

THE PALESTINE AND ISRAEL CONFLICT

From an African point of view:

The African perspective on the Israel-Palestine conflict is diverse and shaped by historical, political, economic, and cultural factors. It reflects a complex balance between solidarity with Palestine, rooted in shared experiences of colonialism and oppression, and pragmatic relations with Israel, driven by economic and security interests. I have described below a detailed overview, based on information collated from real everyday Africans, including historical context and current sentiments.

Historical Context:

- **Anti-Colonial Solidarity** - many African nations, having experienced colonial oppression, historically aligned with the Palestinian cause. The establishment of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent displacement of Palestinians (known as the Nakba) resonated with African struggles against colonialism. This led to strong support for Palestine, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s when African countries gained independence. For example, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor to the African Union (AU), severed ties with Israel in 1973 following the Yom Kippur War, reflecting solidarity with Arab states and Palestine.
- **South African Influence** - South Africa's experience with apartheid has significantly shaped its stance. The African National Congress (ANC) and Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) developed close ties during their respective liberation struggles, with figures like Nelson Mandela and Yasser Arafat publicly supporting each other. Many South Africans draw parallels between Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and apartheid, leading to strong pro-Palestinian sentiment. South Africa has taken bold actions, such as filing a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December 2023, accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza.
- **Algerian Solidarity** - Algeria, with its own history of resistance against French colonialism, has been a vocal supporter of Palestine. The 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence was proclaimed in Algiers, and Algeria has consistently condemned Israeli actions, expressing "full solidarity with Palestine" during recent conflicts.

Current African Perspectives:

The Pro-Palestinian Stance! African responses to the Israel-Palestine conflict, particularly since the escalation of the Israel-Hamas war on October 7, 2023, reveal a polarized continent. The following points highlight key trends:

- **Strong Support from Some Nations** - Countries like South Africa, Algeria, Namibia, and Zimbabwe have been outspoken in their support for Palestine. South Africa has accused Israel of genocide and war crimes, recalling its diplomats from Israel and supporting investigations at the International Criminal Court (ICC). Namibia and Zimbabwe have condemned Israeli actions, with Zimbabwe labeling Israel's blockade of Gaza a "war crime."
- **African Union Position** - The African Union, led by Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, has called for a two-state solution and criticized Israel's actions, particularly the denial of Palestinian rights. The AU has expressed concern over civilian casualties and urged a return to negotiations.
- **Public Sentiment** - Across Africa, public support for Palestine remains strong, often surpassing official government positions. Pro-Palestinian protests have occurred in countries like South Africa and Nigeria, driven by a view of the Palestinian struggle as a continuation of anti-colonial resistance. Posts on X reflect this sentiment, with users like @ramasefiri and @SiveXaluva emphasizing African solidarity with Palestine and opposition to Israeli policies.
- **Historical Analogies** - Many Africans, particularly in South Africa, view Israeli policies as akin to apartheid, a perspective reinforced by reports from Amnesty International and other organizations labeling Israel's actions as apartheid. This analogy fuels support for movements like Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS).

Pro-Israel or Neutral Stance:

- **Diplomatic and Economic Ties with Israel** - Over the past two decades, Israel has strengthened relations with 44 African countries, offering technology, military assistance, and economic aid. Nations like Kenya, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia have developed ties with Israel, often prioritizing pragmatic interests. For instance, Kenya and Ghana expressed support for Israel's right to self-defense after the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack, though Kenya later shifted to a neutral stance advocating a two-state solution.
- **Economic Pragmatism** - Countries like Morocco, Sudan, and Chad have maintained or normalized relations with Israel, partly due to the Abraham Accords and economic incentives. Israel's expertise in agriculture, technology, and security is attractive to African nations facing developmental challenges. For example, Kenya and Malawi have sent workers to Israel, and countries like Togo and Cameroon abstained from UN resolutions calling for a Gaza ceasefire.

- **Neutrality and Diplomatic Caution** - Some countries, like Nigeria and Ethiopia, adopt neutral or cautious positions to balance relations with both Israel and Arab states. Nigeria's Senate called for a ceasefire and a two-state solution, reflecting a diplomatic approach to avoid alienating Western allies or Israel. Ethiopia, with historical ties to Israel, has remained silent on recent events, possibly due to its own geopolitical considerations.

Divisions and Polarization:

- **Geopolitical Interests** - African countries' positions often reflect their broader geopolitical alignments. Nations with strong Western ties, like Kenya and Ghana, lean toward Israel, while those aligned with BRICS (e.g., South Africa) or with historical anti-colonial stances (e.g., Algeria) support Palestine. This mirrors divisions seen in other global conflicts, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where African nations also split in their UN votes.
- **Domestic Pressures** - In countries with diverse populations, such as Nigeria, the conflict can exacerbate social tensions. Pro-Palestinian protests have occurred, but governments often maintain neutrality to avoid domestic unrest or to protect economic ties with Western nations and Israel.
- **Economic Vulnerabilities** - Some African countries depend on Western aid, which influences their positions. As one analyst noted, nations reliant on foreign donations may avoid openly criticizing Israel to maintain favor with Western powers.

Key Factors Shaping African Perspectives:

1. **Historical Memory** - The legacy of colonialism and apartheid drives sympathy for Palestine, particularly in nations like South Africa and Algeria, which see parallels in their own histories of oppression.
2. **Economic and Security Ties** - Israel's growing influence in Africa through technology, arms transfers, and development aid has led some countries to prioritize relations with Israel over ideological solidarity with Palestine.
3. **Religious and Cultural Ties** - In countries with significant Muslim populations, like Nigeria and Algeria, solidarity with Palestine is reinforced by religious ties to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and shared Islamic identity. Conversely, Christian-majority nations like Kenya may have less emotional investment in the conflict.
4. **Global Alliances** - African nations navigate a complex geopolitical landscape, balancing relations with the West, BRICS countries, and Arab states. This leads to varied responses, from outspoken criticism of Israel to cautious neutrality.

Recent Developments (Post-October 7, 2023):

- **South Africa's ICJ Case** - South Africa's legal action against Israel at the ICJ, accusing it of genocide in Gaza, has been a significant move, supported by countries like Namibia, Chad, and Algeria. The ICJ issued provisional measures in 2024 to prevent genocide and ensure aid access to Gaza, though Israel has been criticized for non-compliance.
- **UN Voting Patterns** - Thirty-eight African countries voted for a UN General Assembly resolution in October 2023 calling for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, reflecting broad support for de-escalation. However, abstentions by countries like Togo and Cameroon indicate divisions.
- **Public vs. Government Divide** - While governments like Kenya and Ghana have leaned toward Israel or neutrality, public sentiment across Africa often favors Palestine, as seen in protests and social media activity. Posts on X highlight this, with users condemning African leaders who support Israel as betraying anti-colonial principles.

In conclusion:

Africa's perspective on the Israel-Palestine conflict is not monolithic. Countries like South Africa and Algeria lead pro-Palestinian advocacy, driven by historical parallels to colonialism and apartheid, while others, like Kenya and Morocco, maintain ties with Israel for economic and security benefits. The African Union and many African publics support a two-state solution, but divisions persist due to geopolitical interests and economic dependencies. Public sentiment, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, often leans strongly toward Palestine, viewing it as a cause of justice and anti-colonial resistance, as reflected in protests and social media. This nuanced landscape suggests that Africa's stance will continue to evolve, shaped by domestic pressures, international alliances, and the trajectory of the conflict itself. For further details on specific country positions or legal actions, resources like Al Jazeera, Amnesty International, or the ICJ website provide in-depth coverage.