



## **A year of UK government inertia since the International Court of Justice reaffirmed the illegality of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory**

***Joint letter to Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Foreign Secretary David Lammy, Secretary of State for Business and Trade, Jonathan Reynolds, Attorney General Lord Hermer.***

As UK human rights and humanitarian organisations working on and in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), and trades unions, we are exasperated by the UK government having failed for a whole year to respond to, let alone implement, the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) Advisory Opinion (AO) on Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory.

The ICJ, the world's highest inter-state court, issued its AO on 19 July 2024, stating categorically that Israel's entire presence in the oPt is unlawful. It ruled that Israel must end this illegal occupation rapidly and unconditionally, evacuate its settlers from occupied Palestine, and pay reparations to affected Palestinians. We call upon the UK government to swiftly advance the necessary steps to halt the ongoing British assistance to the unlawful occupation, and to help facilitate a rapid end to the occupation.

The ICJ's AO was a landmark determination on the illegality of the now 58-year occupation, and one which clarified the legal obligations of Other States, including the UK. The UK government received clear instruction in the AO on how to ensure that it does not entrench the occupation and its suppression of Palestinian rights, including the right to self-determination, and to ensure compliance by Israel with international humanitarian law. Specific obligations include not recognising or rendering aid or assistance to Israel's unlawful presence in the oPt; abstaining from entering into economic or trade dealings with Israel concerning the oPt which may entrench its unlawful presence in the territory; and taking steps to prevent trade or investment relations that assist in the maintenance of the illegal situation created by Israel in the oPt. A failure to implement these obligations represents a failure to respect this inalienable right to self-determination.

Despite the ICJ's clarification of these obligations, the government has failed to address the fact that its policies and practices appear to entrench occupation and facilitate annexation. The UK government has continued transferring arms to Israel, including F-35 parts which it admits are used in military activities in the oPt. The UK continues to allow the import of goods from the illegal settlements, and has taken no steps to prevent investment or involvement by UK companies in the illegal settlement project and occupation. The UK has failed to suspend its trade deal with Israel, or even announce a review of it, despite the text of that agreement requiring respect for human rights as an "essential element". Our organisations demand that the UK government acts with the utmost urgency to identify and prevent financial, commercial, trade, diplomatic, military, logistical or other support that aid or assist the maintaining of Israel's unlawful occupation of Palestinian territory, in violation of international law.

The UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to endorse the ICJ's AO and demanded that the occupation ends by September 2025. The UK abstained on the vote. The failure of the UK and other influential states to respond to the AO with the urgency it demands has encouraged Israel to defy the ruling.

With impunity, Israel is in fact deepening its illegal occupation and accelerating the accompanying displacement of Palestinians. State and state-backed settler attacks on Palestinian West Bank communities continue to soar - with more than 1,000 Palestinians including over 200 children so killed since October 2023 and 30 Palestinian West Bank communities forcibly transferred in the same period. UN OCHA reports that in the first half of 2025, over 740 settler attacks impacted more than 200 Palestinian West Bank communities and that more than 40,000 Palestinians have been forcibly displaced from their West Bank homes by military operations. Palestinian homes are being demolished at the highest rate recorded in over 50 years. Plans have been re-announced to construct tens of thousands of new settlement units, including over 3,000 in the 'E1 Area' - a project which will effectively sever the Palestinian West Bank in two. These policies and practices, the ICJ identified, are designed to "create irreversible effects on the ground" amounting to annexation of Palestinian territory.

While UK ministers have remarked that the Advisory Opinion was a "*far-reaching and complex judgment, and we are taking our time with our response*", the crimes identified by the ICJ grow in scale each day while the rights situation for Palestinians deteriorates at an accelerating pace. With written submissions accepted by the Court until 25 July 2023, the UK has now taken longer to issue a formal response to the ruling than the ICJ took in deliberating on the evidence put to it.

The failure of the UK and other states to act on the ICJ AO facilitates corporate entities' ability to continue to fuel the illegal occupation and to profit from it, as the latest report from the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the oPt lays out. In the absence of domestic legislation or instruction to prohibit corporate involvement in Israel's economy of illegal occupation, companies in a wide range of sectors - including but not limited to arms, tech, construction, energy, tourism, finance and agriculture - continue to drive and profit from the illegal situation. The UK Government's failure to prohibit such commercial activity or even issue up-to-date guidance in light of the ICJ AO puts UK businesses at risk. Any UK business selling goods produced in or generating revenue from the settlements benefits from the underlying criminal conduct that the ICJ identified and could be committing money laundering offences.

### **Signatories**

Action for Humanity

ABCD Bethlehem

Amos Trust

ASLEF (The Train Drivers Union)

Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU)

Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT)

Christian Aid

Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu)

Embrace the Middle East

Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS)

Global Justice Now (GJN)

Global Legal Action Network (GLAN)

International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP)

Islamic Relief UK

Muslim Aid

Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS)

Quakers in Britain

University and College Union (UCU)

Sabeel-Kairos

War on Want