on crimes codified in law. However, those Courts can take years to reach their decisions, meanwhile, we are witnessing a humanitarian and moral crisis and action is required now before it is too late.
  - 3.3. We present here the recent opinions and judgements of respected and relevant institutions on what is happening across the OPT. Governments with an obligation to act remain seemingly paralysed, rendering them complicit. Failure to stand resolutely against all war crimes and crimes against humanity wherever they occur undermines also efforts to secure peace elsewhere, whether in Ukraine, Sudan, Syria or Myanmar. As a matter of principle, lasting peace requires a commitment to accountability and justice without which any form of critical reconciliation will be impossible to achieve. Thus, the following must be addressed.
  - 3.4. A UN Commission concluded in October 2024<sup>12</sup> that Israel was guilty of both war crimes and crimes against humanity. Furthermore, in November 2024 the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants<sup>13</sup> for Israeli and Hamas over allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity including starvation as a method of warfare and persecution. There can be no justification under international humanitarian law for impeding humanitarian aid.
  - 3.5. Those crimes have led to the mass displacement of Gaza's population, often multiple times, deaths of tens of thousands of civilians and the population in Gaza at imminent risk of dying of disease and

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<sup>11</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee: What is the FCDO's plan B in Gaza? - Committees - UK Parliament

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/un-commission-finds-war-crimes-and-crimes-against-humanity-israeli-attacks>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-rejects-state-israels-challenges>

famine, and damage to civilian infrastructure, rendering the possibility of Gazans returning to their homes virtually nil.

- 3.6. In January 2024, the ICJ considered that the risk of genocide warranted provisional measures in order to prevent it. Genocide is a crime against humanity which the ICJ is uniquely positioned to determine from a legal perspective. In November 2024, a UN Special Committee concluded that Israel's warfare in Gaza is consistent with the characteristics of genocide, with mass civilian casualties and life-threatening conditions intentionally imposed on its Palestinian population.
- 3.7. At the end of January 2025, two laws within Israel's Knesset will come into force, ending UNWRA's ability to operate within 'the sovereign territory of Israel' and banning contact between the agency and the Israeli authorities<sup>14</sup>. This will render it virtually impossible for UNWRA to conduct its humanitarian work across the territory that Israel occupies.
- 3.8. As the Minister for Development has stated 'no other organisation has the scope that it has and the depth of provision'<sup>15</sup>. The legislation breaches the provisional measures ordered by the ICJ to prevent genocide, given the critical role that the agency plays in delivering critical humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population in Gaza and across the region. The international community has a clear obligation to prevent genocide, which must include giving unequivocal political and financial support to UNRWA.
- 3.9. In October 2024 the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, found that Israeli actions in Gaza constituted the crime against humanity of extermination, which obligates Governments such as the UK to act regardless of their view on genocide. The Commission accused Israeli security forces of deliberately killing, detaining and torturing medical personnel and targeting medical vehicles while tightening their siege on Gaza and restricting permits to leave for medical treatment unavailable in Gaza.
- 3.10. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Famine Review Committee (FRC) issued an alert on 8 November 2024 warning that there is "a strong likelihood that famine is imminent in areas within the northern Gaza Strip"<sup>16</sup>. The lack of aid access has had devastating effects on the people of Gaza, who have endured critical food insecurity and face starvation. The Palestinian NGO Network, PNGO, have called for northern Gaza to be declared a famine zone<sup>17</sup> following this and warned that the situation in northern Gaza was critical as limited aid access only met '6% of the region's essential needs'.
- 3.11. The UN, Human Rights Watch and humanitarian organisations have consistently warned international governments that starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is being used in Gaza<sup>18</sup>. Starvation of civilian populations is illegal under International Humanitarian Law, and in direct breach of UNSC Resolution 2417. Despite this high-level Ministers have publicly called for a 'complete siege'<sup>19</sup> of humanitarian aid.
- 3.12. An independent legal opinion<sup>20</sup> found that the 16-year closure of Gaza, including its intensification since the war began, constitutes the crime against humanity of persecution and experts have recommended this be added to the existing ICC investigation into crimes against humanity and war crimes in IOPT committed since 2014.
- 3.13. The ICJ advised<sup>21</sup> in July 2024 that Israel is under an obligation to end its unlawful presence in the IOPT as rapidly as possible, must cease all new settlement activities immediately and evacuate all settlers from the OPT. It further clarified that all States are obliged not to act in any way which assists maintaining the occupation.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/remarks-philippe-lazarini-unrwa-commissioner-general-third-meeting>

