

Ceasefire Now

**A UNISON guide for activists
campaigning for peace**

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 4 |
| The situation since 7 October 2023 | 4 |
| Take action | 6 |
| Ceasefire Now | 6 |
| Support peaceful protests to demand a ceasefire | 6 |
| Donate to UNISON’s appeal to support the work of Medical Aid for Palestinians and the Red Cross | 7 |
| Campaign against antisemitism and Islamophobia | 7 |
| Write to/lobby your local MP | 8 |
| Key arguments | 9 |
| Ceasefire Now | 9 |
| Immediate recognition of Palestine | 9 |
| Suspend the arms trade | 10 |
| Uphold international law | 10 |
| Immediate and safe release of hostages | 11 |
| Full access to humanitarian assistance | 11 |
| Ban trade with the illegal settlements | 12 |
| Suspension of the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement | 13 |
| Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions | 14 |
| Identifying targets | 16 |
| Appendix 1: Model speech | 17 |
| Appendix 2: Model letter from branch secretaries to your local MP | 18 |
| Endnotes | 20 |

Introduction

The situation in Palestine and Israel has always been an international priority for UNISON, resulting in extensive campaigning and solidarity work. UNISON works closely with trade unions, labour organisations and human rights groups in Palestine and Israel and has supported several projects to organise Palestinian workers. Delegates attending UNISON's National Delegate Conference have regularly debated the situation, contributing to the union's extensive policy in support of justice and self-determination for the Palestinian people, and for the creation of a viable, contiguous Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Our campaigning has increased in response to the devastating events we have seen in Palestine and Israel since October 2023. UNISON was one of the first unions to call for a ceasefire¹, access to humanitarian assistance, the immediate and safe release of hostages² and an end to the siege of Gaza, and we have been working since to keep these issues high on the political agenda.

This briefing has been written in response to the horrific events of recent months to help UNISON activists and branches with their campaigning. It is intended to supplement existing resources UNISON has produced to help branches and activists campaigning on Palestine.

The situation since 7 October 2023

On 7 October 2024 Hamas launched a devastating attack on southern Israel, killing over 1,200 people, most of whom were civilians. At least 252 people, including children, were taken hostage³. This was the worst attack Israel has experienced in its history and the worst loss of Jewish life since the Second World War.

Within hours of the attack by Hamas the Government of Israel began bombing targets in Gaza⁴. The subsequent ground incursion and indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza has continued since, except for seven short days in November 2023 when there was a temporary ceasefire⁵. By the beginning of September 2024 over 40,800 Palestinians had been killed, including at least 885 health workers and 295 aid workers. At least 10,000 more have been reported missing, many presumed to be under the rubble. Over 94,000 people have been reported injured, whilst just 17 out of 36 hospitals and 44 percent of primary health facilities are partially functioning. Other public services are severely affected including water and sanitation and access to education remains extremely limited. Much of Gaza has been turned to rubble by the bombing. At least 60 percent of homes have been destroyed or damaged

and 90 percent of the population have been displaced at least once, with many forced to seek shelter in highly overcrowded camps. Almost all of the population of Gaza (96 percent) are projected to be facing crisis levels of food insecurity, or worse, with 495,000 facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity (famine)⁶.

Gaza's fragile public services were already close to collapse long before 7 October. The tight land, sea and air blockade of Gaza has been in operation since Hamas seized power in 2007⁷. This has devastated the economy of Gaza and severely limited access to goods and freedom of movement⁸. Gaza has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the world⁹ and access to health, education, electricity, water and sanitation have been severely limited due to the blockade and underfunding¹⁰. Military operations in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2018, 2021 and 2022¹¹ have also damaged public services, and restrictions on construction materials have hindered reconstruction efforts¹².

There has been a significant deterioration in the situation in the West Bank since the beginning of the war in Gaza. Violence has surged in many areas, including settler attacks on Palestinian communities and major raids by the Israeli Defence Force.

