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**CRISIS IN ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**  
**08 December 2023**

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS URGING THE UK GOVERNMENT TO:**

- Immediately support an immediate ceasefire by all parties to the conflict to end unprecedented civilian suffering.
- Urgently and explicitly call on Israeli authorities and all Palestinian armed groups to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law, foremost by taking all necessary precautions to protect civilians.
- Continue to call on Palestinian armed groups to immediately release all civilian hostages and refrain from firing indiscriminate rockets into Israel.
- Call on Israel to end its 16-year-long illegal blockade on Gaza, starting by immediately suspending its recent increased restrictions on food, fuel, electricity and water, which is collective punishment amounting to a war crime.
- Call on Israel to immediately rescind its evacuation orders to people in Gaza, which amounts to forced displacement; and end unlawful attacks that kill or injure civilians and destroys civilian homes and infrastructure.
- Suspend the supply of arms to the Israeli authorities given that serious violations amounting to crimes under international law are being committed.
- Call on the Israeli authorities to dismantle the system of apartheid imposed on all Palestinians.
- Commit support to international accountability measures, including full support and all necessary resources to the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation into the situation in Palestine, including expediting the investigation.

**FOREIGN SECRETARY'S RECORD ON ISRAEL AND OPT**

Amnesty International recognises that as Prime Minister during the 2014 Israel / Gaza crisis, Lord Cameron [called](#) for “**an immediate and unconditional humanitarian ceasefire**” recognising that the “**the situation in Gaza is intolerable**”.

In relation to the 2014 crisis, which resulted in 2,251 Palestinian fatalities, Lord Cameron as Prime Minister stated that it was “**wrong and illegal**” to target civilians and supported the role of the UN, stating it was “**right to speak out in the way it has, because international law is very clear that there mustn't be the targeting of civilians**”.

We urgently call on the Foreign Secretary to radically review the UK government's policy and approach to the current crisis in line with the recommendations set out at the start of this document.

## SUMMARY

On 7 October 2023, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups launched an attack on Israel which violated international humanitarian law. The attacks displayed a chilling disregard for life by carrying out cruel and brutal crimes, including mass summary killings, hostage-taking, and launching indiscriminate rocket attacks into Israel. By 16 October, at least 1,200 people were killed and 3,436 injured in Israel, according to Israel's Health Ministry.

In the six weeks since Hamas' attack, Israeli military action has resulted in the deaths of more than [17,177](#) Palestinians, about 70% of whom are said to be women and children including more than 7,150 children, and at least 46,000 are reportedly injured. The real number of fatalities is expected to be much higher, with families struggling to recover the bodies of their loved ones from under the rubble.

On 5 December, the [UN Human Rights Office stated](#) that "the pattern of attacks that target or impact on civilian infrastructure raises serious concerns about Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law and significantly raises the risk of atrocity crimes."

On 07 December, the UN Under-General Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs said "we do not have a humanitarian operation in southern Gaza that can be called by that name anymore. That the pace of the military assault in southern Gaza is a repeat of the assault in northern Gaza. **That it has made no place safe for civilians in southern Gaza, which had been a cornerstone of the humanitarian plan to protect civilians...**"

In an extraordinary move last used decades ago, the UN General Secretary invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter, reiterating his calls for an urgent and binding UN Security Council resolution for an immediate ceasefire, in his stating that "the situation is fast deteriorating into a catastrophe with potentially irreversible implications for Palestinians as a whole and for peace and security in the region." **Amnesty International has [called](#) on the UN Security Council, including the UK, to not block the Ceasefire Resolution to be voted on during 08 December reminding them of their clear obligations under international law to prevent atrocities.**

In the West Bank, Israeli authorities have dramatically increased imprisonment of Palestinians. Since 7 October more than 3,000 Palestinian men and women were detained— many without charge or trial or in administrative detention. Testimonies and video evidence points to numerous incidents of torture and other ill-treatment by Israeli forces, including severe beatings and deliberate humiliation of Palestinians. **Israeli authorities had failed to investigate the incidents of torture and death in custody.**

Following the announcement of a four-day long humanitarian pause, which commenced on 24 November and was renewed twice before ending on 01 December, some hostages in Gaza were released in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners, and some humanitarian aid was allowed to enter Gaza. While these unions provided a welcome relief for all those involved, all remaining civilian hostages held by Hamas and other armed groups, must be immediately released. Israel must end torture and other ill-treatment in custody and release all Palestinians detained unlawfully, including those held without charge or trial in administrative detention.

