

Ireland and the Struggle for Palestinian Rights: Charity, Solidarity and Responsibility

Presentation to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence, Parliament of Ireland.

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I am honored to address your esteemed parliamentary committee and am grateful for this opportunity to share with you a glimpse of the Palestinian people's existence, resistance and inextinguishable insistence on freedom and self-determination after 70 years of colonial oppression.

Like all Palestinians, I feel more at home in Ireland than in any other western country. Your heroic struggle against centuries of colonialism has always inspired Palestinians. This is why I shall speak from the heart, as if at home.

At a time when Israel's [regime of military occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid](#) is implementing a [shoot-to-kill-or-maim](#) policy against peaceful Palestinian protesters in Gaza marching for freedom and refugee rights, charitable rhetoric is not enough. It is time for accountability.

The EU still votes as a bloc in support of UN resolutions upholding basic Palestinian rights, [including the right of return for Palestine refugees](#), and condemning [Israel's settlements](#) as illegal, but has yet to take effective measures of accountability against Israel. In contrast, significant EU sanctions have been imposed on Russia soon after its takeover of the Crimea.

Despite Israel's descent into [unmasked, right-wing extremism](#), particularly with the current escalation of its [brutal military occupation and repression](#), and its rhetoric notwithstanding, the European Union (EU), including Ireland, remains largely complicit in enabling and maintaining Israel's grave violations of Palestinian human rights.

Israel's serious breaches of international law trigger legal obligations for the EU, Israel's largest trade partner, and to its member states. As reiterated in the 2004 decision by the International Court of Justice, states must refrain from any act that would entail recognition of Israel's settlement enterprise and from providing any form of assistance to maintaining the illegal situation arising from it.

By trading with Israel's illegal settlements and supporting companies that are involved in the settlement enterprise, as [defined by the UN](#), the EU is violating both obligations of non-recognition and non-assistance.

The EU, including Ireland, maintains a web of [military relations](#), [weapons research](#), [banking transactions](#) and [settlement trade](#) with Israeli companies, [banks](#) and institutions that are deeply [implicated](#) in human rights violations.

For instance, the EU [imports](#) goods from the Israeli settlements at an [estimated annual value of \\$300 million](#). This is more than 17 times the [average annual value](#) of Palestinian goods imported by the EU between 2004 and 2014.

Through its Horizon 2020 research program [the EU has approved more than 200 projects](#) with Israeli companies, such as Elbit Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries, that are accused of deep complicity in Israel's [war crimes](#) and possible [crimes against humanity](#). Another Israeli beneficiary of EU funding is Technion University, a main hub for developing Israeli weapon systems used to perpetrate crimes against Palestinian civilians.

Merely labeling *some* of the illegal products of Israeli colonies instead of [banning](#) them all is considered by Palestinians as yet another EU [failure to uphold European and international law](#).

Israel's Far-Right Government Drops the Mask

As Israel's regime becomes more overtly [associated with the global far-right](#), including white supremacist and [anti-Semitic groups](#) in the [United States](#) and [Europe](#), and as it becomes the

model for Trump's xenophobic policies its popularity continues to sink. A recent [BBC poll](#) shows that Israel has the fourth *lowest* popularity rating among many countries, with over 60% of the public in the UK, France and Spain viewing it negatively.

Crucially, support for holding Israel to account is growing among [Jewish Americans](#) and the broader [US public](#).

Israel is intensifying its [land-grabbing](#) construction of [illegal](#) settlements and walls in the occupied West Bank, especially in East Jerusalem.

It is tightening its fatal, 12-year-long siege of two million Palestinians [in Gaza](#), denying them basic necessities, while [counting the per-capita calories](#) that are allowed in. The UN predicts that Gaza will be [unlivable](#) by 2020.

Israel is entrenching what even the [US Department of State](#) once characterized as a system of "institutional, legal, and societal discrimination" against Palestinian citizens of present-day Israel, enforced by more than [sixty five racist laws](#).

It also continues to deny the internationally-recognized rights of Palestinians in exile, who account for [50 percent](#) of all Palestinians.

In light of this [ongoing Nakba](#), and given the failure of the international community to hold Israel to account, the nonviolent, [Nobel Peace Prize-nominated](#) Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions ([BDS](#)) movement for Palestinian rights was launched in 2005 by the [broadest coalition](#) in Palestinian civil society. It calls for an end to Israel's 1967 occupation, full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the UN-stipulated [right of Palestinian refugees to return](#) to the lands from which they were uprooted and dispossessed since the [1948 Nakba](#).

Anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, BDS has [consistently and categorically opposed all forms of racism and racial discrimination](#), including [anti-Semitism](#), anti-Black racism

and Islamophobia. One's identity, the movement upholds, should never diminish one's entitlement to rights. BDS, as a result, targets complicity, not identity.

The BDS movement is supported by a [near consensus](#) in Palestinian society. Days ago, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, [reiterated](#) its support for BDS and called for sanctions against Israel.

Solidarity not Charity

At the most basic level, Palestinians are calling on Ireland, the EU and the world at large to uphold their profound moral and legal responsibility to do no harm to us.

Beyond responsibility, we are asking for solidarity, not charity. In a show of effective and genuine Irish solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality, a few weeks ago, the [Dublin](#) became the first European capital to adopt BDS for Palestinian rights. [Derry](#) was the first Irish city, in 2016, to endorse BDS.

The Irish trade union movement headed by the Irish Congress of Trade Union has for years supported the BDS movement. Hundreds of Irish cultural workers have signed a pledge to support the institutional cultural boycott of Israel. The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the student unions in Trinity College Dublin, Queens University Belfast and Galway University have all adopted BDS.

Israel's New McCarthyism

In response to the impressive growth of support for Palestinian rights, particularly through BDS, and evoking memories of [McCarthyism](#), Israel has since 2014 waged a [global war](#) on the BDS movement, including [extensive propaganda](#), [legal warfare](#) and [espionage](#). A desperate Israeli government minister has established a "[tarnishing unit](#)" to smear Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights defenders in the BDS movement, while another has publicly

[threatened](#) us with “targeted civil assassination.” [Amnesty International](#) has condemned these threats.

[Ireland](#), along with the [EU](#), Sweden, Netherlands and others, has upheld the right to call for BDS against Israel to achieve Palestinian rights as a matter of freedom of expression.

Conclusion

To fulfill Ireland’s obligations under international law vs. the Palestinian people by, we appeal to you to consider the following concrete measures and accountability:

- 1) Imposing a two-way military embargo on Israel, as was done against apartheid South Africa, and as called for by [Amnesty International](#).
- 2) Banning the import of products of companies implicated in Israel’s illegal settlement enterprise and ensuring that companies involved in grave misconduct - such as HP and G4S - are excluded from state tendering processes in line with the EU directive on the matter.
- 3) Supporting the suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement until Israel abides by its human rights clause.
- 4) Halting all financial transactions with Israeli banks that finance Israel’s settlement enterprise.
- 5) Stop considering the import of Israeli natural gas or electric power given Israel’s pillage of Palestinian energy resources.

Yeats once said: “I have spread my dreams under your feet. Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.” He also said, “In dreams begin responsibilities.” Indeed, in presenting my people’s dreams and aspirations before you, I sincerely hope that you shall not tread on our dreams of dignity, emancipation and a just peace but will act with responsibility to make them come true.

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