Between 7 October 2023 and the beginning of September 2024 approximately 652 Palestinians were killed, including 624 by Israeli forces. On 27 August 2024 significant military operations were launched in the cities of Jenin, Tulkarm and Tubas in the northern West Bank. Settler violence has also increased with around 1,300 attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians recorded. In addition, 1,478 Palestinian homes and other structures have been destroyed¹³. The Israeli Government has announced the establishment of several new settlements, thousands of housing units in existing settlements and the authorisation of a number of outposts since October 2023, whilst settlers have established 25 new outposts¹⁴. This expansion of settlements facilitates the annexation of the occupied West Bank¹⁵ and is a serious violation of international law¹⁶.

The West Bank has also seen a significant increase in restrictions on freedom of movement since October 2023¹⁷, limiting the ability of Palestinians to access workplaces and public services. Tens of thousands of Palestinian workers from the West Bank who previously worked in Israel have lost their permits and therefore their livelihoods¹⁸. Public sector workers have been forced to endure significant wage cuts as the Israeli Government has withheld customs revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority, which was their main source of income¹⁹.

For more information about the impact of the blockade and occupation on human and workers' rights in Gaza and the West Bank, including the right to quality public services see the UNISON guide 'Talking about Palestinian Rights':

www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/12/Talking-about-Palestinian-rights.pdf

Take action

UNISON is respected for its extensive work and campaigning for Palestinian rights. Our position is based on solidarity and respect for human and workers' rights, including the right to quality public services, international law and our commitment to a viable, contiguous Palestinian state alongside Israel.²⁰ We recommend that you focus on these areas, including public services and workers' rights, in your campaigning.

Ceasefire Now

UNISON was one of the first unions in the UK to call for a ceasefire in Gaza²¹. We have put pressure on the Government and taken regular actions in support of a ceasefire, including supporting peaceful national and local demonstrations.



It is critical that the demand for an immediate ceasefire remains at the forefront of our campaign, and we encourage branches and activists to hold actions, including photo actions to highlight our demand. A ceasefire now poster can be found here:

www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2024/09/434-Ceasefire-Now.pdf

Support peaceful protests to demand a ceasefire

Since October 2023 there have been many protests in the UK in support of a ceasefire. UNISON has supported and provided speakers for many of the national demonstrations organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. We are also encouraging branches and members to support peaceful protests organised by PSC, that promote our demands for an immediate ceasefire, full access to humanitarian assistance, the immediate and safe release of hostages and an end to the blockade of Gaza²².

Branches may be approached by local PSC branches and asked to promote, support or provide a speaker for a local demonstration. Some local PSC branches have also organised coaches to regional and national PSC demonstrations. Branches may want to consider promoting these events in their branch newsletter, email or on social media, alongside other news from the branch. As with all external events of this nature we ask branches to consider UNISON guidance, including the following:

1. Is the protest organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign or another organisation UNISON is affiliated to? Details of official PSC branches can be found here: palestinecampaign.org/get-involved/branches
2. What are the organisers' demands and are they in line with UNISON policy?

3. What steps are the organisers taking to ensure that discriminatory acts are not committed, including by speakers, against any persons on grounds such as race, gender, sexuality, gender identity, disability, age, creed or social class?
4. Are the organisers working with the police and other appropriate authorities?
5. Are there sufficient trained stewards to assist with the safety of the event?
6. Has consideration been given to access needs to ensure all members can participate?
7. Have the organisers conducted a risk assessment, and do they have public liability insurance?
8. Are the appropriate regional staff aware of the event?

The above points are particularly important if UNISON is asked to speak at a demonstration or protest. Please find model speech in appendix 1.

Donate to UNISON's appeal to support the work of Medical Aid for Palestinians and the Red Cross

UNISON has been calling on branches to donate to the emergency appeals of Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) and the Red Cross²³. Many branches have already donated to MAP, one of the only international organisations providing medical and humanitarian support in Gaza in response to the collapse of Gaza's fragile health system. It also works with the Palestinian Red Crescent in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. MAP is a UK based charity and a longstanding partner of UNISON²⁴. Branches have also supported the Red Cross emergency appeal, which has provided critical support both in Gaza and Israel in response to the crisis, by working with the Palestinian Red Crescent and Magen David Adom. The International Committee of the Red Cross has been working to facilitate the release of hostages in Gaza and provide surgeons to hospitals²⁵.

