

Peace with Justice - How to get there

Conference Report

Balfour Project with King's College London



6th June 2024
Bush House, London & Online

Peace with Justice

how to get there

*Bush House, Strand
Entrance London & Online,
Thursday 6th June 2024*

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Mission Statement

Acknowledging Britain's historic and continuing responsibilities, we work through education and advocacy to advance equal rights for all in Palestine/Israel, regardless of race or creed. We raise public awareness of the issue in Britain. We seek to persuade our Parliament and Government to demand that the rule of law and fundamental human rights, including the right to self-determination, are upheld in Palestine/Israel. We urge our Government to recognise the State of Palestine now, as a step towards equality and an end to the occupation which began in 1967.



How you can help

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Introduction

Welcome to this report on our seventh annual conference. I commend the Action Points emerging from it, which will guide our education and advocacy work with civil society, Parliament and Government.

As Gazans Mohammed Ghalayini and Imad Karam testify, we are witness to the worst violence between Israelis and Palestinians since 1948. The Nakba did not end. It continues, in Gaza and in the West Bank. That is the context of the appalling Hamas attack of 7 October, and the brutal, devastating Israeli Government retaliation against the Palestinian people. The many innocent victims are why our charity has consistently demanded an immediate ceasefire as well as the release of all hostages and those arbitrarily detained. Addressing the horrendous now and working for a better tomorrow need to go hand in hand.

Consistency is key.

Our distinguished conference speakers were united in seeking consistency from our political leaders – upholding international law without fear or favour; principle over expediency; support for those seeking peace with justice, and consequences for those opposed to that peace. With power comes responsibility. That applies to Israel and to our own Government, which needs now to advance the Palestinian right to self-determination by recognising the state of Palestine on pre-June 1967 borders. As Nour Odeh commented, Britain owes that to the Palestinians – and more. While it is not for us to say who should speak for the Palestinian people – or for Israel – we have every right to hold their leaders to account for their actions. Soon the International Court of Justice will rule on the illegality of the 1967 Occupation. Our Government should accept that judgment and, crucially, act to ensure UK policy and practice are consistent. Too often – eg on illegal settlements – we have said one thing and done another, or done nothing.



Mutual security

The British Government should help both to end the fighting and then to provide Palestinians and Israelis with the opportunity for peace, security, and justice they both need and deserve.

“The security of one side cannot be prioritised over the security of the other.”

-Andrew Whitley

Hitherto the United Kingdom has tamely followed the line set by Washington, making a mockery of our country's claim to stand for the rule of law. We need to work together to ensure that this will change. As Daniel Levy commented, South Africa and the Global South have shown up the lack of principle among Western nations.

Much disinformation aimed at discrediting certain actors, especially the UN, has been spread deliberately from the outset. Heroic organisations like UNRWA, the agency for Palestinian refugees, are falsely labelled as terrorists. Almost 200 UN staff have been killed in Gaza. Our Government must resume its funding to the Agency forthwith.

No more double standards

The Sunak government rightly championed legal accountability against Putin over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but then failed to apply the same standards over the devastation of Gaza and its population by Israel saying, "We don't accuse our friends of breaking international law". The same double standards have been applied to refugees from the two conflicts. While Ukrainians without any natural connection to this country have quite rightly been welcomed in Britain, Palestinians from Gaza with immediate family connections here are being rebuffed. Children in need of urgent medical treatment, which generous donors wish to fund, cannot get here. This is shameful. It too must change.

What are the wider implications of the Gaza war for democratic societies and the basic freedoms we often take for granted, but should not? According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of expression and opinion, Irene Kahn, the Gaza war is becoming a global crisis for freedom of expression, with huge repercussions. Our keynote speaker, Agnès Callamard, focused on the need to defend that freedom, here and now. Agnès found hope in the mobilisation of young people, exemplified by our charity's Peace Advocacy Fellows – among them Kira Nygren, Lily Wood and Adrian Kreutz, spelling out why they chose to act through us.

Britain's role

When the shooting stops at last, alongside the massive humanitarian aid effort may come diplomatic efforts to chart a path to peace. There will be an international conference. The United Kingdom should play a leading role, with our European and Commonwealth partners, to ensure that the path leads to justice – to equal rights. We cannot rely on others. Britain has a responsibility, and a duty to do better.



Andrew Whitley
Chair, Balfour Project



Andrew Whitley is founder and executive director of Geo-Political Advisory Services (GPAS), a UK-based consultancy that works on the alleviation of armed conflict in the Middle East and Asia. He was previously Policy Director and interim Chief Executive of The Elders, a journalist with the BBC and Financial Times, and the founding director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa division, then known as Middle East Watch. At the UN, Andrew held senior posts at UNCTAD, the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations and at UNRWA.

Balfour Project Action Points

This is an abridged version. To view the full text, please visit www.balfourproject.org/2024conference

The Hamas attack of 7th October 2023, and the on-going Israeli destruction of Gaza which followed, are but the latest and most devastating episode of a sequence of recurring violence which must be ended. The Balfour Project works with others to inform and influence Parliamentarians and our Government on the need to address the underlying causes: 76 years of the Nakba starting under the British Mandate, 57 years of occupation, 17 years of the Gaza blockade, dispossession, suppression of all means of peaceful resistance, and the continuing denial of Palestinian rights including the right of self-determination. We hope it will provide a template for action.

Immediate requirements

- **Hamas and Israel** agree to a permanent ceasefire with the release of all hostages;
- **Hamas** immediately halts its indiscriminate rocket fire against Israeli civilian targets;
- **Israel** removes all aid restrictions, and facilitates the delivery of humanitarian aid;
- **Israel** guarantees the safety of all humanitarian workers.
- **Israel** gives access for all UN agencies, including UNRWA;
- **Israel** freezes all settlement building in the West Bank; and
- **Israel** ends the unprecedented levels of settler violence in the West Bank and holds those responsible to account.

Priority Actions for the UK Government

- Recognise the State of Palestine now, and support Palestine's full membership of the UN as a state. Without this, the UK commitment to the two-state solution is meaningless; and
- Work with the US, EU, Arab partners, and other key UN member states to end the violence.

UK actions to end collusion in war crimes in Gaza

- End arms trade with Israel;
- Ban settlement trade;
- Ensure the UK differentiates in ALL its dealings with Israel between the illegal settlement project and Israel itself;
- Vote in the UN Security Council to enforce ICJ measures over Israel's actions in Rafah; and
- Reject any role for UK judges in a scheme to monitor the treatment of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli custody.

UK actions to ensure accountability for war crimes

- Increase UK sanctions against violent settlers, those who incite violence against Palestinian civilians, or advocate dispossession, expulsion or genocide, and the organisations that fund these activities, including those outside Israel; and
- Support the ICJ, ICC and UN Human Rights Council in holding to account all parties involved in breaches of international law, whether Israeli or Palestinian.¹

UK actions to ensure the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State

- Insist that Israel withdraws completely from the whole of the Gaza Strip, and contribute to the reconstruction of Gaza and the renewal of the West Bank;
- Re-unite Gaza with the West Bank including East Jerusalem, leading to a sovereign Palestine with control of its own borders;
- Support Palestinian civil society and political groups in building a broad coalition, leading to an elected government of the State of Palestine; and
- Support an international coalition to guarantee security for Palestine and Israel during the transition to a final resolution, accepted by both parties.

[1] Without accountability, the starvation of a population, the targeting of health, education and other vital civilian infrastructure, the misuse of dual use lists, and the use of Artificial Intelligence algorithms programmed to accept a disproportionate rate of civilian death, will all become established military practice and a starting point for abuses by Israel, or by others, in subsequent wars.



Professor Adam Sutcliffe

Adam Sutcliffe joined the History Department at King's College London in 2005, having started his academic career at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He received his BA from Cambridge, his MA from Sussex, and his PhD from UCL. He has held fellowships at the University of Pennsylvania, the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton, and the University of Leipzig, and served as Head of the History Department from 2012 to 2016.

Welcome from Adam Sutcliffe, Professor in European History, King's College London

My research is on Jewish history and on Jewish/non-Jewish relations. I've written on the history of antisemitism, and written and edited a book on the history of philosemitism - the tradition of western idealisation of and identification with Jews. This is often overlooked, but plays an important part in the history of Jewish/non-Jewish relations, not least in the mentality that led to the Balfour Declaration of 1917. It is to remind us of that, and of Britain's role in the increasingly catastrophic situation in Palestine-Israel ensuing from that Declaration, that the Balfour Project has the name that it has. That spirit of holding ourselves to account, to the history that our country is involved in, brings us here today. Philosemitism and its history are part of that.

