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Briefing: Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

War on Want is a registered charity¹ campaigning against the root causes of poverty and human rights violation, as part of a worldwide movement for global justice. We have worked for many years on upholding the human rights of Palestinians.

The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip is worsening daily; over one million Palestinians in Gaza live in devastating poverty, requiring food and other assistance in order to survive. Gaza has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, reaching 49.1% this year.

This poverty is in large part due to the illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip imposed by Israel. The blockade, now in its twelfth year, has effectively 'locked in' Palestinians. They are denied their right to movement and prevented from accessing goods and materials necessary for survival, including basic medical supplies. The blockade is enforced by the Israeli navy, army, and other military forces, and to a lesser extent by the Egyptian authorities. The UN has found that the blockade, and related restrictions, contravenes international humanitarian law, and is a form of collective punishment, which is a war crime.

Since 2014, the UK government has approved over £490 million worth of exports of weapons and components to Israel. Companies in the UK have been awarded export licences for a variety of components for combat naval equipment like those used in Israel's 2014 attacks on the Gaza strip, resulting in numerous deaths and casualties. Israel's naval attacks on Palestinians in Gaza are ongoing, a key part of enforcing the blockade on the Gaza Strip, keeping Palestinians in a deepening state of humanitarian crisis.

It is vital that the UK step up its humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, but this cannot be seen as an alternative to holding Israel to account for its criminal denial of Palestinian rights and attacks on them. War on Want believes that poverty is political; the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is neither inevitable nor acceptable and cannot be addressed as though it is separate from Israel's systematic abuses of Palestinian rights, and the UK's complicity in those abuses. The poverty and deprivation in Gaza will increase as the illegal blockade goes on and will continue to worsen until Palestinians are granted the rights they are afforded by international law, including their right to self-determination.

Recommendations

The UK must take action to hold Israel to account for its violations of international law, including its illegal blockade and military attacks on civilians. The UK must also ensure that it ends its complicity with Israel's violations. To this end, the UK Government should:

- **Refuse licences for exports to Israel**, and revoke extant licences for exports to Israel, where the end-user is the Israeli military or military industry.
- **Support accountability mechanisms** and pursue accountability to ensure that those responsible for breaches of international law and international humanitarian law are held to account.
- **Call publicly for the lifting of the illegal blockade of Gaza** and end all cooperation in activities that contribute towards the blockade, including through the arms trade and through participation in the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, which aids Israel in maintaining its blockade.

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¹ Registered charity number 208724