MAP's Emergency Response: map.org.uk/landing-pages/maps-emergency-response
Red Cross Emergency Response: donate.redcross.org.uk/appeal/gaza-crisis-appeal

Campaign against antisemitism and Islamophobia

Since 7 October the UK has seen a huge increase in antisemitism²⁶ and Islamophobia²⁷. UNISON and Hope not Hate have produced guidance to help members and activists confront and avoid antisemitism and Islamophobia, particularly in the context of Israel and Palestine.

We all have a responsibility to tackle the unprecedented increase in antisemitism and Islamophobia and the guide is intended to help activists and members by increasing awareness and understanding.

www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2024/02/understanding-antisemitism-and-islamophobia

Write to/lobby your local MP

The UK Government's position on Gaza and the occupation has shifted considerably since the general election in July 2024. However, there are still a significant number of actions the new Government must take to contribute towards securing an immediate and permanent ceasefire, the immediate and safe release of hostages, full access to humanitarian assistance and end to the the 57 year occupation. You'll find a model letter for branch secretaries to send to their local MP in Appendix 2 and the following arguments will assist if you are able to meet with your MP to highlight UNISON's concerns.

Key arguments

Ceasefire Now

Shortly after the general election the UK's new foreign secretary travelled to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories where he called for a ceasefire²⁸. This is an important first step but must be backed by actions to ensure that the Israeli Government comply with international law and respect human and workers' rights.

Immediate recognition of Palestine

UNISON supports the call for the UK Government to immediately recognise the state of Palestine. 146 member states of the United Nations have officially recognised Palestine²⁹, leaving the UK in a small minority who have not. Although MPs have previously voted for the recognition of Palestine³⁰, this was not supported by the previous Government who argued that recognition must take place at the right time³¹. The question of 'the right time' for the recognition of a Palestinian state has been debated for many years, since United Nations Resolution 181 set out the Partition Plan for Palestine in 1947³².

Labour's 2024 manifesto recognises that "Palestinian statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people. It is not in the gift of any neighbour and is also essential to the long-term security of Israel. We are committed to recognising a Palestinian state as a contribution to a renewed peace process which results in a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state."³³

Recognition of a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel would provide a clear signal to the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority of the UK's support for a two-state solution. This is particularly important following the vote on 17 July 2024 when Israel's Knesset (parliament) overwhelmingly supported a resolution opposing the establishment of a Palestinian state³⁴. It would also signal opposition to the continued annexation of the West Bank, including the expansion of illegal settlements and destruction of Palestinian property. Whilst some critics of recognition have argued that it would reward Hamas³⁵, it should be noted that Hamas do not support a two-state solution.

Palestine has been a non-member observer state in the United Nations since 2012³⁶. Recognition by the UK and other governments would help build the case for full recognition by the United Nations. This would bring additional rights under international law. Recognition by individual countries also facilitates increased accountability and scrutiny of human rights violations due to a greater diplomatic presence.

Suspend the arms trade

The previous UK Government continued to issue licences for the export of arms to Israel, despite the significant risk that UK weapons and components could be used in serious violations of international law³⁷. In December 2023 the previous Government announced that they would not suspend or revoke existing licences but keep them under review³⁸. As recently as 8 April 2024 the Business and Trade Secretary decided not to suspend existing licences and to continue to grant new licences³⁹. On 30 July the new Foreign Secretary informed the House of Commons that immediately after taking office he had commissioned new advice on Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law in the context of war in Gaza⁴⁰. Following this review, on 2 September 2024, the Foreign Secretary announced that the Government would suspend 30 arms licences for items used by the Israeli Defence Force in the conflict in Gaza, from a total of approximately 350 licences to Israel⁴¹. UNISON is urging the new Government to suspend the arms trade with Israel until human rights and international law are respected, in line with our longstanding policy.