I have written about the abuse of the concept of antisemitism, and most distastefully, the abuse of the memory of the Holocaust and the pedagogy around it to cast a chill over criticisms

of Israeli actions and over solidarity with Palestinians. This is being done by promoting tendentious definitions of antisemitism, arguing that entirely legitimate criticisms of Israel are antisemitic, losing any sense of proportion in relation to the racism and hatred experienced by other minorities.

Suggesting, as our Health Secretary has said, that bans are needed on the simple wearing of a Palestine flag on a badge, because they might make Jews feel unsafe.

I am Jewish. Since October I've been marching in the large Palestine solidarity marches through central London, usually as part of a sizable Jewish block, as we call ourselves, numbering several hundred. Far from feeling unsafe, we've met the warmest of welcomes.

I find it distressing that sections of our media and our politicians prefer focusing on claims that certain people feel unsafe rather than highlighting the situation of millions of Palestinians now trying to survive through a situation in which they manifestly are desperately unsafe. Our focus today is primarily not on dynamics in the UK, but on what is happening in Palestine. But we here are mindful of our responsibilities as citizens for the role that our country and other western countries could play in finding a way forward.





Daniel Levy is the President of the U.S./ Middle East Project. From 2012 to 2016, he was Director for the Middle East and North Africa at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Prior to that, he was a Senior Fellow and Director of the New America Foundation's Middle East Taskforce in Washington D.C. and a Senior Fellow at The Century Foundation. Daniel was a Senior Advisor in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office and to Justice Minister Yossi Beilin during the Government of Prime Minister Ehud Barak (1999-2001).

Nour Odeh is a media professional and communications consultant. In 2014, Nour founded Connect, a strategic communications consultancy firm. Before that, Nour served as the Director of the Palestinian Media Centre and spokesperson of the Palestinian Government after having served as a senior communications advisor for the Palestinian leadership, ahead of Palestine's application for membership at the United Nations in 2011. In 2003, Nour set up and led Ramattan News Agency, Palestine's first video news agency, based in Gaza, which served clients worldwide.

The challenges ahead

**Daniel Levy (President, US/MEP)
& Nour Odeh (National
Democratic Assembly, Palestine)**

Daniel Levy:

Confusion reigns since President Biden gave his ceasefire speech on 31 May. The White House then issued a statement signed by a number of countries, mostly those that have nationals held hostage in Gaza. It speaks to the absurdity and criminality of the way that the US and the West have managed affairs in the last months. The first paragraph calls on Hamas to accept the proposal. The second calls on Israel and Hamas to act. There is a place in diplomacy for constructive ambiguity. There is also something called dishonesty. We've crossed that line.

Predictably, the Israeli response was yes to the bits we like, and no to the bits we don't. Within hours, Prime Minister Netanyahu clarified that Israel intends to continue the war. His coalition partners and MPs did the same. What would America do? The US caved in and walked it back. The problem here was with Jerusalem, but the US stressed that the only people who had to give an answer were Hamas.

“There is a terrible tendency to suffer from Bibi-itis, as if the only problem is this one person, and if he goes, it will all be okay.”

-Daniel Levy

What is the determination made by the UK government in terms of its weapons sales and transfers to Israel? What is that legal advice? When do arms transfers stop? How does the UK respond to the ICC and the ICJ? That's not decisive for the US, but it helps create the environment in which the US administration operates.

What are the dynamics in Israel? There is a terrible tendency to suffer from Bibi-itis, as if the only problem is this one person, and if he goes, it will all be okay. Ben-Gvir, Smotrich and much of the Likud have openly called for further ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the displacement of the population in Gaza, even though the real prize is the West Bank.

October 7th was a violation of international law. What Israel has done in response in Gaza is a violation. What was happening every day from October 6th and back for decades, denying Palestinians their freedom and rights, was a violation.

The way forward cannot be to go back to the status quo ante.

The attempt of the U.S. to bring in Arab partners, succeeding with European partners, including the UK, and the supposed moderate camp in Israel and the PA is to try and return to a Potemkin peace process, a make-believe in which we continue with a reality of apartheid.

Recognition of Palestine is meaningful if we say that what we recognise is occupied.

How do we respond to that?

The UK government can contribute to that or can challenge that. Recognition of Palestine can do either. It is neutral – Israel may scream and shout about it, but it is only meaningful if the next step is to say that what we just recognised is occupied. How do we respond to that? There is no real

“The way forward cannot be to go back to the status quo ante.”

-Daniel Levy

distinction between a settler economy and the Israeli economy, but if you want to go down that route, do we ban settlement trade? How to ensure that Israel is not circumventing that? What's our position in international legal fora?

Change Israel's incentive structure, ending impunity

After an end to the horrors occurring every day in Gaza, here are four things we need to think about:

1. *Palestinians need a national liberation movement with a strategy to challenge the status quo.*
2. *Israel cannot continue to act with impunity and not be held accountable as long as the cost-benefit calculation of any Israeli leader is that taking on the hardliners (who go deep into society, the establishment and the political class) is very costly. If it's cost-free to carry on, and you get normalisation with Arab states thrown in, don't be surprised if things keep going in that direction. **Israelis cannot be bludgeoned and sanctioned into a full change of everything, but if you want minds to be focused on the hard questions, change the incentive structure.** We could not have got here without these layers of impunity allowing Israelis to not see Palestinians. Palestinians were not on the agenda. When you don't see people, it's much easier to dehumanise them.*
3. *This cannot be an American monopoly. We have to welcome a different set of actors. The UK government should think hard about those in the Global South who have actually proved that they are willing to challenge the status quo.*
4. *All of this plays into our domestic politics, but it cannot play out in the silencing, criminalising, culture war ways which pit one community against another. It's a big strategic misstep that the Jewish community, in its establishment guise, has volunteered to be a battering ram with other communities here. If everything is antisemitism, if you are so expansive in your definition, so unserious and willing to conflate, then nothing is antisemitism. People won't take it seriously.*



Nour Odeh:

**“There is a sense of
abandonment.”**

-Nour Odeh

I am a Palestinian living in Ramallah. I'm also a diaspora Palestinian born in Damascus. I have had the privilege of living and leaving a piece of my heart in Gaza.

The mood in the West Bank is all that Gaza is experiencing, minus the mass destruction and bloodshed. We are collectively traumatised, in agony. We suffer from survivor's guilt, fearing to receive news of losing loved ones or friends, or simply of seeing more scenes of bloodshed that we are helpless to stop.

And there is a sense of abandonment.

What social media has done, and where hope comes in, is why we also see that gap between governments and the political establishment in the West and the general public and people who make an effort that we really value highly. It is so important. It is the one breath of fresh air we get when we see people marching, taking a stand, knowing how costly it is. Thank you.

A secret war in the West Bank... everybody understands that they're next

In the West Bank a secret war is happening, overshadowed by Gaza. Entire communities are being displaced. All the tactics that Israel has been able to normalise in Gaza are being brought to the West Bank. When you hear of incursions in the West Bank, know that the first thing that Israeli soldiers do is block the entrances to hospitals, is plough up the streets and damage the infrastructure, is destroy homes indiscriminately and detain thousands of Palestinians, including over 80 journalists, 52 of whom remain in Israeli imprisonment. Not counting the thousands of Palestinians who have been forcibly disappeared from Gaza.

There is no comparison in the level of destruction, but that reality of pain is common between the Palestinians. Everybody in the West Bank understands that they're next. That is the conviction, the reality that they feel, aside from losing loved ones and not having a moment to grieve. For eight months we haven't been able to



take a breath. We don't have the luxury to break down, because you need to keep moving forward, thinking about what will happen next, knowing that nobody will come to the rescue, not even your own government.

No longer playing the rigged game

As to the discussion of the day after, the idea that Palestinian agency is a gift that can be given to certain token 'good' Palestinians, that we as a people who are predominantly young, highly educated and very opinionated, do not have what it takes to decide for ourselves who should lead our nation to freedom.



Since the Hamas takeover of Gaza we have had everybody decide what will become of us and discuss who will lead us except us. The only question we get is, who do you think can do it? Well, why don't we put it to the test? The ballot box usually does that.

But there's a risk. We don't know who's going to win. Isn't that how elections are supposed to work? We've been denied that.

