



CRISIS IN ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES
23 November 2023

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS URGING THE UK GOVERNMENT TO:

- Urgently call for an immediate ceasefire by all parties 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 financial and other resources to the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation into the situation in Palestine, including expediting the investigation.

NEW FOREIGN SECRETARY'S VISIT TO ISRAEL AND OPT

Lord David Cameron who was Prime Minister between 2010 and 2016, has announced a visit to Israel. Amnesty International recognises that as Prime Minister during the 2014 Israel / Gaza conflict, Lord Cameron [called](#) for **“an immediate and unconditional humanitarian ceasefire”** recognising that the **“the situation in Gaza is intolerable”**.

In relation to the 2014 conflict, 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”**.

Amnesty International urgently calls on the Foreign Secretary to radically review the UK government's policy and approach to the current crisis, which as of 10 November 2023 had resulted in more than 14,000 Palestinian fatalities and **call for an immediate ceasefire by all parties to the conflict**.

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 14,000 Palestinians, including more than 5,500 children, and at least 28,000 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. Casualty figures have not been updated since 10 November 2023 following the collapse of services and communications at hospitals in the north.

On World Children's Day (20 November), UN Secretary-General [António Guterres](#) said "**We are witnessing a killing of civilians that is unparalleled and unprecedented in any conflict since I have been Secretary-General.**"

Israeli authorities have dramatically increased their use of the arbitrary administrative [detention](#) of Palestinians across the occupied West Bank. Between 7 October and 8 November 2023 more than 2,000 Palestinian men and women were detained and held – without charge or trial – 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.

URGENT NEED FOR AN IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE BY ALL PARTIES TO END UNPRECEDENTED CIVILIAN SUFFERING

While a four day 'extended pause' is welcome and had been agreed to commence 22 November 2023, Amnesty International continues to call for a full and immediate ceasefire by all parties¹. A pause, even of four days, is neither practical nor sufficient to ensure civilians are properly protected. A 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 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.

A ceasefire is also needed to secure the safe release and return of hostages and to enable independent investigations into war crimes and other human rights violations by the International Criminal Court and UN Independent Commission of Inquiry.

UPDATES ON THE CURRENT CONFLICT '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.

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/israelopt-hostage-release-deal-must-pave-way-further-releases-and-sustained>

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.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL 2015 AL-SHIFA HOSPITAL REPORT

Reports have been circulating regarding a 2015 Amnesty International report regarding al-Shifa Hospital serving as a " Hamas interrogation and torture centre". This framing is misleading.

The 2015 [report](#), entitled "Strangling Necks" documented incidents of torture and other ill-treatment of Palestinians documented by Amnesty International **relating solely to the 2014 conflict** and specifically in **abandoned areas of the hospital grounds, including a disused outpatient's clinic**. Amnesty International has no evidence to indicate that al-Shifa hospital has been used for anything other than treating patients during the current conflict in 2023.

Amnesty International has so far not seen any credible evidence to support Israel's claim that al-Shifa is housing a military command centre – and indeed Israel has repeatedly failed to produce any evidence to substantiate this claim, which it has promoted since at least the [2008-9 Operation Cast Lead](#).

Even if al-Shifa or any other hospital was being used for military purposes – which again, the Israeli military has so far failed to provide credible evidence for – and therefore lost its special protected status under international humanitarian law, this **does not absolve Israeli forces from their legal obligation to minimize harm to civilians in carrying out attacks, particularly the obligations to abide by the principles of distinction and proportionality.**

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. On 14 November 2023 Amnesty International reiterated its [call](#) for Hamas and other armed groups to release all civilians held hostage immediately, unconditionally, and unharmed.** All those held captive must be treated humanely, in accordance with international law and granted medical treatment.

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.**

FEAR OF "SECOND NAKBA"

The Israeli army's orders to people in northern Gaza to "evacuate" to the south of the Gaza Strip cannot be considered an effective warning and amounts to **forced displacement of the civilian population - which is a violation of international humanitarian law.** While many Palestinians in northern Gaza are trying to flee, others have told Amnesty that they are choosing to stay for fear this could become a "second Nakba" as the generational trauma of displacement is etched in the collective memories of many Gazans.

Moreover, Amnesty International has verified 6 videos of an attack on 13 October 2023, resulting in civilian casualties along Salah-Al Deen street, a route the Israeli army had designated as safe for civilians to flee after an Israeli 'order' told them to leave northern Gaza. **Israel's order to 'evacuate' is not compliant with international humanitarian law. Amnesty International is calling for the order to be rescinded immediately.**

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 apartheid² 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. The international community – including the UK government – should urgently express full and unconditional support for the ICC investigation, including through the offering of resources.

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Parties to an armed conflict must at all times distinguish between civilians and civilian objects on the one hand and fighters and military objectives on the other. Direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects are prohibited, as are indiscriminate attacks.

When attacking a military objective, Israel is obligated to take all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event to minimize, death and injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects. Such precautions include doing all that is possible to verify that a target is a military objective; choosing means and methods of attack that minimize civilian harm; assessing whether an attack would be disproportionate; giving effective advance warning where feasible; and cancelling an attack should it become apparent that it would be unlawful.

Indiscriminate strikes that kill or injure civilians constitute war crimes. A longstanding pattern of reckless attacks that strike civilian objects, which Amnesty International has documented throughout Israel's ongoing [attacks](#), as well as during the [2008-9](#), [2014](#), and [2021](#) conflicts, may amount to directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects, also a war crime. The extremely high population density in Gaza entails additional challenges for all the parties

² 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](#)).

involved in the conflict. Hamas and other armed groups are required under international humanitarian law to take feasible precautions to protect civilians from the effects of attacks. This includes, to the extent feasible, avoiding locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas. However, even if armed groups fail to fulfil their obligations, Israel remains bound by international humanitarian law, including prohibitions against indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks.

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?
- 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 and forced displacement?
- 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 to ensure the ICC receives all necessary support and resources it needs?
- 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?
- 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 violence facilitated or carried out by 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?

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