Uphold international law

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is currently considering a case brought by South Africa concerning alleged violations by Israel of its obligations under the Genocide Convention in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip⁴². The court indicated six provisional measures on 26 January 2024⁴³ and further measures on 17 May⁴⁴ to protect the Palestinian population of Gaza. The previous UK Government described the case as unhelpful and stated that South Africa's decision to bring the case was wrong and provocative⁴⁵.

On 19 July 2024 the ICJ, in response to a request from the United Nations General Assembly⁴⁶, issued an advisory opinion on the "Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem."⁴⁷ in which the Court concluded:

- > the State of Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful;
- > the State of Israel is under an obligation to bring to an end its unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as rapidly as possible;
- > the State of Israel is under an obligation to cease immediately all new settlement activities, and to evacuate all settlers from the Occupied Palestinian Territory;
- > the State of Israel has the obligation to make reparation for the damage caused to all the natural or legal persons concerned in the Occupied Palestinian Territory;
- > all States are under an obligation not to recognize as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of the State of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the continued presence of the State of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory;
- > international organisations, including the United Nations, are under an obligation not to recognise as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of the State of Israel in

- the Occupied Palestinian Territory; and
- > the United Nations, and especially the General Assembly, which requested the opinion, and the Security Council, should consider the precise modalities and further action required to bring to an end as rapidly as possible the unlawful presence of the State of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The new UK Government has committed to considering the opinion carefully before responding and has stressed that the UK respects the independence of the ICJ⁴⁸.

On 20 May 2024 International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor, Karim Khan KC, filed applications for arrest warrants to the pretrial chamber of the ICC, alleging that Hamas and Israeli leaders bear criminal responsibility for certain war crimes and crimes against humanity since 7 October 2023⁴⁹. The previous UK Government objected to the case, describing it as not helpful⁵⁰. The new Government announced at the end of July that they would not be pursuing the previous Government's challenge to the jurisdiction of the Court⁵¹.

UNISON has continued to call on the UK Government to support the prosecution of violations of international law by the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice and respect the independence of the courts.

Immediate and safe release of hostages

The new UK Government has continued to support calls for the immediate and safe release of hostages held in Gaza⁵². On 15 July 2024 the Foreign Secretary met with the families of hostages held or killed in Gaza, during his visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. On 7 October 2023 251 people were abducted by Hamas from southern Israel, including Israeli citizens and foreign nationals. They have been subjected to appalling violence and abuse and many have been killed⁵³. Approximately 135 hostages have been released or rescued, and around 105 remain in Gaza, 34 of whom are believed to have been killed⁵⁴. UNISON has repeatedly called for the immediate and safe release of hostages⁵⁵.

Full access to humanitarian assistance

Since October 2023 only a fraction of the humanitarian assistance required by the people of Gaza has been entering the strip⁵⁶, contributing to a humanitarian catastrophe which has left 96 percent of the population facing crisis levels of food security and at least 495,000 people facing famine⁵⁷. Since May 2024 fewer than 80 humanitarian truckloads a day on average have entered Gaza⁵⁸, in comparison to 500 truckloads on average per day before October 2023⁵⁹.

On 28 March 2024 the International Court of Justice ruled that "The State of Israel

shall, in conformity with its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and in view of the worsening conditions of life faced by Palestinians in Gaza, in particular the spread of famine and starvation... Take all necessary and effective measures to ensure, without delay, in full co-operation with the United Nations, the unhindered provision at scale by all concerned of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance...⁶⁰

The Court observed that since 26 January 2024, when it issued provisional measures to protect Palestinians in Gaza, “the catastrophic living conditions of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have deteriorated further, in particular in view of the prolonged and widespread deprivation of food and other basic necessities to which the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been subjected⁶¹”.