I was a candidate in elections in 2021 that never happened because nobody in the West wanted them. The Europeans didn't send the observers. Diplomats were apprehensive, almost certain we were going to make the wrong choice. We weren't going to pick their guys. They were right. But then we were denied that chance. That allowed Palestinian politics to disintegrate completely. As a people - not just in the occupied West Bank including Jerusalem and Gaza, but every Palestinian in the world - we were locked in a situation where we were hostage to a divided, dysfunctional and paralysed political system. There is no discussion because we are not deciding.

Nobody asks us about the domestic agenda. Where do we stand on gender equality, the economy or education? All we're asked is where do we stand on Israel? Our occupier, our oppressor. The only right answer, as far as Palestinians are concerned, is we oppose the

occupation. We want to break free. But that is not the answer that everybody else seeks. They want the Palestinians who can ensure the security of their occupier, playing the rigged game, as for the past 30 years - a dysfunctional, humiliating game that has not served the Palestinian cause and international law.

British Government: just be consistent

Since October, we learned that there are a lot of things worse than dying. You can still be breathing while being dead inside, with nothing left in you to fight for. That is the most dangerous state of living.

We count on you to pressure the UK government to take a respectable position, to stand apart from the cowboy politics of Washington, to make sense, to be consistent.

I'm not as ambitious as saying to be pro-Palestine. Just be consistent. If these rules and laws and standards are to continue being applicable to everybody, as they were so quickly and efficiently applied to Russia, then they must apply to everybody. Or what is happening in Gaza will become the new norm. And nobody can say otherwise.

***All the promises and the mirages that were marketed as horizons
were not meant to deliver freedom***

That is why young people have taken charge. They understand that Palestine matters, not just to those who share Palestinian heritage, but to everybody. It is a litmus test.

What is happening is a product of willful political failure. We were thrown under the bus,



sacrificed, 75 years ago. Ever since, all the promises and the mirages that were marketed as horizons for us were not meant to deliver freedom. They were to maintain the status quo of Israeli supremacy and impunity, and of Palestinians just playing along, waiting for that carrot that never comes.

Palestinian agency is a right to be seized, not a gift.

Can this Palestinian government survive? I'm not sure. It's on life support. It's a very comfortable setting for those who want to do nothing. Keep a Palestinian government we can talk to when it pleases us but can deliver nothing unless we give it to it. That is untenable, dangerous, and a formula for disaster.

Palestinian agency is not something that should be given to Palestinians. It's not a gift. It is a right.

But for us to exercise it, we have to have that space, and have all the players participate - those I like and those I don't. That is the definition of democracy. Hamas and Islamic Jihad and Fatah and everybody, they need to be held accountable. The only way is for them to participate in political life and be accountable.

If we can put up with Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, put up with our people. Let us hold them accountable. Otherwise, the option is either civil war, or a fractured, paralysed political system where there's no horizon for participation, for women or men, and thus endless occupation. It is untenable.



Andrew Whitley: What should happen once the fighting stops in Gaza?

Nour Odeh:

In Palestinian political tradition, there can be consensus: the political actors agree on how to move forward. That is possible without the vetoes hovering over everybody's head, using that tradition to form a body that can manage the mammoth task of reconstructing Gaza, of healing, and of

reunifying the Palestinian political system. That body should be in charge of preparing for elections when they are practical and possible. It would take some time. Without this body being the product of consensus, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for it to have legitimacy - practical ability to be in Gaza and work.

There is a tendency, especially in Washington, to talk about Hamas as if it's only relevant for a ceasefire. So we'll talk to them, we'll get the captives out, and then we'll annihilate them, and they'll be OK with that. It's nonsensical. That consensus would help give us some hope of a way forward. But a Palestinian Authority that comes in, after everything that has happened, will not be able to deliver what it should.

Andrew Whitley: What is the best-case scenario for future governance?

Daniel Levy:

There isn't one. It comes down to the incentive structure on the Israeli side: what they can get away with.

First, people in Gaza need to be provided for, not least the situation of scorched earth and hellscape that has been created there.

Governments did not have the guts to say "Israel, you're fabricating this about UNRWA. We're not going along with you". And if you can't even do that, do you think you're going to impose an international trusteeship? We will muddle through. You create the best conditions for that. But you have to build something different.

The Western powers are willing to sacrifice the already very fragile international system to maintain Israeli exceptionalism.

Andrew Whitley: An important ICJ opinion is due on the legality of the occupation. It could result in the world saying this is illegal, with consequences. Can we break that exceptionalism?

Nour Odeh:

There is a chance, if we keep it up. Even if this genocidal war ends tomorrow, collectively we need to continue acting as if nothing has changed. Because it wouldn't have changed. What was happening before 7 October was also illegal and untenable and intolerable. It is not just about this war, it's about the reality of keeping Palestinians captive in an illegal occupation.

Countries like Spain, Ireland, Norway and Slovenia that have recently joined the majority

"The Western powers are willing to sacrifice the already very fragile international system to maintain Israeli exceptionalism."

-Daniel Levy

of the world in recognising Palestine, have an opportunity to take the lead in translating that recognition into action.

Recognition should also mean sanctions, an arms embargo, accountability. If the occupation and maintaining this exceptionalism don't become costly, Israel will not feel the need to make a choice. In fact, it will be motivated to stay the course. So far, it's been a sweet deal.

The International Court of Justice matters

Andrew Whitley: Are we wrong to pin hopes on the significance of this ruling?

Daniel Levy:

No. These are important pieces in the building blocks to challenging the impunity. The South African case on the contraventions of the Genocide Convention and the provisional measures matter - not because they can be



enforced, not because the behaviour changes the next day. Although you now hear the Israelis saying, "We are opening an investigation into how...". The investigations won't go anywhere. But this is exposing vulnerabilities. It does matter, as the basis from which to move on.

Audience Question: Will the continuation of the war in the Middle East lead to a Trump presidency?

Nour Odeh:

It could very well bring Trump, but that is down to Biden. Trump's chances became significantly better because Biden chose his ideological leanings over the demands of his constituency in the Party. He is disconnected from where his Party is. If it's Trump, I hope the world doesn't deal with him like last time, to cower away and not challenge and pray not to be the subject of his wrath. If his policies aren't confronted, we all lose.

Audience Question: On the prospects for Palestinian elections, and whether Hamas would dominate.

Nour Odeh:



Hamas will have a considerable portion, but not a majority. It depends when and how elections are held. We have a robust independent elections commission able to carry out and monitor elections fairly, and this is why we got the 'wrong' results in 2006 and got sanctioned for them by electing Hamas. But if we get to elections, you will see a parliament that needs to work together to form a government. Elections shouldn't be limited to the PA, but be part of a pathway to rebuild the PLO. The

Legislative Council of the PA is part of the PLO structure.

Elections in the OPT would be part of a process to reimagine, redefine our liberation movement, our sole and legitimate representative as a people - our collective home, politically. But that starts with consensus, because we also can't hold elections everywhere. Some countries in the region where there is a large Palestinian constituency are allergic to elections. We would have to figure out a way to ensure representation. But you would have a very vibrant political scene.

Andrew Whitley: Do we need to wait for President Abbas to leave the scene politically before there can be a genuine revival of Palestinian democracy?

Nour Odeh:

Given all the vetoes we talked about, it is hard to imagine the President leading that process.

Daniel Levy:

America would have to use its leverage with Israel. It refuses to do so.

There's an additional element of shock for Israelis, not just of October 7th, but of how the deep systemic dysfunctionality of their system has been exposed subsequently, in its cruelty, but also in its failings.

This is an unprecedented humiliation for Israel. Most of the leadership of Israel's military is now arguing for a ceasefire, because they are stretched, exhausted, running out of manpower, reservists aren't showing up... Many inside the Israeli system know it is not working and want to bring it to an end, but that doesn't align with Netanyahu's calculation. If the absence of leverage continues, you will have a different phase in Gaza: less intensity, no new areas to invade, and that will make it easier to get more of the humanitarian aid in. I am not painting a happy picture.

“There's an additional element of shock for Israelis, not just of October 7th, but of how the deep systemic dysfunctionality of their system has been exposed subsequently, in its cruelty, but also in its failings.”

-Daniel Levy

The Gaza War: a humanitarian disaster

Imad Karam:

I was born and brought up in Gaza. I've lived in Britain for the last 22 years. My whole family is in the north of Gaza today. More than 70 of my relatives have died. The latest one is Malak, 10 years old, who is still under the rubble. She's my niece. All my sister wants is to say goodbye to her daughter. My family lost 11 homes so far - only a tiny proportion of what other families have endured.

