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The Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales
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27 August 2025

Dear The Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales,

Thank you for your correspondence about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The Parliamentary Correspondence Team in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been asked to reply. We have set out in this letter the UK's policy response to a range of linked issues and hope you will find this information helpful in understanding how the FCDO is seeking to positively influence the situation in the OPTs.

Since its first day in office, the UK Government has pressed for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, to free the hostages and to bring humanitarian aid to civilians who have suffered so much. During this time, the UK Government have taken decisive action by restoring funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), suspending arms exports that could be used in Gaza, and providing tens of millions of pounds in humanitarian aid. The UK Government signed a landmark agreement with the Palestinian Authority, defended the independence of international courts, and imposed three rounds of sanctions on violent Israeli settlers. UK Ministers suspended trade negotiations with Israel and sanctioned far-right ministers for incitement. On 21 July 2025, the UK led 28 international partners in demanding an immediate end to the war.

Israel suffered a heinous attack on 7 October 2023. The UK Government have always supported Israel's right to defend Israelis against terrorism. But this escalation is wholly disproportionate. The suffering of civilians in Gaza has reached new depths. The Israeli government's aid delivery model is dangerous, fuels instability and deprives Gazans of human dignity. The UK Government condemns the drip feeding of aid and the inhumane killing of civilians, including children, seeking to meet their most basic needs of water and food.□

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains catastrophic. The UK Government urgently calls on the Israeli government to lift all restrictions on humanitarian assistance. Immediate action is needed to allow the UN and aid organisations to operate freely and deliver

essential supplies—food, water, and medicine—safely to those in need, wherever they are.

The decision by the Israeli Security Cabinet to launch an additional large-scale military operation will aggravate this crisis, endanger the lives of hostages, and further risk the mass displacement of civilians. The plans announced by the government of Israel risk violating International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The worst-case scenario of famine is unfolding, and the exclusion of vital humanitarian organisations would be an egregious signal. The UK strongly rejects these actions and urges the government of Israel to amend its registration system to ensure humanitarian actors can continue their essential work in line with humanitarian principles.□

The Foreign Secretary announced the resumption of UK funding to the UNRWA on 19 July 2024. UNRWA is the only agency that can deliver lifesaving humanitarian aid at the scale needed. The UN has taken seriously the appalling allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October 2023 attack against Israel. Following the independent review by Catherine Colonna and the subsequent action plan UNRWA has provided setting out detailed management reforms, the UK Government is confident that UNRWA is taking action to ensure it meets the highest standards of neutrality. The decision to resume funding brings the UK into line with partners such as Germany, the EU, Sweden, Japan, France, and other donors.□□

The UK Government remains completely opposed to the Knesset legislation which came into force on 30 January 2025 and unequivocally rejects any attempts to undermine or degrade UNRWA. The UK Government is concerned to see the closure of UNRWA facilities in East Jerusalem, including schools, and disruption of services in the West Bank. UK Ministers call on Israel to work urgently with international partners, including the UN, so there is no disruption to this vital work. The UK has joined with allies in expressing concerns and urging Israel to ensure UNRWA can continue its life saving work.□□

On 21 July 2025, the Foreign Secretary announced a £60 million humanitarian aid package to address Gaza's worsening crisis. £20 million of this funding will go to UNRWA to sustain essential services for Palestinians across the region, including water provision for up to 600,000 people monthly across Gaza.□

The UK Government is deeply troubled by the proposed NGO (non-governmental organisation) taxation bill which threatens to undermine the ability of NGOs to operate effectively and continue their important work in Israel and the OPTs. UK Ministers continue to raise these concerns with the Israeli government.

The UK Government is doing all it can to alleviate the suffering and increase the flow of aid. On 21 July 2025, the UK Government announced a £60 million humanitarian aid package to address Gaza's worsening crisis. The funding will support emergency food, water, shelter, and healthcare for over two million people, including continued operations of field hospitals run by UK-Med, who have treated over 500,000 Gazans during the course of this conflict. £20 million of this funding will go to UNRWA to sustain essential services for Palestinians across the region, including water provision for up to 600,000 people monthly across Gaza. The UK also pledged £7 million of this amount will be to strengthen governance and support reforms by the Palestinian Authority. The aid package

is part of the UK's broader £101 million commitment to the OPTs for the financial year 2025-2026, announced on 28 April 2025, reflecting the UK's continued leadership in alleviating suffering and promoting long-term peace and security in the region.□

In the financial year 2024-2025, the UK Government announced £129 million in aid for the OPTs and to Palestinian refugees across the region to ensure healthcare, food and shelter reached tens of thousands of civilians and to support vital infrastructure across the OPTs. UK support has meant over half a million people have received essential healthcare, 647,000 have received food, and 284,000 people have improved access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services.

