

**John Brady TD Opening Statement to Oireachtas Joint Committee on Finance, Public
Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach**

With over 30,000 killed, the people of Gaza are enduring what UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres described as horrifying levels of hunger and suffering.

Children are literally dying of starvation.

This is a continuation of a sustained Israeli strategy designed to annex Palestinian territories through a process of isolation, fragmentation, and dispossession.

They seek to separate Gaza from the West Bank. With the further fragmentation of Palestinian territories into a series of Bantustans, cut off from each other and unsustainable.

Israel seeks to break down Palestinian communities and societies.

The policy of the Irish state is a two-state solution.

The single biggest obstacle to the achievement of this is the illegal Israeli settlements.

There are currently over 700,000 illegal Israeli settlers in 144 illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Last month, the Attorney General Rossa Fanning stated at the International Court of Justice that Israeli settlers had continued to unlawfully destroy and appropriate property throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, and Israel had a policy of encouraging and facilitating the expansion of settlements.

He said this was a clear breach of international law and the Geneva Convention.

Yet, Ireland is currently investing tax-payers money into business entities that finance, support and sustain these illegal settlements.

ISIF has directly invested in four banks deemed essential to the operation of the illegal settlements.

This has the effect of economically wedding Ireland to the financial infrastructure of the illegal settlements.

It is utterly shocking and unacceptable that the government is fighting attempts to divest from this.

Not only does this not make sense, but the state is also supporting illegal activity under international law.

Generally speaking, the Irish people are unaware that their hard-earned taxes are being invested in Israeli banks and other enterprises essential to the continued existence of the illegal settlements.

I believe that if they knew where their pension fund was being invested that they would be outraged.

Consequently, the government has a legal and moral obligation to progress the legislation here today as a matter of urgency.

Unlike other legislation on Palestine such as the Occupied Territories Bill where the government has attempted to hide behind EU competency law to halt its progression, this is a sovereign issue for the Dáil.

In November the government confirmed that the state had €4.2 million investments in 11 companies on the United Nations database of business entities operating in the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Motorola Solutions, one of the companies which the Irish state was listed as having invested in, is providing material for current use by the Israeli military in their assault on Gaza.

In 2016 the UN Human Rights Council adopted resolution 31/36 which clearly provided that the UN database should be updated annually. Which would allow for the addition and removal of specific companies as the situation altered.

Since I introduced this Bill to the Dáil in March 2023 there have been a number of developments in respect of this.

On the 30th of June last year, the UN announced an update to the Database of business entities involved in activities relating to the occupied Palestinian territories which had been first published in 2020.

This has witnessed 15 businesses removed from the database as they were either no longer involved in or were in the process of ending their role in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Following this, on the 11th of July 2023, the UN Human Rights Council passed a new resolution calling for the UN Secretary General to provide for the necessary resources to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to allow for an annual presentation of the UN database to the Human Rights Council.

This provides clear evidence that the database is a live entity. Which will update and delete individual business entities as appropriate.

Israel has been emboldened by international failure to hold it to account for its genocidal actions, we currently witness this in Gaza and the West Bank, and it is incumbent that we align our stated national policy of condemning the actions of Israel with the financial actions of the state, which currently act to embolden Israeli actions, by divesting in businesses enmeshed in Israel's illegal enterprises.