It is an honour to introduce a fellow Gazan, Mohammed Ghalayini, based in Manchester. He was in Gaza visiting his family on 7 October. He stayed until December, when he left through Egypt. While in Gaza, living what everybody else was living, Mohammed helped set up a media project called Amplify Gaza Stories, relaying to the world the testimonies from families suffering the horrors of Israel's war. Back in the UK, he and the Amplify Gaza Stories team have been raising funds to support starving families in Gaza.

Mohammed Ghalayini:

In a tale as old as 1948, I thought we'd be back in two weeks.

Today, this genocidal attack is the most pressing issue. I was in Gaza for 65 days from October to December. I witnessed a medieval



Mohammed Ghalayini

Mohammed Ghalayini is a Palestinian-British air pollution scientist and translator of short stories from Gaza. While in Gaza in December 2023, Mohammed helped set up Amplify Gaza Stories (AGS) to relay testimonies he had recorded with people he knew in Gaza of their experience of the Israeli onslaught and displacement.

Dr Imad Karam

Dr Imad Karam is the Executive Director of Initiatives of Change International, a global network of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, whose mission is to inspire, equip and accompany change makers in the pursuit of a just and peaceful world. Imad is also an award-winning documentary filmmaker. He is a Balfour Project Trustee



siege carried out with 21st century technology. I mourn between 100 and 200 of my parents' families and countless friends and relatives - like my cousin Hamam Ghalayini, shot at point-blank range in the house where he and his family were sheltering. I think of my friend Sahbir, praying at Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al Balah, the hospital recently been inundated with wounded from the bombing of the UN school in the Middle Area. A missile attack took his leg. And my friend Khaled, a newly qualified nurse. When the Israeli attack began, he volunteered at Al Shifa Hospital and remained there until March when the last Israeli assault on the hospital happened. He was ordered to leave with others. Quadcopter machine gun fire killed him as he fled. Add to this the wholesale destruction of Gaza's institutions from universities to hospitals, schools, the parliament building... No one has been spared. That's the way it is in Gaza.

I hope to contribute today by asking how representative current political institutions are, and thinking about the diaspora and the power that we wield here, partly in the burgeoning protest and direct-action movement that has real clout.

We face huge challenges when it comes to Palestinian self-determination.

I came of age politically in the 1990s, when the Oslo process was floundering. The hope was short-lived. The Palestinian political leadership signed away the Palestinian struggle by deferring it to be resolved in final status negotiations, and they sidelined important players in the Palestinian body politic. That was a fatal mistake.

Like Imad, I have lived in the UK for 20 years. There was nothing to go back to. In September I went back intending to resettle. 7 October came. I left our flat in Gaza with just a few clothes. In a tale as old as 1948, I thought we'd be back in two weeks.



We set up Amplify Gaza Stories, which continues. I had media requests for to "tell the Palestinian story". A producer said "You're not here to comment on politics. You're here just to tell us what life is like". I answered "Unless we talk about politics, we can't talk about life in Gaza". I needed to talk about the hypocrisy of political powers and how the strategy of containment of Palestinians had led us to the stage that we were in.

We need equality, self-determination, justice. Without that, we can't have peace

How can we transition from the genocide we have now to a just and lasting peace? Ben-Gvir and Smotrich want to do in the West Bank what they're doing in Gaza. Talking about the day after, British politicians speak of 'good' Palestinians - the ones that submit to what Israel and the West want. We need equality, self-determination, justice. Without that, we can't have peace.

"We Palestinians are not going to be given this agency; we need to seize it."

-Mohammed Ghalayini

There is a need for true Palestinian agency, representing the full diversity of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and abroad. Palestinians in the diaspora have been leaders of the direct action movement: a massive disruptor of those complicit with genocide. It's a power base to be reckoned with. The PLO came out of the Palestinian student movement in the 1950s and 60s. Now a PLO 2.0 may come out of movements such as Palestine Action disrupting companies like Elbit and Barclays in the UK. The main branch of Barclays in Manchester was shut down for five days. The complicity needs to be made more costly to bring about change.

We Palestinians are not going to be given this agency; we need to seize it. Frederick Douglass, an African-American freed slave, said "Power concedes nothing without demand". I ask you to support Palestinians seizing agency, letting peace prevail for all between the river and the sea.

Keynote Speaker – Dr Agnès Callamard, General Secretary, Amnesty International

Agnès Callamard:

Since October, we have been plunged back to a future we don't want, one we were all promised would never recur. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1948 Genocide Convention, the 1948 Geneva Convention together promised, not only to relegate horror to the past, but to chart a path to universal human dignity. Tragically the community of nations caused that promise to blur, weaken and fade. A deepening erosion of the rules-based order, caused not only by massive human rights violations, but crucially by the heartless justification of them in the name of self-defence, counter-terrorism, national security... leading us to the brink of a pre 1948 abyss, worsening under the spread of global inequality and an escalating climate crisis.

The world has been the seemingly powerless witness of the organised, deliberate destruction of people, of international rules, of international law - those rules that were supposed to keep shut the doors to hell.

Palestinians have been indiscriminately or deliberately targeted; starved, denied medicine, punished collectively. Palestinians, the very victims who had been forgotten.

In 1948, when we were celebrating a new world order, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were enduring the Nakba. Responsibility does not lie solely with the Israeli authorities, Hamas and other armed groups in Gaza. Other states, our international institutions and mechanisms for justice - all failed.



Dr Agnès Callamard is Secretary General at Amnesty International. In 2016, she was appointed as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary killings. Previously she was Executive Director of the freedom of expression organisation Article 19. She returns to Amnesty after twenty years having previously held the role of Chef de Cabinet for then Secretary General Pierre Sané.

“Palestinians have been indiscriminately or deliberately targeted; starved, denied medicine, punished collectively. Palestinians, the very victims who had been forgotten.”

-Dr Agnès Callamard

Hamas has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity

The 7 October Hamas attack killed over 1,000 people, most of them Israeli civilians; thousands more wounded. 245 people taken hostage. These are war crimes and crimes against humanity. Hamas and other armed groups continue to hold hostages despite repeated demands for their release. They fire rockets indiscriminately towards population centres in Israel, creating fear and insecurity. Both are also war crimes.

Israel has engineered starvation

**“It is as if the grave lessons
of the Holocaust have
been forgotten.”**

-Dr Agnès Callamard

Israel instigated a campaign of retaliation against Hamas that soon became a campaign of collective punishment against the Palestinian people. They have launched indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks on Gaza, decimating entire Palestinian families, killing large numbers of civilians every day.

Over 37,000 have been killed since the Israeli offensive began, including over 15,000 children. 82,000 people have been injured. Thousands are missing, buried in the rubble. The UN estimates that 70%-75% of civilian infrastructure is destroyed. 2 million Palestinians have been forcibly displaced at least once; many forced to move several times. The Israeli authorities have denied access to humanitarian assistance, also a war crime, through the closure of border crossings like Rafah and systematic obstruction at Israeli controlled crossing points.

There is engineered starvation, that too a war crime. The health system has been dismantled. Patients are dying daily without medical supplies, that too a war crime. Many Palestinians are now surviving on less than 3% of their daily water needs.

The Gaza campaign has resulted in the largest killing of humanitarian workers over eight months: 200. And in the largest killing of journalists: at least 108.

Despite evidence of war crimes, demands for an arrest warrant against the Israeli Prime Minister and the growing risk of genocide - according to many scholars, the fact that genocide is already being committed - it is as if the grave lessons of the Holocaust have been forgotten, purposely ignored, with multiple violations constantly justified. These rules do not apply to us, to them, to this conflict, to Hamas, to Palestinians...

All those living in Gaza, men, women, children, are treated as if somehow lawful targets. All in the guise of military necessity, getting rid of Hamas erected as an aim on a pedestal.

Immediately after 7 October, Western governments condemned Hamas crimes, expressing unconditional support for Israel: an understandable response to what had been inflicted on the population of Israel. They should have shifted their rhetoric once it quickly became clear that Israel's bombing of Gaza was killing thousands of civilians. They should have publicly demanded an end to those unlawful actions and called for a ceasefire. But that did not happen.



The US, UK and the West have accelerated genocide

“All those living in Gaza, men, women, children, are treated as if somehow lawful targets.”

