

The UK's Role in Securing a Just Peace in Israel and Palestine

Two years of violent conflict and siege have taken a devastating toll on the lives of Palestinians living in Gaza – and despite a ceasefire agreement, attacks continue on a near-daily basis. Death and destruction on an unimaginable scale have been witnessed, brought on by Israel's relentless bombardments and refusal to allow in sufficient humanitarian aid. The current ceasefire was a welcome step. But with hundreds more Palestinians killed since then, this is ceasefire in name only and urgent international efforts are desperately needed to deliver a genuine pathway to a sustainable and just peace.

The UK Government has a responsibility to do more. They must push for Palestinians to be made active and equal participants in a peace process, not just bystanders, and for all sides to adhere fully to the agreements that have been made. The UK must also ensure the current process addresses all elements of Israel's illegal occupation over Palestinian territory – not just Gaza but also in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with the continued seizure of Palestinian land for the expansion of settlements and the Israeli Government's declared intention to annex the West Bank entirely.

Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal according to the Fourth Geneva Convention and the occupation itself reaffirmed as unlawful by the International Court of Justice in July 2024.

Furthermore, the UK Government must take steps to end its continued complicity with the occupation, including banning all UK trade and investment in illegal Israeli settlements,

ending the UK's preferential trade terms with Israel and suspending all arms sales to Israel, until all violations of international law cease. Through these actions the UK can make a significant difference towards both ensuring the ceasefire is actually sustained, and to guaranteeing that a lasting peace is secured for all Israelis and Palestinians. Without these actions, we risk a new status quo taking hold that guarantees nothing but further occupation, oppression and violence in the future.

Developments in Gaza

The proposal from President Trump, agreed in October, was a significant development following two years of Israeli bombardment against Gaza. A ceasefire was agreed, which was meant to see the release of the hostages, an increase in humanitarian aid reaching Palestinians, and hopefully start the process to a long-term peace in the region. The proposal has welcome aspects, including the end to fighting, significantly increased aid access and the promise of no forced displacement. However, Palestinian sovereignty appears more as an aspiration than the inalienable right that it is. And, whilst some of this has been implemented, there are clearly significant gaps that the UK Government must seek to address.

In Gaza, over 347 Palestinians have been killed since the ceasefire was agreed, with no meaningful pushback from the UK as Israel has continued attacks. Meanwhile, the World Food Programme has estimated that just half of the required food aid for the population of Gaza is entering the territory, whilst other Palestinian agencies are estimating only a quarter of the mandated aid volume is entering post-ceasefire.

The international community is moving forward with this peace process without addressing this reality. In November, a UN Security Council resolution was agreed upon, which again aimed to move the situation in Gaza forward. But the issues remain – more attacks by Israeli military forces in Gaza, an inadequate amount of aid reaching Palestinians and continued settler violence in the West Bank. The UK must push Israel to comply with its obligations under international law and the ceasefire agreement and take relevant actions to ensure it does so.

The Situation in the West Bank

The international community and the current ceasefire proposal have also completely overlooked the situation in the West Bank, where over 260 attacks by settlers against Palestinians and their property occurred in October, the UN's highest monthly tally since records began.

Since the illegal occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem began following the 1967 Middle East War, Israel has misappropriated over 2000 km² for their own purposes and built around 160 settlements in the Occupied Territory – over 1/3 of the West Bank. These settlements house some 700,000 Israelis, alongside the estimated 3.3 million Palestinians who also live there. But the rate of settlement expansion is increasing.

In May this year, Israeli Ministers announced that 22 new Israeli settlements had been approved in the OPT – the biggest expansion in decades. Then in August, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich announced plans to approve tenders to build more than 3000 housing units in the E1 settlement project, between Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim in the West Bank. Such expansion would in effect divide the northern and southern regions of the West Bank and prevent future developments by Palestinians to connect East Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah. Smotrich described the move as “[burying] the idea of a Palestinian state”.

Although long an issue in the West Bank, settler violence in the West Bank has also been on the increase. This year has already seen 1500 recorded incidents of settler attacks, with October seeing more settler attacks than any other month since the UN's Humanitarian Office began collecting figures nearly 20 years ago. A total of 612 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, by Israeli security forces and settlers during the most recent OHCHR reporting period. Meanwhile, Israel regularly demolishes Palestinian owned structures, with at least 11,500 being destroyed in the 15 years to 2024. And in 2024, Israel demolished around 1,779 Palestinian structures, primarily homes – roughly five structures per day for the whole year.

These illegal settlements have a stranglehold on the Palestinian economy, trapping many in poverty. Settlers violently co-opt important agricultural land for themselves and pollute agricultural land that remains in the hands of Palestinians with sewage. Whilst water is abundant for settlers, most in the West Bank go without the daily recommended intake. These impacts raise the costs of Palestinian products, so they cannot compete with the cheaper settlement products that are available – they are a captive market for settlement goods.

Settlements are a barrier to a just and lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians. The UK views settlements as illegal – but UK businesses are still allowed to trade with, and thus support, these settlements, allowing them to thrive at the expense of Palestinians lives and livelihoods. This must change.

The UK's Role in Achieving a Just Peace

The UK must ensure a genuine ceasefire that leads to a just and sustainable peace for all living in Israel and Palestine. This means ending complicity by:

- Banning all UK trade with and investment in illegal Israeli settlements
- Suspending the existing UK-Israel Trade Agreement, ending the UK's preferential trade terms with Israel.
- Suspending all arms sales to Israel, until all violations of international law cease.

Please contact Lydia Harrold, the UK Parliamentary and Political Officer, at lharrold@christian-aid.org for further information

End notes



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September 2020