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## Justice, Accountability, and the Path to Peace in Israel-Palestine

Written evidence submitted by Nicola Pratt, Professor of the International Politics of the Middle East, Warwick University (IPC0073)

### 1. My background and interest in the topic

1.1 My submission draws on nearly three decades of experience in teaching and researching the Middle East.

I am a Professor of the International Politics of the Middle East at the University of Warwick, where I have taught Middle East politics for 15 years, including specialized courses on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

1.2 My research centres on justice and human security in the Middle East and North Africa, with a focus on themes such as women's activism, civil society movements for human rights, and opposition to war, state violence, and authoritarianism. My most recent book, *Embodying Geopolitics: Generations of Women's Activism in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon* (University of California Press, 2020), examines how major geopolitical events—from the 1940s to today, including the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians after 1948—have shaped women's activism and gender relations in the region. I am also the co-author of *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (University of California Press, 2009), which documents the detrimental effects of the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq (2003–2008) on women's security and rights.

1.3 My research has taken me to many countries in the region, including extended stays in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, as well as visits to Israel, the Occupied West Bank, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Tunisia, and Morocco. These experiences have provided valuable insights into the complex interplay between Western military intervention, authoritarian governance, and regional instability. My findings consistently highlight how Western interventions and support for authoritarian regimes have often undermined women's rights, human rights, peace, and stability while reinforcing reactionary movements.

### 2. Immediate Steps for Ceasefire and Humanitarian Relief

2.1 An immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza is critical to halt the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe. The situation, already described as "apocalyptic," has long-term implications for the health, well-

being and human development of the people of Gaza. Even if a ceasefire were achieved tomorrow, the destruction caused by over 14 months of bombing and blockade will take years to repair.[\[1\]](#)

2.2 A framework for a ceasefire exists in the form of UN Security Council Resolution 2735 (adopted June 2024), but its implementation has stalled due to a lack of political will. There have been reports that the Israeli government has sabotaged ceasefire proposals,[\[2\]](#) indicating that there needs to be more international pressure on Israel to abide by the parameters established in the Resolution. Without international enforcement of the Resolution, the humanitarian crisis will deepen, Israeli hostages will remain in captivity and a long-term peace settlement will remain impossible. Israel's obligation to withdraw from the Gaza Strip is further underlined by the International Court of Justice ruling (July 2024) that Israel's ongoing occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip is unlawful.[\[3\]](#)

### 3. Addressing Structural Violence and Long-term Solutions

3.1 While ending physical violence through a ceasefire is a critical step, sustainable peace requires addressing the structural violence caused by Israel's ongoing military occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967 and blockade of the Gaza Strip since 2007. As Johan Galtung defined, structural violence refers to harm caused by inequality and injustice, rooted in systems of oppression, such as colonialism, racism, and economic exploitation.[\[4\]](#)

3.2 The 17-year blockade of Gaza, coupled with recurrent military assaults, rendered the territory almost uninhabitable even prior to October 2023. Reports from the UN and humanitarian agencies have detailed:

- a collapsed healthcare system,
- contaminated water sources,
- 70% youth unemployment, and
- a devastated economy.

By 2018, the UN warned that Gaza might become unliveable by 2020.[\[5\]](#) Since October 2023, relentless bombing, destruction of infrastructure, and a near-total siege have accelerated this humanitarian collapse.

3.3 Similarly, Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem face daily indignities under Israeli occupation. These include:

- Restricted mobility due to checkpoints, permits, the separation wall, and settler-only roads;
- Denied access to land for farming or building homes, often followed by forced demolitions;
- Increased settler violence, with settlers acting with impunity under the protection of Israeli soldiers.[\[6\]](#)

3.4 Another critical dimension of structural violence is Israel's imprisonment of Palestinians under military law. Before October 2023, thousands of Palestinians were already detained, including children, many for peacefully protesting against the occupation. Since then, the number of prisoners has almost doubled, with a large proportion held under administrative detention, meaning they are detained indefinitely without charge or trial. Military courts trying Palestinians lack basic guarantees of due process, further exacerbating the injustices faced by detainees. Hundreds of children are imprisoned each year, often subjected to harsh conditions that violate international standards of human rights.[\[7\]](#)

3.5 These violations not only undermine Palestinians' basic human rights but also serve to maintain Israel's control over Palestinian territories, including the ongoing settlement expansion—a clear contravention of international law. In 2024 alone, Israel seized more land than in the preceding two decades combined.[\[8\]](#) Settlements now house 700,000 Israelis in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

## 4. Recognizing Palestinian Self-determination

4.1 The denial of Palestinians' right to self-determination is a historical injustice that continues to fuel the conflict. During British rule over Mandatory Palestine, Arab Palestinian national rights were systematically ignored while Jewish national rights were endorsed, setting the stage for decades of unrest.