On 26 January 2024 it was reported that the Israeli Government had alleged that 12 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) employees in Gaza had been involved in the atrocities of 7 October 2023. UNRWA immediately dismissed the 12 and the UN launched an independent review into the agency⁶². The UK⁶³ and 17 other states suspended funding⁶⁴. The independent review reported on 22 April 2024 that Israeli authorities had not provided any supporting evidence to back the accusations that UNRWA staff had participated in terrorist organisations⁶⁵. Whilst other governments resumed funding, The UK and US continued the suspension, with the UK arguing that it was waiting for the results of a second review to be published⁶⁶.

Since 1950 UNRWA has been providing assistance and protection for registered Palestinian refugees, including education, health care, relief and social services, refugee camp infrastructure, microfinance and emergency assistance. Approximately 5.9 million Palestine refugees are eligible for UNRWA services including the vast majority of the population of Gaza⁶⁷. UNRWA is the largest UN agency in Gaza, with 13,000 staff, and plays a leading role in the provision of humanitarian assistance in the current crisis⁶⁸.

Shortly after the election the new UK Government made a statement at the United Nations, recognising the importance of UNRWA’s mandate⁶⁹. On 19 July 2024 the Foreign Secretary announced that funding would be resumed and committed to an initial release of £21 million⁷⁰. Whilst this is an important first step, UNISON will continue to urge the Government to increase support for UNRWA due to its pivotal role in providing humanitarian assistance and essential public services and increase pressure on the Israeli Government to allow the access of humanitarian assistance into Gaza.

Ban trade with the illegal settlements

There are approximately 300 illegal settlements and outposts in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, housing approximately 700,000 settlers. The establishment and expansion of settlements is a serious violation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva

Convention, as confirmed by the International Court of Justice . The illegal settlements involve the violation of Palestinian rights, including the right to self determination, equality, non discrimination and freedom of movement. The settlements are responsible for the displacement of Palestinians from their land and homes and the exploitation of natural resources . They also further entrench the occupation and annexation of the West Bank, undermining the possibility of a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Many international and Israeli companies have enabled, facilitated and profited from the establishment and expansion of the settlements . This involvement further contributes to the violation of international law and human rights . The ICJ have advised that “all States are under an obligation not to recognise as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of the State of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the continued presence of the State of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ;” The UK Government recognise there are “clear risks related to economic and financial activities in the settlements, and we do not encourage or offer support to such activity .” However, UNISON calls on the UK Government to go further and ban trade with the settlements, in order to uphold international law.

Suspension of the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement

The trading relationship between the UK and Israel is governed by the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement, which came into force when the UK left the European Union⁷¹. The agreement is based on the EU Israel Association Agreement and includes the same provisions on human rights⁷². UNISON is calling for the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement to be suspended until its human rights provisions are fully respected.

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

The Palestinian civil society call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) was launched in 2005 to put pressure on the Israeli government to comply with international law and respect the human rights of Palestinians⁷³. UNISON was one of the first unions in Europe to support BDS and has actively promoted and regularly reaffirmed this position.

The United Nations has approved numerous important resolutions over the years, which remain unheeded by the Israeli Government⁷⁴. The Government has also failed to act on the International Court of Justice 2004 ruling that the vast majority of the separation barrier should be removed⁷⁵. Other important cases are currently being considered by the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court (see above).

BDS is an appropriate response to the occupation and the violation of Palestinian rights, in the absence of international pressure on the Israeli Government. The UK and many other governments have opposed sanctions or restrictive measures in response to violations of international law by the Israeli Government for many years.

BDS focuses on three demands: the end of the occupation, equality for the Palestinian citizens of Israel and the right of return for refugees. The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) focuses on companies that play a clear and direct role in the occupation and the violation of Palestinian human rights. UNISON also takes a targeted approach to BDS in order to be more strategic and effective.