-Dr Agnès Callamard

The US largely failed to denounce Israel's relentless bombings and devastating siege. It rejected any reference to context, including 56 years of Israel military occupation, instead amplifying Israel's counterterrorism framing. The US paralysed the UN Security Council for months by vetoing a desperately needed ceasefire. Displaying double standards, given

their well-founded protestations about war crimes by Russia, the US, UK and others have continued to arm Israel. Within days of the ICJ ruling to prevent genocide in Gaza, the US, UK and several other Western governments canceled funding to UNRWA. In doing so, and rejecting South Africa's genocide case against Israel, they were not just ignoring the evident risk of genocide. They accelerated the risk of genocide.

In response to the 20 May ICC request for arrest warrants against leaders of Hamas and Israel, those states failed to act. The US, UK, Australia and others criticised the warrants. President Biden described the request as outrageous.

“They were not just ignoring the evident risk of genocide. They accelerated the risk of genocide.”

-Dr Agnès Callamard

Many of the architects of the post-World War II system of rule of law are now actively disregarding that system and undermining its institutions, working against the delivery of justice and peace. Numerically they are a tiny minority, but they have power and thus responsibility. An overwhelming majority in the world have demanded a ceasefire and call for justice, but the US, Israel and their few allies have carried on regardless. Evidently the rules do not apply to them.

We hear the language of counterterrorism, the constant reference to Hamas as a terrorist group, as if that justified each violation.

“Stop shielding the Israeli authorities from international accountability.”

-Dr Agnès Callamard

The rules-based order at risk



We look to civil society, to those documenting evidence of crimes against international law, drawing media attention to their findings, advocating to protect the rule of law. This is brave action. Yes, international law is breaking down, but more people than ever are calling for international law, including the protesters.

We look to governments that were not represented in the 1948 process because they were fighting colonialism. South Africa filed cases before the ICJ alleging that Israel's conduct violated the Genocide Convention. The ICJ itself continues to rise to the challenge. The ICC prosecutor has demonstrated finally that no one is above the law, issuing requests for arrest warrants against leaders on both sides. Questions had been asked about the ICC's willingness to pursue charges. We had criticised their silence. Finally he proved that the ICC can resist undue influence: an important message to all parties to the conflict.



Accountability

We need the ceasefire, the release of civilian hostages, a stop to the Rafah ground operations. An end to the transfer of weapons and military equipment from the US, UK and others. Stop shielding the Israeli authorities from international accountability.

Governments must protect freedom of expression. There is a global attack on freedom of expression, clamping down on

peaceful protest, sit-ins, university encampments, academic fora in solidarity with Palestinians. We must defend our freedom of expression.

Apartheid

We call for the dismantlement of Israel's system of apartheid and military occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip – occupied militarily since 1967. Palestinians in the OPT have been trapped and oppressed under Israel's brutal occupation and system of apartheid.

I refer to the West Bank. I could have spoken about Israel proper. Take the Bedouins, there for generations, whose villages are destroyed. The poverty of those people living beside

incredible wealth. The Bedouin reside in less than 3% of the entire Negev area. But that is too much and they must go.

The reality of apartheid must be at the heart of what we are discussing now. Jewish Israelis have the right to self-determination and to security. So do Palestinians. The reality must be acknowledged so that everyone can live in peace and security.

“Israelis have the right to self-determination and to security. So do Palestinians. The reality must be acknowledged so that everyone can live in peace and security.”

-Dr Agnès Callamard

“When the powerful flout the law, the shield of law weakens for us all...We cannot wait in hope that heads of state or corporations or the super rich will do what is right.”

-Dr Agnès Callamard

The 1948 international system has not worked as we hoped: neither fair nor equitable. Very often it has sided with the powerful. To work, it needs our constant scrutiny and at times our outright

denunciation. Those 1948 institutions are not sacred, but are far too precious to have any power decide for the rest of us that they are no longer operable. When the powerful flout the law, the shield of law weakens for us all. When they set themselves above the law, betrayal of the law becomes a weapon favoured by many more.

Reimagining the rules and institutions for global governance

Together we need to re-imagine the rules and institutions for global governance. We should seek an overhaul of the UN Security Council, beginning with the use of the veto, and look for alternative decision-making bodies when they fail to do so. We must lead this change, to disrupt the building of a world order that takes us to the abyss. We cannot leave the construction of our brave new world to a few privileged states, institutions or rich individuals.

We cannot wait in hope that heads of state or corporations or the super rich will do what is right.

Audience Question: What can we do in practice, e.g. about illegal settlements?

Agnès Callamard:

The Balfour Project action plan provides a way forward on settlements. Sanctions must be at the heart of any work plan at international level, starting now. We at Amnesty agree with many of the Balfour Project recommendations. The only way to shift the mindset is through accountability.

We need to share the story of the violations, including in the West Bank. When Amnesty criticises Israel, we are automatically accused of antisemitism. We need to be strong. When people are accused of antisemitism for criticising Israel, we need to say no, that is not what antisemitism is about – for we need to combat antisemitism, too.

How young people bring about change

Balfour Project Peace Advocacy Fellows & their projects:

Kira Nygren - Settler Violence in Area C

Adrian Kreutz - Israel Arms Suspension

Lily Wood - Israel Arms Suspension, Recognise Palestine, TikTok

Matan Rosenstrauch

Matan Rosenstrauch is an anti-occupation activist and the Balfour Project Peace Advocacy Fellowship Coordinator since 2019. He has worked with Jewish communities' anti-occupation organisations and helped establish the Jewish Democratic Initiative, a South African charity. He is an organiser for Meretz UK. He also teaches Hebrew.

Find out more about the Fellowship Programme here:

www.balfourproject.org/fellowship



Matan Rosenstrauch:

I'm the coordinator of the Peace Advocacy Fellowship for the last five years. I am Israeli. I have close family members who were affected and lost friends in the Hamas attack on 7 October. This has caused me much pain, but also strengthened my understanding that there can be no military solution to the conflict, only a political one that we should work towards. The Fellowship brings young people together and provides them with tools, knowledge, and capacities to become peace advocates, working on projects that they plan with us on advocacy and education during the academic year. The Fellows are very diverse: young people from the Jewish diaspora, the Palestinian diaspora; all working together.

Using my voice

Kira Nygren:

I focused mainly on settler violence in Area C. I helped organise the UK tour of Nidal Younis, the Mayor of Masafer Yatta in the South Hebron Hills. His community faces eviction by the Israeli authorities. He spoke with the Middle East Minister and political activists in Westminster, and talked to students in Durham. I chose



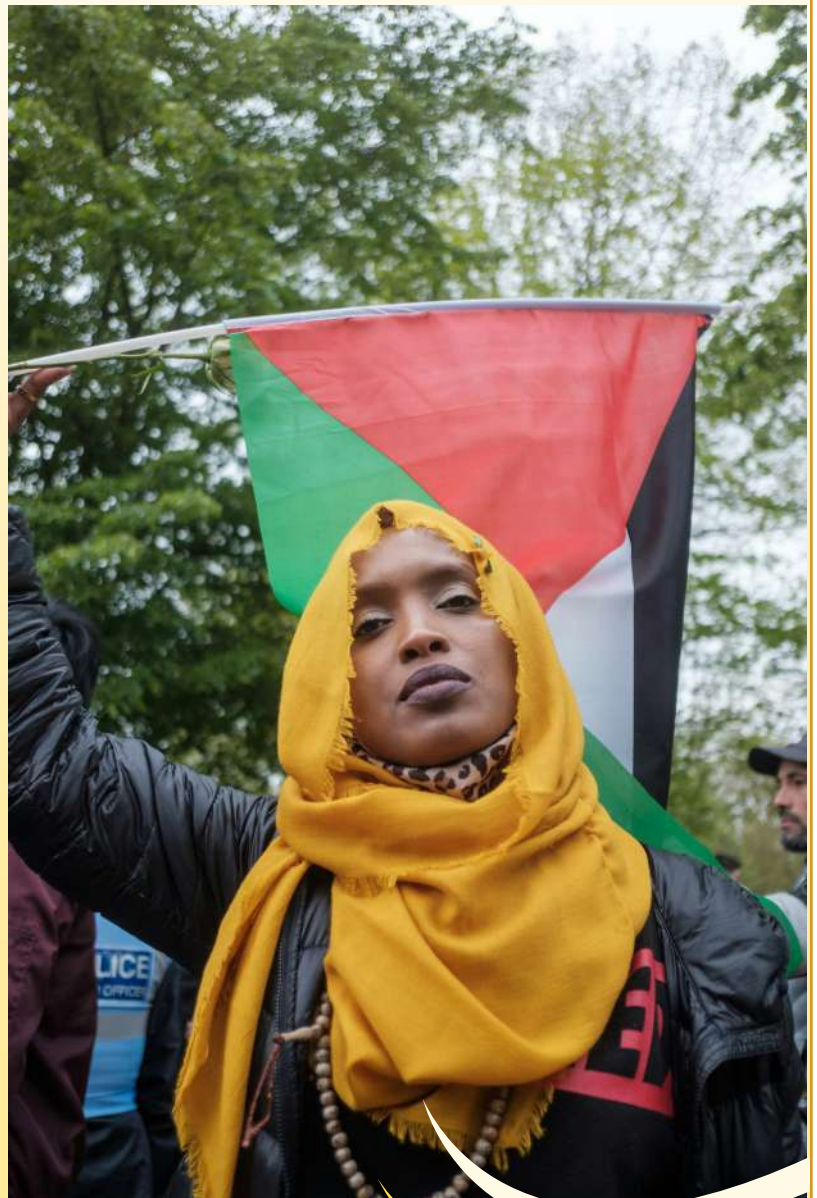
to join the Balfour Project for two reasons. I did a variety of academic work for my degree, focusing on settler violence and Israel-Palestine. My maternal family are Palestinian. It's been difficult for my family to be open about being Palestinian, I researched my family's background and the consequences they faced as a result of losing their home in Haifa. I was able to combine that personal connection to Palestine with advocating tangible change.