Amnesty International has urgently reiterated our [calls](#) for an immediate enduring ceasefire by all parties to the conflict.

## **URGENT NEED FOR AN IMMEDIATE AND ENDURING CEASEFIRE BY ALL PARTIES TO END UNPRECEDENTED CIVILIAN SUFFERING**

Amnesty International continues to [call](#) for an immediate enduring ceasefire by all parties. A pause, even of several days, as evident from the resumption of attacks in Israel in the occupied Gaza Strip and rocket fire from armed groups into southern Israel after a seven-day truce ended, is neither practical nor sufficient to ensure civilians are properly protected and the wounded are properly taken care of and treated. An immediate and enduring ceasefire is vital to enable aid agencies to get sufficient relief into the occupied Gaza Strip, and to distribute it safely and unconditionally. It would give hospitals and clinics an opportunity to receive life-saving medicines, collect the little fuel still available locally, and water and equipment they desperately need as well as to repair damaged wards and other critical infrastructure such as the water network.

An enduring ceasefire is also needed to secure the safe release and return of all hostages who are at further risk. Civilians in Israel are also exposed to harm as a result of the firing of indiscriminate rockets from Gaza, and to enable independent investigations into war crimes and other human rights violations by the International Criminal Court and UN Independent Commission of Inquiry.

**A ceasefire is the best way to ensure all civilians are protected across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and to alleviate mass humanitarian suffering in Gaza. But even in the absence of a ceasefire, Israel and Hamas must protect civilians by fully respecting the rules of international humanitarian law.**

### **RECENT REPORT ON THE CURRENT CRISIS ‘NOWHERE SAFE IN GAZA’**

As part of its ongoing investigation into violations of the laws of war, Amnesty International has documented evidence of [unlawful Israeli strikes](#), including two illustrative cases in which Israeli strikes killed 46 civilians, including 20 children.

The attacks which occurred on 19 and 20 October, include (i) an Israeli air strike in the compound of the Saint Porphyrius Greek Orthodox Church where approximately 450 internally displaced members of Gaza’s small Christian community were sheltering, and (ii) an Israeli strike against houses in the al-Nuserirat refugee camp. The oldest victim was an 80-year-old woman and the youngest was a three-month-old baby.

Amnesty International, based on its in-depth investigation of these events, has determined that the strikes were indiscriminate attacks or direct attacks on civilians or civilian objects, and must be **investigated as war crimes**. These unlawful attacks which merely offer a snapshot of mass

civilian suffering, are part of a **documented pattern of disregard for Palestinian civilians** demonstrative of the impact of Israel’s unprecedented military action on the civilian population, and underscore the urgent need for an immediate ceasefire.

The Israeli authorities have not responded to Amnesty International’s questions on the documented attacks, and Israeli authorities have **failed to publish credible evidence** of the basis for these strikes, including about alleged military objectives present. On the contrary, for at least one case study, the Israeli military published contradictory information. These findings build on previous [documentation of unlawful Israeli strikes](#) during the current escalation and on documentation of similar **patterns of unlawful strikes** during previous rounds of Israeli operations in Gaza.

## UK ARMS SALES TO ISRAEL

**Amnesty International is calling for a comprehensive arms embargo on all parties to the conflict in Israel and Gaza**, which must include the UK ceasing to supply arms and equipment to Israel, including suspending all extant individual and open export licenses currently in force, given the clear risk that the weapons will be used to kill civilians in Gaza and elsewhere.