BDS can sometimes be misinterpreted as a call for a boycott of Israel. This is incorrect and contradicts UNISON's longstanding policy in support of a two-state solution⁷⁶. Whilst BDS is most commonly associated with the campaign for Palestinian rights, the tactics have regularly been used by UNISON in other international campaigning, where they are supported by trade union partners. For example, Myanmar, Western Sahara, Colombia, Zimbabwe and most famously apartheid South Africa.

UNISON has developed robust internal procedures to minimise the risk of procurement or investment decisions contributing to violations of human or labour rights or environmental harm⁷⁷. UNISON branches should work to ensure that purchasing and procurement is in line with best practice. When contracts are due for renewal or equipment needs replacing, human and labour rights and the environment should be central to the decision making process.

Public bodies in the UK spent £407 billion in 2023/24 on procuring goods and services⁷⁸. UNISON, like many other organisations, encourages and supports public bodies to improve

their procurement policies and practices and use this enormous potential leverage to protect human and workers' rights as well as the environment in global supply chains⁷⁹.

Many pension funds hold significant investments on behalf of scheme members in major corporations with operations all over the world. Funds should use engagement and divestment to ensure that pensions are invested in scheme members interests and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) risks are minimised.

UNISON's work on BDS has largely focused on encouraging responsible investment and procurement decisions by public bodies. For a number of years the union has called on local government pension funds to divest from companies on the United Nations list of business enterprises involved in or with the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and for time limited engagement with companies not on the UN list, but known to be involved in the violation of Palestinian rights⁸⁰.

Many public bodies and pension funds will have investments in or do business with companies that are involved in the arms trade with Israel. UNISON is calling on the UK Government to suspend the arms trade with Israel until international law is respected. We also support divestment from companies who continue to supply weapons and military technology to the Israeli Government used in violations of international law.

UNISON has also called for protections for workers and human rights in procurement contracts that would avoid contracts being awarded to companies that are contributing to violations of international law or the abuse of Palestinian human and workers' rights⁸¹.

Since 2015 the Conservative Government has launched a series of initiatives intended to limit BDS. The Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill was the latest attempt to pass legislation to restrict ethical procurement and investment by public bodies. After a long campaign, in which UNISON played a leading role, the Bill fell in May 2024 when the general election was called⁸².

UNISON has developed the following guides to assist branches and activists working on these issues:

Palestine: Is your pension fund investing in the occupation?

www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/01/25109.pdf

Purchasing power

www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/working-internationally/key-issues/purchasing-power

Other useful resources provided by external organisations:

Who Profits is a research institution, based in Israel, which provides detailed research about many of the companies involved in the occupation: www.whoprofits.org

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has published a list of some of the companies involved in or with the illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, in response to the UN Human Rights Council resolution 31/36. The database was updated in 2023:

ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session31/database-hrc3136

Identifying targets

The following checklist will help you identify which companies to target. Unfortunately, UNISON's international unit is unable to advise branches on the practices of individual companies.

- > Ensure you are using the latest, authoritative information about companies involved in the occupation or violation of human rights. You will need to be clear how these companies are contributing to violations of international law, and the reputational, legal, regulatory and other risks they are taking.
- > Have these companies been subjected to engagement or campaigning?
- > Are there any plans to exit the occupied Palestinian territories?
- > Have they been identified by Palestinian unions and/or civil society as a BDS target?
- > How does the target company relate to UNISON policy?
- > What is the level of investment or involvement with the company?
- > Has the employer raised concerns with the company, directly or through organisations such as the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum?
- > Do investments/relationships violate any policies of the employer, particularly relating to ethical purchasing or investment?
- > Have you consulted members who might be affected by any decision to divest/not procure from a particular company?
- > Can you demonstrate scheme member support?
- > Have you developed a paper to take to your employer outlining the risk?

Appendix 1

Model speech

The following model speech outlines some of UNISON's concerns and can be adapted for use by branches.

UNISON is proud to stand united with the international trade union movement in our condemnation of the horrific violence we have seen in Palestine and Israel in recent months. We demand an immediate ceasefire, full access to humanitarian assistance, the immediate and safe release of hostages, an end to the siege and respect for international law. And we need our new Government to do the same.