4.2 The 1947 UN Partition Plan exacerbated this injustice by allocating 55% of Palestine to a Jewish state, even though Jewish settlers made up only 30% of the population. This triggered the 1948 war, which led to the displacement of 700,000 Palestinians, many of whom fled to Gaza, which now comprises a majority refugee population, as well as the West Bank and neighbouring Arab countries.

4.3 UN Resolution 194, passed towards the end of the 1948 war, called for the return of Palestinian refugees or compensation for their property, but has never been implemented. The failure to enforce this resolution coupled with Israel's continued military occupation of Palestinian territory has deprived Palestinians of their right to self-determination. The international community must treat this right as a legal principle to be upheld—not a concession to be negotiated.

## 5. Learning from Past Failures

5.1 Since the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993, the international consensus has been to support a two-state solution. However, the failure to enforce measures that condemn Israeli settlement expansion has rendered this solution increasingly unviable. Key issues include:

- The West's refusal, with few exceptions, to recognize Palestinian statehood until a final settlement;
- Israel's exploitation of the Oslo process to expand settlements and further restrict Palestinian freedoms.

5.2 Since October 2023, evidence suggests that Israel is pursuing policies of ethnic cleansing in Gaza, systematically destroying healthcare and other infrastructure in the northern Strip to make it uninhabitable.<sup>[9]</sup> Such actions, emboldened by impunity, violate international law. For example:

- The ICJ ruled in January 2024 that Palestinians are plausibly at risk of genocide in Gaza;
- The ICC has issued arrest warrants for Israeli leaders; however, Western governments have largely refused to commit to enforcing the warrants.

5.3 The lack of accountability for these violations perpetuates violence and undermines prospects for a peaceful resolution. The path to peace lies in justice and accountability, not impunity. The UK has an opportunity to play a leading role in forging a fair and sustainable resolution to the conflict.

5.4 Another critical failure of Western governments has been their disregard for Palestinians' right to choose their own political leadership through democratic elections. The last Palestinian legislative elections were held in 2006, when Hamas was elected to government in a process widely recognized as free and fair. Western reactions to Hamas's electoral victory, including diplomatic isolation and sanctions, exacerbated political polarization between Fateh and Hamas. This has undermined democracy, weakened civil society, and led to the indefinite postponement of Palestinian legislative and presidential elections in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The result has been the entrenchment of authoritarian governance by Fateh in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza, further alienating the Palestinian populace and eroding trust in democratic processes. Meanwhile, Palestinians have been left without any meaningful political leadership to advance their rights.

## 6. Recommendations for UK Government Action

**6.1 Immediate Recognition of Palestinian Statehood:** The UK should join Sweden, Ireland, Spain, and Norway in recognizing a Palestinian state in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip;

**6.2 Sanctions and Accountability:** Impose targeted sanctions on Israel for its ongoing violations of international law, including settlement expansion and blockade enforcement; publicly commit to respecting the ICC arrest warrants against Israeli officials;

**6.3 Support for UN Resolutions:** Advocate for Israel's unconditional withdrawal from the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 242 and the International Court of Justice ruling that Israel's occupation is unlawful; and for UN Resolution 194 (refugee return or compensation);

**6.4 End Arms Sales:** Suspend arms sales to Israel until it complies with international law and ceases its occupation and settlement policies;

**6.5 Promote International Law and Democracy as a Foundation for Peace:** Urge international partners to enforce legal frameworks as a precursor to peace talks and to respect the right of Palestinians to elect their political leadership to represent them in any future peace talks.

31<sup>st</sup> December 2024

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[5] United Nations, “Gaza ‘Unliveable’”, UN Special Rapporteur for the Situation of Human Rights in the OPT Tells Third Committee”, 24 October 2018, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/gaza-unliveable-un-special-rapporteur-for-the-situation-of-human-rights-in-the-opt-tells-third-committee-press-release-excerpts/>

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