<sup>15</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15205/pdf/>

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC\\_FRC\\_Alert\\_Gaza\\_Nov2024.pdf](https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_FRC_Alert_Gaza_Nov2024.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/live-blog/live-blog-update/palestinian-ngos-urge-un-declare-famine-zone-gaza>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-used-weapon-war-gaza>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/defense-minister-announces-complete-siege-of-gaza-no-power-food-or-fuel/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/defense-minister-announces-complete-siege-of-gaza-no-power-food-or-fuel/)

<sup>20</sup> <https://pshr.org.uk/latest-news/pshr-publishes-landmark-independent-legal-opinion-by-eminent-team-of-experts-that-finds-the-closure-of-gaza-including-its-intensification-since-7-october-2023-to-constitute-the-crime-against-humanity/#:~:text=Accountability%20%3E%20This%20page,-LPHR%20publishes%20landmark%20independent%20legal%20opinion%20by%20eminent%20team%20of,crime%20against%20humanity%20of%20persecution>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/experts-hail-icj-declaration-illegality-israels-presence-occupied>

- 3.14. Before October 7<sup>th</sup>, violence in the occupied West Bank had already been reaching unimaginable levels, 2022 was the ‘deadliest year’<sup>22</sup> for Palestinian children and since the Oslo Peace Accord, settler numbers have almost tripled. Today there are approximately over 700,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank<sup>23</sup>, and a significant minority are violent towards Palestinian communities. This well-documented violence includes beating, throwing stones, physical threats, torching fields, destroying<sup>24</sup> and stealing crops, damaging homes and cars, blocking roads, and, in rare cases, killing.
- 3.15. Often watched by the military who rarely intervene<sup>25</sup>, settlers intimidate Palestinian farmers and shepherds to leave their fields and water sources which they have used for generations and are enabled to seize land and property. In 2024, over 4000<sup>26</sup> Palestinians have been forcibly displaced as a result of both settler violence and home demolitions by the Israeli military. Seizing land and settler violence appear to be state-sanctioned, which, alongside other measures used against Palestinians, suggests that Israel has no intention of relinquishing any land or control to enable the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state in line with the UK’s commitment to a two-state solution<sup>27</sup>.
- 3.16. Palestinians in the West Bank face obstacles to everyday life. Palestinians navigate an increasingly hostile environment, from dealing with checkpoints controlling their movement to, to the near impossibility of obtaining building permits, for those living in Area C. Such conditions result in severe disruptions to livelihood, economic activity, education, and essential services including access to health and water services. The World Bank have noted the restrictions under occupation have heavily curtailed Palestinian economic potential. Since October 7<sup>th</sup> the humanitarian situation has been compounded in the West Bank doubling the number of people pushed into food insecurity<sup>28</sup>.
- 3.17. The denial of Palestinian refugees the right to return from 1948 onwards, the ongoing clearing of Palestinians from northern Gaza, forced displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank and also in the Negev/Naqab inside Israel - it seems that Israel seeks to entrench the occupation and potentially annex further territory.
- 3.18. Annexation did not begin after October 7<sup>th</sup>, but in 1980 with formal but illegal annexation of east Jerusalem. Following the 2020 election, as part of the coalition agreement, the government moved to debate annexation plans, applying sovereignty over parts of the West Bank and land along the West Bank boundary with Jordan<sup>29</sup>. Concerns over these plans were debated in the UK Parliament<sup>30</sup> which opposed ‘any unilateral annexation’. The UN also condemned the move, calling for the international community to prioritise bringing an ‘end to impunity’<sup>31</sup>.
- 3.19. In early 2023, moves were already being taken forward to transfer administrative powers from the military commander to civilian control under Israeli’s Finance and Defence Minister Bezalel Smotrich<sup>32</sup>. In the first six months of 2023, settlement construction was at an all-time high<sup>33</sup> and by June<sup>34</sup> a controversial resolution eased the process for expanding settlements, retroactively legalising outposts and unauthorised extensions to existing settlements which were previously illegal under Israeli law.
- 3.20. Israeli Finance Minister has claimed that Donald Trump’s election opens up an ‘important opportunity’ to advance annexation of the occupied West Bank<sup>35</sup>, and the incoming US Ambassador to Israel has previously said ‘there is no such thing as an occupation’<sup>36</sup>. This political support has further emboldened further annexation plans, with the Minister already ordering his department to