There is a perception that Palestinians have a very firm sense of identity, something that many of them are very proud of. Less well understood is the concept of shame amongst Palestinian diaspora. My family felt embarrassed at having left to start a new life, creating an identity built around other parts of the world. They moved to Canada and integrated and stopped speaking Arabic at home. We've reflected that in some ways you contribute to the loss of Palestinian identity across the world, and thus to the erasure of Palestinian people. It's really important, now that we have settled and feel comfortable, for me to use my voice and my privilege to do meaningful work in the space.

Adrian Kreutz:

I grew up in Germany. I recently completed my PhD at Oxford in political theory. I spent a year lecturing in Amsterdam. I am now lecturing in the Philosophy Department at Oxford.

I had worked with the UN Department of Palestinian Rights and Al Haq, the human rights NGO in Ramallah. The Balfour Project gave me the chance to learn about the narrative in the UK. That was very insightful. I had the opportunity to reflect on the student protests around the globe. All the advocacy came from the student body. I was involved in the student protests in Oxford and Amsterdam. Some of it was fairly violent, disruptive, the students went as far as resorting to property damage to get their demands heard. Whether that was productive - that's up for debate.



“The Balfour Project vision resonates with my own ideas about the responsibility of the UK in the Middle East, and Israel-Palestine specifically. “

-Lily Wood

One of the demands was boycotting, sanctioning and divesting (BDS) from Israeli institutions. In Amsterdam, the student demand was first to disclose all the ties that the University has with Israeli institutions, both academic

institutions and the arms industry. This first demand was not met. Aggravated by that, students took to the streets and the campus encampment, protested, putting up blockades, trying to disrupt the educational space in a more or less fruitful way. What happened after that was more fruitful and might lead to positive change in how we view a boycott demand. The students and staff at the University critically renegotiated the programme of BDS regarding Israeli institutions. We've put forward a proposal to the Boards of Oxford University and Amsterdam University to downplay what is commonly considered the BDS demand, which is the blanket divestment and sanctioning of Israeli academic institutions. We want to distance ourselves from that.

Among the academic community, there's recognition that within Israeli institutions, a blanket boycott would have negative impact on the progressives, the radical voices in Israeli academia, and so a blanket boycott would just hurt.

The policy proposal that we came up with is an ethical review process. If the boards approve, we will have an ethical review of all further investments and cooperation with Israeli educational and other institutions.

Raising awareness about Britain's role, past and present

Lily Wood:

I joined the Balfour Project because I'd studied Arabic and the Middle East, but never had any personal connection. The Balfour Project vision resonates with my own ideas about the responsibility of the UK in the Middle East, and Israel-Palestine specifically.

The Balfour Project, being so close to home, feels tangible. You can really contribute to change even when it feels quite far away. It's important to raise awareness about Britain's role. Growing up, I had no idea about the Israel-Palestine conflict and how the UK was so involved historically.



I worked on three projects. We've been making short educational videos on TikTok, responding to events: a video on the ICJ hearings for the genocide case; on the ICJ case about the legality of the Israeli occupation, and general news, recognition of Palestine and so on. Second was the Recognise Palestine campaign. We drafted letters for the public to send to their MPs – and now to all the MP candidates - to encourage our Government to recognise Palestine. Last was the Suspension of Arms to Israel campaign, which we hope to carry on into next year.

Matan Rosenstrauch:

The Suspension of Arms project started as a Fellows' initiative: a good example of how young people bring change and progression also in the work of charities. Finally, what is your message to young people? How can you work for change from here in the UK?

Kira Nygren:

My message is one of gratitude. This year young people have looked at Israel-Palestine with a critical eye, but also a genuine and committed interest, which has been wonderful, especially in regard to writing to MPs. Young people have made their voices heard. It is very easy to share an image on social media, when your face isn't necessarily attached. One

really important thing is having tangible conversations in your social circles, at university, with your family. Not just using social media, where it can feel like you don't have to own up to the opinions you're putting out, but to follow up in real life. Young people do have an interest and an excellent voice, so to continue on that road.

Calling for justice, equality and security for all people isn't picking sides

Lily Wood:

**“Don't be afraid to use
your voice.”**

-Lily Wood

There's often fear and nervousness about talking about Israel and Palestine. People may feel they don't have all the answers, don't know everything about a conflict, or maybe feel that they have to pick a side. I was quite afraid of that growing up: if I express support for one side, am I then denying the rights or respect for the

other side? To recognise and promote the idea that calling for justice, equality and security for all people isn't picking a side. You don't have to have all the answers. You don't have to know absolutely everything. It is complicated, but it's not that complicated. Don't be afraid to use your voice.

Adrian Kreutz:

I would like to see young people, me included, not mistaking political tribalism for advocating for a cause. Speaking up for a political cause should not be mistaken for forming in-group alliances. Taking up a certain standpoint in the friendship group, in the radicalised or not so radicalised student body is about debate, engagement, listening to one another - discourse.



Sir Vincent Fean

Sir Vincent Fean was a member of the British Diplomatic Service 1975-2014. His last post was as Consul-General, Jerusalem (2010-14). Before Jerusalem, he was Ambassador to Libya, and previously High Commissioner to Malta.

Chris Doyle

Chris Doyle is the Director of Council for Arab-British Understanding (CAABU). He is a frequent commentator on TV and Radio.

Yasmine Ahmed

Yasmine Ahmed is UK Director of Human Rights Watch. She has two decades of experience as a public international lawyer, and human rights advocate.

Dr Phyllis Starkey

Dr Phyllis Starkey was a Member of Parliament from 1997-2010 during which time she was Chair of the All Party Britain Palestine Group, then PPS to the Middle East Minister in the FCO.

What our Government must do to uphold equal rights

Dr Phyllis Starkey (Vice Chair, Balfour Project), Chris Doyle (Director, CAABU), Yasmine Ahmed (UK Director, HRW) and Nour Odeh, chaired by Sir Vincent Fean (Balfour Project Trustee)

Vincent Fean:

I draw your attention to a strong new economic document called Palestine Emerging. There is a website: www.palestine-emerging.org. It's not a political document but is based on the assumption that there will be game changers enabling the Palestinian economy to grow both in Gaza and in the West Bank. Palestine needs to recover economically, and flourish. How will that happen? Who needs to work on it? Baron Frankal, a trustee of the Balfour Project and CEO of the Portland Trust, is among the authors. There are about 100 contributors to this document, including Palestinians, Israelis and internationals.



Action Points

Dr Phyllis Starkey:

The Balfour Project will take forward the Action Points emerging from this conference. We focus on the UK government - not because the UK is uniquely powerful, although it does have a history that's contributed, not in a good way, to the situation that we're in in the Middle East - but because it's our government, accountable to us. We have a duty to try and influence it. It is well-placed to work with like-minded governments in the Middle East and closer to home in Europe to achieve change. The Action Points are an attempt to select the key issues on which to focus our activity. For example, we have been lobbying intensively to get the UK government to resume funding UNRWA. That is a priority.

