

UK ATROCITY PREVENTION WORKING GROUP STATEMENT AHEAD OF VOTES ON ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Members and Friends of the [Atrocity Prevention Working Group](#) are gravely concerned by the recent devastating escalation of violence and likely commission of mass atrocity crimes in Israel and in Gaza, and of rapidly increasing risks of atrocity crimes in the West Bank. We call on His Majesty's Government, His Majesty's Loyal Opposition and all Parliamentarians to prioritise the preservation of human life above all else.

It has been a month since Hamas' attack saw the killing of an estimated [1,200](#) in Israel, and a further 240 taken hostage. We consider the attack by Hamas as likely constituting crimes against humanity. We condemn these brutal crimes in the strongest manner.

The ongoing offensive by the Israeli Government over the last 4 weeks has comprised of widespread killing and systematic destruction in Gaza. To date, the [UN estimates over 11,000](#) civilian deaths, with an average of 160 children now killed each day. Medical Aid for Palestinians [reports](#) more than 25,956 are injured, more than 40% of which are children, while over 2,450 people remain missing under the rubble. [Over 1.5 million](#) Palestinians from Gaza are now internally displaced, with [45% of its housing stock](#) destroyed. Amnesty International reports since 7 October, the total number of Palestinians held in administrative detention by Israeli forces, without charge or trial, rose from [1,319 to 2,070](#), as monitored by Israeli human rights organisation HaMoked. Meanwhile, the Israeli Government's ongoing blockade is severely inhibiting access to basic necessities such as water, food and healthcare.

The use of siege tactics, collective punishment, forced displacement, the targeting of civilians, hospitals, schools, and housing blocks, are serious violations of International Humanitarian Law and international human rights law. Given the widespread and systematic nature of acts targeting civilians and violating human rights, we consider it likely that Israel's armed forces are committing crimes against humanity, including ethnic cleansing. We condemn these brutal crimes in the strongest manner.

We have so far been dismayed by the reluctance on the part of the UK government and other political leaders to condemn a trajectory of escalation towards widespread and systematic violence by the Israeli Government and the Israeli Defence Force.

Inconsistency in the face of mass atrocity crimes undermines the safety of all in Israel and Palestine. Never does the indiscriminate targeting of one group lead to the greater security of another. Failure to stand resolutely against crimes against humanity, wherever they occur, drives impunity and undermines efforts to secure peace everywhere, whether that is Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, Myanmar or Xinjiang.

In the shadow of this crisis, we are seeing the escalation of violence in [Myanmar](#), including an airstrike on an IDP camp killing 27; during October, the White Helmets reported [Syria](#) witnessed the most intense military escalation in three years, with more than 65 civilians, including 20 children, killed in strikes targeting Idlib. This past week in [Western Darfur](#) alone, the world looked away as Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) committed what may amount to the single largest mass killing since the civil war erupted in April, with local monitors reporting up to 1,300 people killed, 2,000 injured and 310 missing.

We, therefore:

- Urge His Majesty's Government, His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and all Parliamentarians to advocate for a full and immediate ceasefire.
- Implore all political leaders to allow a free vote on a ceasefire in Gaza if a division were to take place on the floor of the House. We maintain that votes on the prevention or cessation of mass violence are always a matter of conscience.

Further, we urge UK leaders to call on all parties, including Heads of State, the UN Security Council, and those perpetrating ongoing violence, to:

- Facilitate the delivery of and unfettered access to lifesaving essentials, including food, medical supplies, fuel, access to electricity and means of communication.

- Free all civilian hostages, without condition.
- Allow humanitarian convoys to reach UN facilities schools, hospitals, and other health facilities in Gaza with guarantees of protection for staff and civilians at all times.
- Rescind orders by the Government of Israel for civilians to depart their homes.
- Allow patients in critical condition to be medically evacuated for urgent care.

Intermittent humanitarian pauses followed by the resumption of violence and bombardment are inadequate and irresponsible. A ceasefire, agreed by both parties, is the only way forward to halt the death and destruction, and lay the foundation for a lasting peace.

To suggest that calls for a ceasefire are wrong on the basis that one party *may* break it, is a devastating exercise in wilful pessimism. All while hundreds of innocent civilians continue to die each day. The ongoing refusal to meaningfully explore this policy option and attempt to avert the further loss of civilian life, will prove a monumental stain on our collective conscience and signify a resounding failure to uphold our obligations to help prevent and punish mass atrocity crimes, and address the escalating risks of identity-based violence in our domestic and international policy.

The world is watching. We implore UK leaders to act.

Signatories:

Action for Humanity (umbrella organisation for Syria Relief)

Age International

Amos Trust

BOND the UK Network for NGOs

Christian Aid

Embrace the Middle East

International Centre for Eritrean Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Interpal

Omega Research Foundation

Plan International UK

Protection Approaches

Remembering Srebrenica

Sri Lanka Campaign

Saferworld

United Nations Association UK

United Against Inhumanity

Videre est Credere

Welfare Association

Adrian Gallagher, Professor in Global Security and Mass Atrocity Prevention, University of Leeds