<sup>22</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/2022-becomes-deadliest-year-palestinian-children-west-bank-over-15-years>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Palestine-March2024.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-230-west-bank>

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.btselem.org/settler\\_violence/20240827\\_magged\\_haaretz\\_farm\\_military\\_assisted\\_settler\\_takeover\\_of\\_shufa\\_and\\_kafa\\_lands](https://www.btselem.org/settler_violence/20240827_magged_haaretz_farm_military_assisted_settler_takeover_of_shufa_and_kafa_lands)

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/humanitarian-situation-update-252-west-bank>

<sup>27</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-07-30/debates/94AC48AD-FDAD-40B5-97CD-E7ABDF2259D0/RecognitionOfPalestine#contribution-5F300173-AB8D-40CB-9D6D-A209E3ED1CB5>

<sup>28</sup> [Gaza updates: Hunger deepens as aid plummets | World Food Programme](https://www.gazaupdates.com/hunger-deepens-as-aid-plummets-world-food-programme)

<sup>29</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2020-0089/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-06-30/debates/B7FFA316-BBC6-4025-91CE-3F68A84A4D30/WestBankPlannedAnnexation#contribution-EFE62166-4213-4C22-8DAD-F9BBC918B161>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2020/06/israeli-annexation-parts-palestinian-west-bank-would-break-international-law-un>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/20/idf-transfers-powers-in-occupied-west-bank-to-pro-settler-civil-servants>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/2023-sets-record-for-settlement-construction-and-outpost-legalization-watchdog/>

<sup>34</sup> [Israel's Expansion of West Bank Settlements Raises Concerns for Peaceful Resolution in the Middle East | ASIL](https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-expansion-of-west-bank-settlements-raises-concerns-for-peaceful-resolution-in-the-middle-east-asil/)

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/smotrich-says-trumps-victory-an-opportunity-to-apply-sovereignty-in-the-west-bank/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0tend8qj010>

prepare 'the necessary infrastructure for applying sovereignty'<sup>37</sup> and Ministers have called for the re-establishment of settlements in Gaza<sup>38</sup>.

- 3.21. More than 2 million Palestinians in Gaza have been collectively punished with the vast majority of the population having been forced to move multiple times on the orders of the Israeli military with nowhere safe to seek refuge. Makeshift shelters have been hit - men, women and children burned to death. Preventable diseases, starvation, chronic over-crowding and dehydration are an ever-present reality. Women and girls are unable to find sanitary products and forced to use any material they can find. An entire generation will miss out on their education. With almost 70% of buildings destroyed or damaged and Gaza's infrastructure in ruins, it is hard to imagine what sort of future remains.

*20<sup>th</sup> January 2025*

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<sup>37</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/11/11/middleeast/israeli-minister-annexation-occupied-west-bank-intl/index.html>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/government-ministers-call-for-new-settlements-in-gaza-at-ultranationalist-conference/>