The UK government exploits a loophole to arm Israel by supplying components for US-made F-16 and F-35 fighter aircraft, in the full knowledge they're being used in military action on Gaza. As detailed in this briefing, Israel's military conduct in Gaza has repeatedly involved indiscriminate and unlawful attacks which have killed large numbers of Palestinian civilians.

It is clear that the UK's arms licensing system is not fit for purpose in assessing risk, is riddled with loopholes and is in desperate need of root-and-branch reform. In the meantime, the UK should cease the licensing of arms and security equipment to Israel, including components supplied via third countries, immediately.

On 07 December, after verification of over 100 videos and photographs, analysis of weapons fragments from the site and following the interviewing of nine witnesses, Amnesty International [determined](#) that Israeli strikes on a group of seven journalists in South Lebanon on 13 October, which killed Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah and injured six others, **were likely a direct attack on civilians that must be investigated as a war crime.**

## WAR CRIMES BY HAMAS & PALESTINIAN ARMED GROUPS

Attacks on October 7 against Israel began with a barrage of indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza, followed by an incursion into Israel by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups. Thousands of rockets landed in several areas across central and southern Israel, reaching as far as Tel Aviv. These unlawful attacks killed both Israelis and Palestinians. They also hit unrecognised Palestinian villages in the Negev/Naqab region, killing at least six civilians, five of them children. These neglected communities already live in a precarious situation with no access to shelters.

In addition to horrific summary killings of civilians in several locations across southern Israel, at least 200 hostages were taken into Gaza, including children and foreign nationals, according to Israeli officials. **The abduction of civilians is prohibited by international law and hostage-taking is a war crime. Amnesty International continues to reiterate it's [call](#) for Hamas and other armed groups to release all civilians held hostage in Gaza immediately, unconditionally, and unharmed.** All those held captive must be treated humanely, in accordance with international law and granted medical treatment. Hostage taking is a war crime, those responsible must be held accountable.

## ILLEGAL BLOCKADE

Since 2007, Israel has imposed an air, land and sea blockade on the Gaza Strip collectively punishing its entire population. On 9 October, Israel's minister of defence Yoav Gallant announced a "complete siege on Gaza ... No electricity, no food, no water, no gas - it's all closed", as part of Israel's response to attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups. **Amnesty International is calling on the Israeli authorities to immediately suspend all increased restrictions which have recently been imposed** and to lift its illegal 16-year blockade on the occupied Gaza Strip.

On 12 October, an Israeli minister said that the authorities will not restore power or allow water or fuel to enter Gaza until Hamas releases its hostages. This is explicit confirmation that Israel's response is designed to punish civilians in Gaza for the actions of Palestinian armed groups.

As the occupying power, Israel has a clear obligation under international law to ensure the basic needs of Gaza's civilian population are met. Palestinian armed groups' horrific mass killing of Israeli civilians and other serious violations do not absolve Israel from upholding its obligations to respect international humanitarian law and to protect civilians. **The collective punishment of civilians in Gaza and other war crimes will not bring justice to the victims of war crimes by Hamas and other armed groups, or security to civilians in Israel.**

## ACCOUNTABILITY

War crimes have and continue to be committed on both sides, as outlined in this briefing. Israel's well-documented record of war crimes does not excuse Palestinian armed groups' war crimes, nor absolve them from upholding their obligations under international law to respect fundamental principles of humanity and protection of civilians. Targeting and killing civilians is a war crime and there can be no justification for Hamas's reprehensible attacks. As Israeli forces' retaliatory attacks pummel Gaza, Amnesty insists that neither security nor justice will be achieved by a civilian bloodbath in Gaza and collective punishment.