The UK is deeply concerned by reports of medics being detained, killed or injured. Gaza is the deadliest place on earth for humanitarian workers, with 2024 being the deadliest year on record for humanitarian personnel. Nearly all of Gaza's hospitals are damaged or partly destroyed according to the World Health Organisation. The UK Government reiterates its outrage at recent strikes by Israeli forces on humanitarian personnel, infrastructure, premises, and healthcare facilities. UK Ministers call on the government of Israel to abide by its obligations under IHL to ensure full, rapid, safe, and unhindered provision of humanitarian assistance to the population in Gaza.□□

Israel must do much more to protect the civilian population, infrastructure, and humanitarian workers. This includes restoring deconfliction systems, allowing humanitarian workers free movement within Gaza, and preventing harm to medical personnel and facilities during their military operations.□□

Journalists covering conflicts are afforded protection under IHL because they are civilians, and all parties must avoid deliberate attacks against them and only detain them on justified grounds. The UK remains committed to Media Freedom and to championing democracy and human rights around the world. Independent media is essential to a functioning society and journalists must be able to investigate and report independently without fear. Alongside our partners, the UK co-signed a Media Freedom Coalition statement on 10 September 2024, relating to journalists in conflict zones. It called upon states to ensure the protection of journalists and media workers covering conflict.□□

Furthermore, media equipment and installations dedicated to civilian purposes are civilian objects and must not be the target of attacks or reprisals, unless they qualify as military objectives.

The UK's position is unequivocal: settlements are illegal under international law, undermine prospects for peace, and pose a serious threat to the viability of a two-state solution. Alarming, settlement approvals are now being reviewed on a near-weekly basis, with construction accelerating rapidly alongside a sharp rise in settler violence. The UK strongly condemns any comments proposing the annexation of land in Gaza or the West Bank, as well as the inciteful remarks made by prominent Israeli Ministers Smotrich and Ben-Gvir. The UK will challenge those who undermine a two-state solution, press for a change in course and continue to act against those carrying out heinous abuses of human rights.

The demolition of Palestinian homes inflicts significant suffering on the Palestinian people. In all but the most exceptional of cases, demolitions by an occupying power are contrary to international law. Israel must cease its policy of demolitions and provide a clear route to construction for Palestinians in Area C.

It will be for Palestinians to determine the future of Gaza, with support from regional states and the wider international community as part of a peace process. The UK Government does not support any effort to move Palestinians in Gaza to neighbouring Arab states against their will. There must be no forced displacement of Palestinians, nor any reduction in the territory of the Gaza Strip which is home to two million Palestinians and remains an integral part of a future Palestinian State. Palestinian civilians should be able to return to, and rebuild, their homes and their lives. That is a right guaranteed under international law.□

The UK has already introduced sanctions on extremist individuals and entities responsible for perpetrating and supporting acts of violence carried out against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.□

On 10 June 2025, Minister Falconer announced the UK imposition of sanctions on prominent Israeli Ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir for their role in inciting settler violence against Palestinian communities in the West Bank - violence that has led to the death of Palestinian civilians and the displacement of whole towns and villages. That violence constitutes an abuse of Palestinians' human rights. It is cruel, it is degrading, and it is completely unacceptable. UK Ministers have told the Israeli government repeatedly that they would take tougher action if this did not stop. It still did not stop: the appalling rhetoric has continued unchecked; and violent perpetrators continue to act with impunity and encouragement. The UK acted alongside Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway, all of whom announced their own measures on 10 June 2025.□

On 20 May 2025, the Foreign Secretary announced sanctions targeting three individuals, including prominent settler leader Daniella Weiss, as well as two illegal outposts and two organisations that have supported, incited, and promoted violence against Palestinian communities in the West Bank. These individuals and entities are now subject to measures including financial restrictions, travel bans, and director disqualifications, and will follow 18 other individuals, entities, and companies already sanctioned relating to serious violence against communities in the West Bank. The Foreign Secretary also announced sanctions on 15 October 2024, targeting three illegal settler outposts and four organisations that have supported and sponsored violence against communities in the West Bank.□