On many issues, we've already been lobbying the government and the opposition, and we'll continue to do so. The plan sets out immediate actions which are required of Israel and Hamas. The most urgent is an immediate ceasefire and cessation of violence. Our government has to try and make sure that happens. It calls on Israel to remove all restrictions on humanitarian aid entering Gaza, with unfettered access for all UN agencies, including UNRWA; to cease to use starvation and the destruction of civilian infrastructure as weapons of war, and to guarantee the safety of all humanitarian workers, medical workers, and so on. And in the West Bank, to stop settler violence and freeze all settlement building.

It then proposes actions that the UK government must take: to recognise the state of Palestine on pre-June 1967 borders; to end immediately any collusion of UK government or UK businesses in war crimes in Gaza; to ensure accountability for war crimes by supporting the ICC and the ICJ; to



“We don't have a view on who should be in that government, what form it should take, or what their final demands should be. That is for the Palestinians themselves to decide.”

-Dr Phyllis Starkey

participate in reconstruction, ending the occupation and supporting Palestinian civil society in democratic renewal, leading to an elected Palestinian government.

We don't have a view on who should be in that government,

what form it should take, or what their final demands should be. That is for the Palestinians themselves to decide.

The Balfour Project will continue to lobby government and parliamentarians on these and other points. We hope you will use this list to hold your MPs to account and remind them that Palestinian rights – equal rights - are a key issue for citizens of Britain. We expect any British government to ensure those rights are properly respected.

An immediate ceasefire

Chris Doyle:

CAABU and Medical Aid for Palestinians have done polls with YouGov. British public opinion is consistently in favour of an immediate ceasefire: more than 70% in support of an immediate ceasefire, a very high level. On the more contentious issue of imposing a UK arms embargo on the state of Israel, the polling ranged from 55% to 62% in favour of suspending UK arms transfers. The percentage of those who opposed an arms embargo shrank in the last poll to just 13%. Our political leaderships are not in line with public opinion on this issue, and thus under increasing challenge.



Labour took until February to call for an immediate ceasefire. Labour have been better in terms of the ICC and ICJ, speaking out in favour of the independence of those courts, whose decisions must be respected. But they haven't backed an arms embargo. They've called for a review. What happens on day one of a Labour government on arms exports to Israel? They are going to have to make that decision whilst the military operation is ongoing. Labour have changed their policy on recognition. They were in favour of immediate recognition, but last autumn they changed it. If you make your voice heard that there should be recognition. The Greens, Liberal Democrats and SNP support an arms ban and recognition.

Press our Government to act on Day 1

Let's look to the first 100 days of a new government. What we can do is important. Will Labour restore future funding to UNRWA on day one? No reason to delay. Will it say something on international law? Will it change position on arms transfers? What can you do? Press our incoming government to act on Day one – the lack of action so far has been lamentable.

“We do need to talk about what next – a way forward. It does not do justice to anyone to only talk about today and the suffering.”

-Yasmine Ahmed



Yasmine Ahmed:

We are frustrated at seeing civilians being killed, women, children. We saw it on 7 October and for over eight months since. I woke up to the news that a refugee camp, an UNRWA facility, had been attacked: 35 civilians killed. Among those 35 there will be children. I looked at my six

-year-old son, who was ill last night. I watched and worried if he had a fever. We live in London, with a doctor five minutes away. He has a grandma upstairs, a dad and a mum watching over him. I still woke up worried and panicked about him. I saw this news and froze. I cannot even imagine what the parents of Gaza are feeling right now.

We do need to talk about what next – a way forward. It does not do justice to anyone to only talk about today and the suffering.

But part of the reason that we have got here is because all we are doing is looking forward to a peace process, to a solution, not looking at the reality on the ground. They need to go hand in hand.

We cannot just talk about the PA and the Arab states, a negotiation table and next steps. That will lead us to continue on a path we have followed for over six decades.

Look at the reality on the ground

We need context. This has been decades of severe systemic repression of Palestinian people, amounting to the crime against humanity of apartheid. We are not talking about two equal groups coming to a table, that this is a conflict where we bring two together and find a way forward with equal power. We need to keep talking about the suffering. But we do need to talk about the next steps.

Using leverage

Human Rights Watch doesn't take a position on recognition, but in my personal capacity, I would ask our government what their vision is for a two-state solution. First, ensuring it can be a reality on the ground, whilst we know settlements are expanding. Where are



your sanctions? Your bans on doing business with settlements? Where is your guidance to businesses to say you shouldn't be doing that, like Norway has issued? Where are the levers that you hold? You don't have many levers.

“You cannot come into power and say you are committed to a rules-based international order, international law, domestic law, the rule of law and not comply with it. You are potentially complicit in the violations happening now.”

-Yasmine Ahmed

Let's be clear. The UK is not the US. But you do have levers. Why are you not using them, even talking about using them? You have a trade agreement with Israel. You have made

commitments about future agreements for cooperation on science, technology, military and trade. Why are you not saying that these are up for review because of our plan for a two-state solution? Something different needs to happen.

Arms - people say it's less than 2% that the UK sends to Israel. The quantity does not matter under the law. One component being used by Israel to enforce the blockade, to attack civilians, to attack aid workers is enough to mean that you are legally obliged under domestic and international law to stop the licensing of military equipment. The UK has acknowledged in the current judicial review brought by Al Haq that there were, in December last year, 28 extant licences, and 28 future licences are on their table that they said were likely to be for equipment and components going for IDF use in Gaza. 20% of the components in the F35s flown in Gaza are UK made. It is not acceptable legally or morally.

It would make a massive difference politically if the government,



alongside their key European allies, made a joint statement stopping the export of arms and military components. It would leave the US out on a limb, on their own. It makes a difference.

“We will not be spending British taxpayers’ money to then say nothing when Israel, in its next attack on Gaza, destroys the hospitals, the schools that we’ve spent millions of pounds to construct.”

-Yasmine Ahmed

You cannot come into power and say you are committed to a rules-based international order, international law, domestic law, the rule of law and not comply with it. You are potentially complicit in the violations

happening now.

Not only is the UK complicit - individual Ministers and officials are complicit, and potentially liable under criminal law. Staff in the Dept for Business and Trade have already raised their concerns and thinking about taking action.

UNRWA funding: if that is not resumed in the first days, I don't want to hear anything about commitments to humanitarian provision, nor to hear a Minister say we are so concerned that aid is not getting into Gaza, yet you will not lift your funding suspension on UNRWA.

Now in the West Bank Israeli settlers, armed, supported by Israel, are actually demolishing schools and facilities funded by the UK government. Let's be clear why accountability and the “day after” need to go hand in hand. We will not be spending British taxpayers’ money to then say nothing when Israel, in its next attack on Gaza, destroys the



hospitals, the schools that we've spent millions of pounds to construct.

The government needs to use its leverage. We can't continue to see the atrocities committed and no leverage being used. It's not enough. It will not be enough when future generations look back and ask what did we do? As

they asked about the Holocaust, about Srebrenica, about Rwanda. What did we do? No one says, "Well, we didn't have much leverage. It wasn't that much. We do what we can."

The UK government is under a legal obligation to not only not be complicit, but to take



positive steps to end violations of international law. That is the rules-based order.

ICC, ICJ, it was great to see that Labour were strong and principled on the ICC. But I heard equivocation from Starmer, so that needs to be clarified. If an arrest warrant is issued, what will the UK government do? Will it, as it is required to under international law, as a state party to the Rome Statute, give effect to that warrant?

That needs to be clear.

I urge the government to take heed that this is a matter of legality, morality, and politics. You need to be thinking of them all hand in hand, and about the legacy that you'll leave - and about those people in Gaza who are relying on you right now because they have no one else.

Britain has a legacy to rectify: recognise Palestine, but don't stop there: action, not words

Nour Odeh:

Recognition by the UK of Palestine is not just a matter of legal position, it is a historical debt owed to the Palestinians. British politicians need to be reminded of that. Annoying as it is, they need to always remember that they have a legacy that they need to rectify.

Balfour, British history and Mandate Palestine mark 14 million Palestinians. We view what the UK does with a different lens, because we see that London has an added responsibility. There is an international, legal, moral responsibility, but there's a bilateral score to settle here. There's a correction of history that needs to happen.

Don't settle for words.

We've heard over the past 30 years of the so-called peace process that has got us to genocide that settlements are illegal, or as the Americans like to say, an obstacle to peace, whatever that means, and yet the number of settlers has gone from 100,000 to 700,000.