In 2021, the International Criminal Court opened an investigation into the situation in the State of Palestine with a mandate covering crimes under international law committed by all parties in the current conflict, as well as the crime against humanity of apartheid<sup>2</sup> against Palestinians. In a [statement](#) dated 17 November, the Prosecutor of the International Court, Karim Khan KC stated that he stands ready to work with all parties and called for their "full cooperation with my office"; including to complement domestic accountability efforts, "to ensure that justice is delivered for those affected by Rome Statute crimes". He also called on all State Parties to the Rome Statute to provide the ICC with the tools and resources needed to allow them to fulfil their mandate.

**Amnesty calls on the ICC prosecutor to expedite the investigation and to include the recent crimes committed by all parties. Given the UK government has now recognised the independence and jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court regarding its ongoing investigation into the situation in Palestine – it should ensure the ICC receives full and all necessary resource, including for its investigation into the situation in Palestine.**

## PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

- Why does the UK government think that the Heads of 18 UN agencies and NGOs, including the World Health Organisation, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Secretary General, UN Women, UN Humanitarian Affairs – the list could go on – are wrong to call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire?
- By invoking Article 99 of the UN Charter – an extraordinary move – the UN Secretary General has sounded the alarm regarding the urgent need for an immediate ceasefire - will the UK support the need for an urgent and binding UN Security Council resolution for an immediate ceasefire?

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<sup>2</sup> In 2021 Amnesty International concluded that Israel is committing the [crime against humanity of apartheid](#) against Palestinians, joining many other international Israeli and Palestinian human rights organisations and individuals who have drawn similar conclusions (including [Human Rights Watch](#), [B'Tselem](#), [Yesh Din](#), [Al Mezan](#), numerous former Israeli politicians, including most recently a [former Head of Mossad](#) and multiple [UN experts](#)).

- Will the UK government state unequivocally that under international law the war crimes of Hamas cannot justify an Israeli response that also includes war crimes such as collective punishment, forced displacement and indiscriminate or direct attacks on civilians or civilian objects?
- Given the UK government has now recognised the independence and jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court regarding its ongoing investigation into the situation in Palestine, what steps will the UK take as a State Party to the Rome Statute, to cooperate with and ensure the ICC is provided with the tools it needs to fulfil its mandate<sup>3</sup>?
- What steps are the UK government taking to ensure that Israel is upholding their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians?
- It is clear that Israel's blockade of Gaza, intensified since 7 October to cause unimaginable suffering to Palestinians, is collective punishment which is a war crime; what steps is the UK government taking to press Israel to immediately restore Gaza's electricity supply and suspend all increased restrictions which have recently been imposed?
- Given that forced displacement of a civilian population is a violation of international humanitarian law, will the UK government call on the Israeli authorities to immediately rescind the orders for people in northern Gaza to evacuate to the south of the Gaza Strip?
- On 27 November, Minister of State, Andrew Mitchell stated in reference to Gazans displaced post 07 October, that it's "the British Government's policy that those displaced should be able to return to area from which they were driven"; what steps is the UK taking to ensure relevant individuals have a right to return?
- What steps is the UK government taking to ensure Israel prevents settler violence in the West Bank, and what is their assessment of any incidences of settler violence facilitated or carried out with the support of the Israeli Defence Forces?
- Given evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel, will the UK government cease the licensing of arms and security equipment to Israel?
- Will the government identify which arms export licences currently in force (including any open licences), are for end-use by the Israeli defence and security forces, and provide details of those licences?
- What longer term plans do the UK government have to deal with the root causes of this crisis, including the decades of impunity enjoyed by all sides and Israel's racist system of apartheid against Palestinians?

**FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION ON AMNESTY'S RESPONSE TO THE CURRENT CRISIS, SEE OUR [CRISIS IN GAZA, ISRAEL AND THE WIDER OPT](#) PAGE ON OUR WEBSITE**

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<sup>3</sup> [https:// www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-prosecutor-international-criminal-court-karim-aa-khan-kc-situation-state-palestine](https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-prosecutor-international-criminal-court-karim-aa-khan-kc-situation-state-palestine)