These sanctions demonstrate the UK Government's determination to deter and provide accountability for this violence. As the Foreign Secretary has said "The Israeli government has a responsibility to intervene and halt these aggressive actions. Their consistent failure to act is putting Palestinian communities and the two-state solution in peril."□

The UK continues to keep these measures under review but the culture of impunity for those engaged in violence is intolerable. It would not be appropriate to speculate about future sanctions designations as to do so could reduce their impact.□□

Goods produced in these settlements are not entitled to benefit from tariff and trade preferences under the UK's current trade agreements with the Palestinian Authority and Israel. The UK supports the accurate labelling of settlement goods, to ensure consumers are not misled. Guidance for British businesses is routinely updated on the Overseas Business Risk website. The UK advises businesses to consider the UK Government's stance on the illegality of settlements under international law when making investments and conducting activities in the region.

The UK is concerned by the Israel Defence Forces' (IDF) ongoing military operation in the occupied West Bank. While recognising Israel's right to defend itself against security threats, the UK Government is gravely concerned by the methods being employed, including the disproportionate use of force, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the mounting civilian death toll.□

□UK Ministers continue to urge Israeli authorities to exercise restraint, comply fully with international law, and act against those who seek to inflame tensions.□□

If the military personnel of any country violate the laws of armed conflict, the UK Government would expect that State to investigate their conduct and hold them to account. British nationals who have committed crimes abroad may also be prosecuted before UK courts. An investigation would be required and any prosecution in England and Wales would be a matter for the Crown Prosecution Service, who will determine whether there is sufficient evidence available to mount a prosecution and whether such a prosecution is in the public interest and will require the consent of the Attorney General.□□

The UK is not participating in the conflict between Israel and Hamas, nor the actions of Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

In response to the situation in Israel and Gaza, the UK Government is working with international partners to de-escalate the conflict, reinforce stability, and support humanitarian efforts in the region. The Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) have been central to the UK's humanitarian and hostage rescue efforts over the last year, and in supporting regional stability and conflict de-escalation. All use of the SBAs, by the UK and our allies, is in line with IHL and with our humanitarian objectives. No RAF flights have transported lethal cargo to the Israel Defence Forces.□

For operational security reasons and as a matter of policy, the Ministry of Defence does not offer comment or information relating to any foreign nations' military aircraft movements or operations. All flights by foreign military-registered aircraft and civil aircraft operating under Government status are required to apply to the Ministry of Defence for Diplomatic Flight Clearance whenever they wish to use a UK air base. The basis on which a foreign partner may or may not be granted permission to utilise UK air bases is dependent on the nature and purpose of their activity and reflects the UK's international legal obligations.

The UK Government has been clear that it will uphold both its domestic and international legal obligations when it comes to arms exports. The UK operates a robust system of export controls, set out in the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. They state that items

may not be exported where there is a clear risk that they might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of IHL.□

As soon as the Foreign Secretary took office, he ordered a review into Israel's compliance with IHL, which concluded that Israel is not committed to upholding IHL in Gaza and there was a clear risk that UK exports for the IDF in the Gaza conflict might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of IHL. The IHL assessments continue to find that Israel is not committed to upholding IHL and that there are possible breaches in the areas of humanitarian access, the treatment of detainees and ensuring adequate assistance and protection to displaced populations.□□

As a result, the UK Government took action, stopping exports to the IDF that might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of IHL in Gaza. The UK Government has successfully implemented the suspension decision and continues to refuse all relevant licence applications. It refused more licence applications for Israel in 2024 than in 2020 to 2023 combined.□

As set out to Parliament, the only exception to the suspension is parts for the global F-35 programme, to protect its role in NATO and international peace and security. The UK Government has suspended direct exports of F-35 parts for use by Israel, and it categorically does not export any bombs or ammunition which could be used in Gaza and the West Bank. In the judgement handed down on 30 June 2025, the High Court upheld the Government's decision-making on this matter.□

