



The Case for Stopping the Importation of Goods Arising from Serious Breaches of International Law

Amnesty International is calling for the UK government to commit to a policy position of stopping the importation of products arising from activities that are a grave breach of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, such as use of forced labour, or originating from territories that are occupied illegally under international humanitarian law.

Whilst the case for stopping the importation of goods arising from serious breaches of international law is not limited to goods from territories unlawfully occupied by Israel, this briefing focuses on the urgent need for the UK to stop the importation of Israeli settlement goods as a required step in order to comply with the [International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on 19 July 2024](#). The latter recognised Israel's occupation as unlawful and directed third states to not recognise as lawful, aid or assist that unlawful situation.

What can Parliamentarians do:

- **Call on the UK government to prevent the importation of goods arising from breaches of international law, including urgently stopping the importation of goods from Israel's illegal settlements.**
- **Call on the UK government to prohibit the export of machinery, equipment and technologies to countries where they have been repeatedly linked to human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law.**
- **Call on the UK government to hold Israel accountable for repeated serious breaches of international law, as recognised by the ICJ and other independent bodies, including plausible genocide, unlawful occupation and annexation, war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the crime against humanity of apartheid.**

Key Questions for the UK Government

- What concrete steps will the UK government take to comply with the ICJ's ruling of 19 July 2024 directing third states not to aid or assist Israel's unlawful occupation of Palestinian territory?
- Does the UK Government agree that trade in settlement goods facilitates, legitimises and aids the existence of illegal settlements and Israel's unlawful occupation?
- What assessment has the UK government made of implementing a ban on settlement goods as a necessary and responsible step to comply with the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion on 19 July 2024?
- Will the UK government commit to adopting regulatory pathways to prohibiting the import of products originating from situations of illegal occupation as the UK did in the case of Crimea?
- What decisions will the UK government make regarding trade with Israel to reflect the authoritative determination by the International Court of Justice on the illegality of Israel's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories?
- How does the UK Government reconcile its support for international law with allowing settlement goods to enter the UK?

International Law Position

Israel's policy and practice of settling its civilians in occupied Palestinian territory and displacing the local population violates the Fourth Geneva Convention, constitutes a war crime, and forms a key part of Israel's system of apartheid rule over Palestinians.

The International Court of Justice's (ICJ) landmark ruling of 19 July 2024 declared that Israel's occupation of the Gaza strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is unlawful, along with the associated settlement regime, annexation and use of natural resources. The Court added that Israel's legislation and measures violate the international prohibition on racial segregation and apartheid. The ICJ mandated Israel to end its occupation, dismantle its settlements, provide full reparations to Palestinian victims and facilitate the return of displaced people.

The ICJ also directed third states:

- *'not to recognize as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.*
- *not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by Israel's illegal presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.*
- *to distinguish in dealings with Israel between the territory of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.'*

The UK Government Position

The UK has long stated that its [position](#) on settlements is clear: settlements are illegal under international law and the UK does not recognise the Occupied Palestinian Territories as part of Israel, including Israel's settlements there.

The UK government has called on Israel to stop its settlement expansion. However, it has taken no action to hold Israel accountable for ignoring international law and moreover, the UK is currently supporting settlement maintenance and expansion by allowing goods produced there into the UK market and allowing UK firms to conduct business with settlements.

The UK government has stated that settlement goods do not receive trade preferences, but that does not go nearly far enough. Furthermore, the [negotiating strategy](#) for the UK-Israel Free Trade Agreement published by the previous government in July 2022, which has not been refuted or publicly altered by the current UK government, lacks a geographically explicit territorial clause which would be essential to differentiate between goods from illegal settlements and Israel.

In July 2024 the UK Government confirmed that it will 'look at all options when it comes to tougher action on issues related to the West Bank' in light of being 'strongly opposed to the expansion of illegal settlements and rising settler violence'¹ – it should now take urgent action to ban settlement goods (amongst others arising from breaches of international law), which would be a step to demonstrate meaningful commitment to consistent application of international law.

UK political party policy

In 2020 as Shadow Foreign Secretary, [Lisa Nandy](#) confirmed that the **Labour Party** would ban settlement goods if the Occupied Palestinian Territory were formally annexed. The ICJ's 19 July 2024 ruling sets out that Israel has unlawfully annexed Palestinian land.

In 2021 **Liberal Democrats Party** members voted overwhelmingly in favour of "a ban on UK trade with the illegal Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory" at their annual conference. The policy was

¹ Hamish Falconer, 30 July 2024, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office Oral Questions, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-07-30/debates/A1DF7F27-524B-41B7-8A26-3932AD6BC15C/OralAnswersToQuestions#contribution-E9251AF4-0479-4921-9FDC-68B11B4CEF2E>

accepted by the Party. In March 2024 frontbench spokesperson Alistair Carmichael MP [called](#) for a ban in Parliament.

Multiple **Scottish National Party** front bench spokespeople have called for the UK government to ban the importation of settlement goods, for example: [Drew Hendry](#), SNP Foreign Affairs Spokesperson: “Will the Minister support the UK banning trade in Israeli settlement goods?” 23 March 2023.

Urgent need for UK government consistent application of international law

In response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea and full-scale invasion of Ukraine, to prevent the support of business activities that directly or indirectly advance the violation of human rights or international humanitarian law, the UK introduced legislation that enabled the restriction of export or import of goods or technologies to or from Russia. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the response included a ban on imports originating in Crimea and a ban on infrastructure-related exports to Crimea.

What would this look like in practice? A Case-study from elsewhere

Following Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea region, to reinforce the policy of NOT RECOGNISING ANNEXATION, the EU introduced a trade and investment ban on Crimea which included a ban on importing products made in Crimea into the EU.

Since March 2014, the EU has progressively imposed restrictive measures (sanctions) against Russia, initially in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. On 23 February 2022, sanctions were expanded in response to the recognition of the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine and the ordering of Russian armed forces into those areas. These were massively expanded in response to Russia’s full-scale aggression on 24 February 2022.

Similar restrictions exist under UK legislation.

The Russia (Sanctions) (EU exit) Regulations 2019, a UK statutory instrument:

- bans imports from Crimea
- prohibits the export of infrastructure-related goods to, or for use in, Crimea
- the supply and delivery of goods is prohibited, including technical assistance and all other services relating to goods is prohibited

Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the UK adopted extensive sanctions against Russia as well as relevant individuals and companies. This includes extensive export bans on every item Russia has been found using on the battlefield to date as well as import bans on hundreds of goods. As with the EU, existing measures against Crimea were extended to non-government-controlled territory in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

Why Definitively Ending Trade with Illegal Settlements is Not the Same as a “Boycott”

Amnesty International does not call for individual consumers to “boycott” goods from Israeli settlements – our calls regarding settlement products and services are directed at governments and businesses. Amnesty International urges governments and businesses to abide by their respective international obligations and responsibilities regarding Israeli settlements. The call to stop the importation of settlement goods reflects the reality that such goods originate from practices that are illegal, and to allow their importation legitimises and facilitates those practices.