The settlers near my home were once on the horizon. Now I see them from my balcony in my comfortable neighborhood in Ramallah. In my home village in southern Hebron, Israel has barred people from building additional floors to their homes or balconies because Palestinians are bothering the settlers when they look out of their balconies.

It's not about saying the right thing - politicians are good at saying a lot of nice things. We need to ensure that they're taking the right actions. If settlements are illegal, great. Now tell me that you're going to outlaw products from that stolen land and those stolen resources. That is the only way I'll understand that you really view settlements as illegal. Are you against the terrorism of settlers and those who arm them? Great. Show me you are

doing what you are legally required to do and hold accountable those who are directing the policy and doing the arming, not individual settlers who



“There is an international, legal, moral responsibility, but there's a bilateral score to settle here. There's a correction of history that needs to happen.”

-Nour Odeh

can get away with it. And don't do it like the US did - they made a big splash and then walked it all back. So don't settle for words, please. And don't settle for recognition only.

Accountability has to be at the forefront. It has to hurt. Those committing war crimes and atrocities shouldn't complain that they're being punished. If they don't want to be punished, don't commit the crimes. Yes, it needs to hurt. Being a coloniser has to be at a high cost.

“Being a coloniser has to be at a high cost.”

-Nour Odeh

I draw the parallel with apartheid South Africa. Governments were the last to join when it became untenable for them to continue being complicit in apartheid. It was the people, the voters who made sure supporting apartheid became politically untenable. It is within your power and ours together to make sure that happens.

Questions on accountability and on normalisation with Saudi Arabia

Chris Doyle:

The UK has got to stop treating Israel as a good faith actor. I'm fed up with Ministers, whenever asked about Israel and international law, saying “Well, I'm not a lawyer”. But when it comes to Ukraine or Sudan, they offer a legal view, condemning Russia or Syria, for example. Suddenly, they are all lawyers when it suits them.

Nour Odeh:

Normalisation with Israel has been central to US policy, declared or not, even before the so-called Abraham Accords. What they are in essence is making sure that Israel is the boss in the region. Militarily, in terms of security, in terms of economy, there's an overlord who represents the bigger overlords, and everybody else is willing to play. In exchange, Israel will give to our beautiful despotic regimes in the region all the intelligence gadgets they need to spy on the opposition, perhaps even murder the opposition, or at the very least, jail them and make their life hell.

There is an implicit deal in this normalisation frenzy. It wasn't just

“The UK has got to stop treating Israel as a good faith actor.”

-Chris Doyle

Trump. It's also Biden. He is far more dangerous, because in the middle of a genocide he is presenting the biggest prize of all: Saudi Arabia. The price for Saudi normalisation has gone up for purely Saudi reasons, not just because of the genocide. Saudi Arabia saw the opportunity to leverage everything that was happening, and they did drive the price up. Politically, I'm not sure they're willing to give Biden that win, but they would be amenable to reaching a deal with Trump the deal-maker.

Tell them we Gazans can hear them

Nour Odeh:

Before I came here, I asked my friends in Gaza for permission to leave and come here without feeling too much guilt that I would be in a safe place. I asked them what they wanted me to say to you on their behalf. They said “Tell them we can hear them”.



Closing Statement from Dr Phyllis Starkey

Palestinians count on us to pressure the US government, and our own. That should be a spur to us, to carry on doing what we are doing, but to do it better.

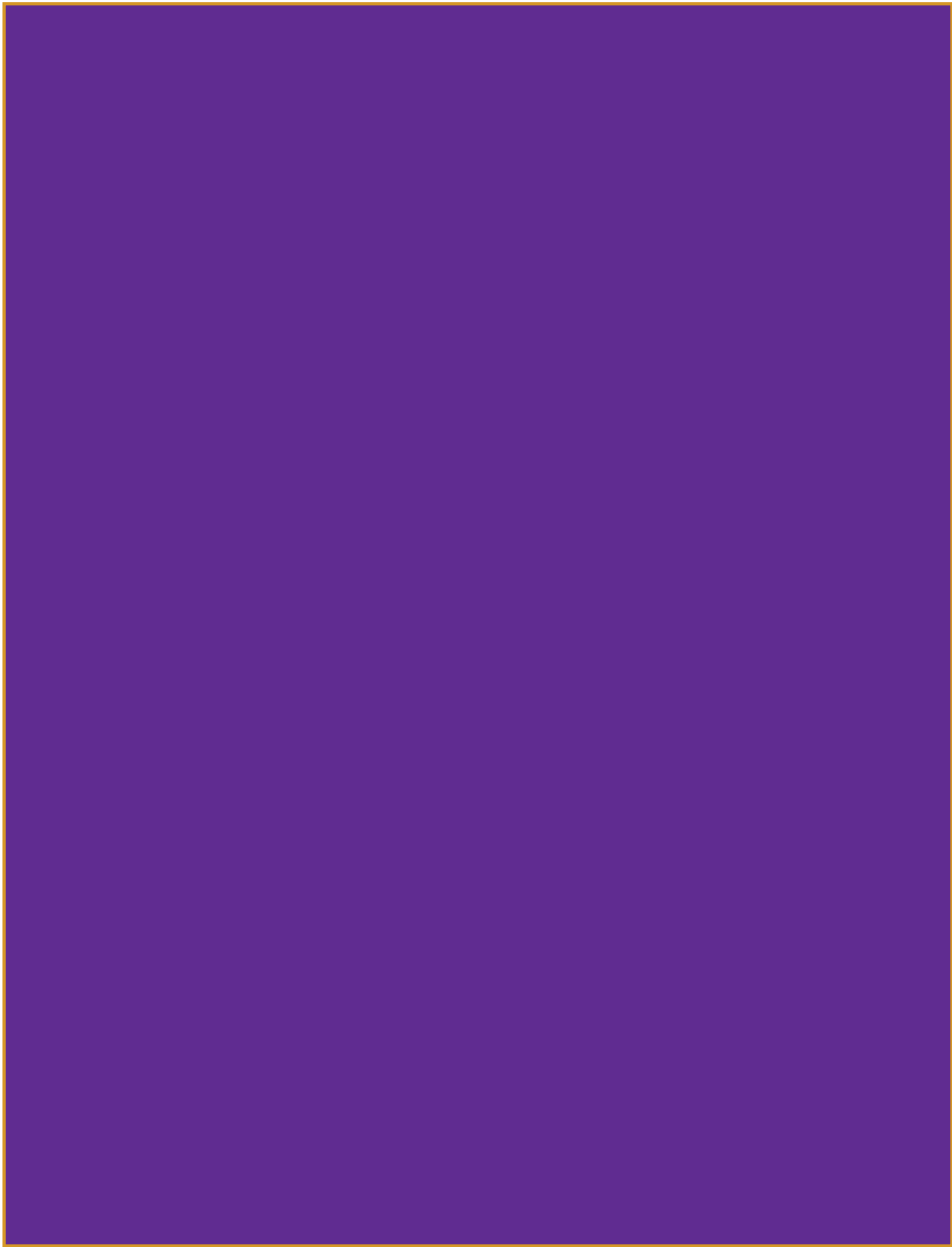
Be effective

We need to think strategically and politically – not asking for things that we know the government or the opposition are never going to entertain. We have to start from where they are, and move them further in the right direction. Aim for the big things but ask for the small steps that will get you nearer. When you've got your first step agreed and they've done it, then you press for the next step, within the rules and the framework. That is a discipline you have to follow to be effective. **We owe it to Palestinians to be effective - not to do things that just make us feel better.**

We need the rule of law too

Our governments have applied very effective sanctions against Russia, which if applied against Israel would, for example, mean that Ben-Gvir and Smotrich would be sanctioned. All the settlement administrations would be sanctioned. If we applied to Israel-Palestine all the things that we and European Union states have done after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, that would be a good start. We're not asking for something that governments haven't done before. We also need to emphasise the rule of law - how it protects us, as well as everybody else. Politicians also respond to self-interest. We in Britain have a self-interest in the rule of law and its credibility being maintained. It is outrageous if our government is undermining the credibility of the system which protects us, as well as everybody else.

We need also to talk about the wider implications of the attack on the rule of law. We will continue to use our resources as effectively as we can to take forward this work - to advance the peace with justice that both Palestinians and Israelis deserve.



Balfour Project



For more information and to send us any comments, please email us
at info@balfourproject.org or visit www.balfourproject.org

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