More than half of export licences for Israel are for civilian goods, including IT security software, food testing chemicals, and university and lab equipment. Most military licences do not go to the Israeli authorities. Many are for equipment for commercial or civilian use, such as product testing or body-armour for journalists and NGOs. More still are for components which go to Israeli companies before being re-exported to a third country, including many to NATO allies. In these cases, it is not military equipment for use by Israel or in Israel and the Israeli government is not involved. Any action to suspend these licences is unlikely to impact Israel's military operations in Gaza but would undermine the UKs allies' defences.□

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is the primary international institution for investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes of international concern. It is actively investigating allegations of the gravest crimes in countries around the world.□□

The UK is a State Party to the Rome Statute and an active member of the Assembly of States Parties. In line with the UKs stated commitment to the rule of law, the UK Government respects the independence of the ICC. It is not for the UK Government to agree or disagree with the decisions of independent Courts. There is a domestic legal process through other UKs independent courts that determines whether to endorse the warrant in accordance with the UK's ICC Act 2001.□□

There is no moral equivalence between Israel, a democracy, and Hamas and Lebanese Hizballah, which are terrorist organisations. The UK Government has been clear that Israel has a right to defend itself, in accordance with international law. The UK takes the view that this right is not under question, regardless of the Court's approval of the warrants.

The UK respects the independence of the ICC and the judicial process that will be followed.□

The UK Government continues to consider the Advisory Opinion issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 19 July 2024 carefully, with the seriousness and rigour it deserves.□The issues raised are by their nature complex and require proper consideration. The UK is fully committed to international law and respects the independence of the ICJ.□□

UK commitment to a two-state solution is unwavering.□The UK Government is of the clear view that Israel should bring an end to its presence in the OPTs as rapidly as possible, but that this must be done in a way that creates the conditions for negotiations towards the two-state solution.□□

It is the UK Government's long-standing policy that any formal determination that genocide has occurred is a matter for a competent national or international court, and not for governments or non-judicial bodies. This approach ensures that any determination is above politics, lobbying, and individual or national interest. The UK respects the independence of the International Court of Justice and awaits its decision. The UK cannot comment on ongoing legal proceedings and do not believe it helpful to speculate on the outcome.□

Hamas are a terrorist organisation responsible for the atrocities on 7 October 2023. Hamas must immediately release all the hostages, sign up to an immediate ceasefire, accept that they will play no part in the government of Gaza, and commit to disarmament.□□

The hostages continue to suffer terribly. A negotiated ceasefire offers the best hope of bringing them home and ending the agony of their families. Diplomacy, not more bloodshed, is the path to security for Israelis and Palestinians.□

On 29 July 2025, the Prime Minister announced that the UK Government intends to recognise the State of Palestine when the UN General Assembly convenes in September 2025, unless the Israeli government ends its military campaign in Gaza and commits to a long-term peace based on a two-state solution. This decision reflects the UK's historic responsibility to support the two-state solution.

The UK Government's demands on Hamas also remain absolute and unwavering. Hamas must never be rewarded for its monstrous attack on 7 October 2023. It must immediately release the hostages, agree to an immediate ceasefire, accept it will have no role in governing Gaza and commit to disarmament. The UK will make an assessment ahead of UNGA on how far the parties have met these steps. No one side will have a veto on recognition through their actions or inactions.

Recognition alone will not resolve the conflict, but it is a necessary step to preserve the viability of a two-state solution and to signal our commitment to a just and lasting peace. The full statement can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-words-on-gaza-29-july-2025.□

On 28-29 July 2025, the Foreign Secretary and the Minister responsible for the Middle East, Hamish Falconer MP, attended the Two-State Solution Conference in New York. The UK is committed to leading international efforts towards a two-state solution, which UK Ministers reinforced in bilateral meetings with regional counterparts, including from Qatar, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and the OPTs. UK Ministers continue to work closely with international partners and allies, in pressing for an immediate ceasefire and laying the groundwork for a sustainable peace. That ceasefire must be sustainable, and it must lead to a wider peace plan, which is being developed with our international partners.□ This plan will deliver security and proper governance in Gaza and pave the way for negotiations on a two-state solution.□□

The situation in the region continues to evolve rapidly. But please rest assured that the Foreign Secretary and his entire Ministerial team will continue to do all they can to push for peace.

Yours sincerely,

Parliamentary Correspondence Team
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office