We condemn the disgraceful antisemitism and Islamophobia we have seen in recent months and stand against those who seek to divide our communities.

It was back in January when the world's highest court ordered governments to take immediate and effective measures to prevent genocide. But the atrocities have continued at an extraordinary scale. 90 percent of the people of Gaza have been displaced, many multiple times, yet they remain at constant risk of bombardment. And almost the entire population of Gaza is facing crisis levels of food insecurity, with many facing famine.

Public services in Gaza, which were already on the verge of collapse, have been decimated. Only a small number of hospitals and primary care facilities are partially functioning, but with extraordinary shortages of health workers, essential medical supplies, fuel, food, clean water and sanitation. At least 885 health workers have been killed. Yet their colleagues continue to risk their lives daily to help the tens of thousands who are injured or suffering from infectious diseases.

We need our new Government to act now. They need to address the countless failures of their predecessors to demand an end to this devastating conflict. And they must suspend the arms trade and the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement until human rights are respected.

We welcome Labour's resumption of funding for UNRWA, that was withdrawn by the previous Government but call for them do more to get aid into Gaza.

They need to support the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court to uphold international law.

And they need to take action to end the occupation and demand a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel, starting with fulfilling the manifesto pledge to recognise the state of Palestine.

Appendix 2

Model letter from branch secretaries to your local MP

Dear [insert name] MP,

On behalf of [insert branch name], I am writing to express our extreme concern at the devastating situation in Israel and Palestine. We request that you urge the Government to take action to demand an immediate ceasefire, access to humanitarian assistance, the release of hostages and adherence to international law. We also request that you call on the Government to immediately recognise the State of Palestine, to contribute to a two state solution.

Following the heinous attack by Hamas on southern Israel on 7 October the Israeli Government launched a sustained attack on Gaza which has resulted in the killing of over 40,000 Palestinians and reported injuries to at least 94,000 more. At least 90 percent of the population has been displaced, many multiple times, and 96 percent of the population is projected to face crisis or worse levels of food insecurity, primarily due to shortages of humanitarian assistance.

We are particularly concerned by the impact of the conflict on public services. Gaza's fragile health system, which was already on the brink of collapse before 7 October, has been devastated, with only a small number of hospitals and primary health facilities partially operating and over 885 healthcare workers killed. Formal education remains unavailable and access to water and sanitation is severely limited.

We welcome the new Government's calls for a ceasefire, the resumption of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and the suspension of the arms licences of around 30 companies. However, we urge them to take further action to encourage all parties to comply with international law. This should include the suspension of the arms trade with Israel until international law is respected and a suspension of the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement, until its human rights provisions are fully complied with.

We are also extremely concerned by the deterioration of the situation in the occupied West Bank, where further restrictions on freedom of movement have been imposed. Over 650 Palestinians have been killed and there has been a sharp increase in settler violence. Over 1,300 Palestinian homes and other structures have been demolished and there has been a huge increase in settlement expansion, which facilitates the annexation of the West Bank. UNISON has consistently campaigned for a viable, contiguous Palestinian State alongside Israel and we condemn these actions and the Israeli Knesset's vote to oppose the establishment of a Palestinian State. We welcome the manifesto commitment to recognise the state of Palestine and ask you to urge the Government to implement this urgently.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these concerns and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[insert name]

Branch secretary

Endnotes

- 1 www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2023/10/unison-calls-for-immediate-ceasefire-in-gaza-and-israel
- 2 www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2023/10/unison-condemns-violence-in-israel-and-gaza-and-calls-for-international-law-to-be-upheld
- 3 [A/HRC/56/CRP.3 www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session56/list-reports](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session56/list-reports)
- 4 [A/HRC/56/CRP.4 www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session56/list-reports](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session56/list-reports)
- 5 Ibid
- 6 www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-4-september-2024
- 7 www.ochaopt.org/data/crossings
- 8 www.ochaopt.org/content/gaza-strip-humanitarian-impact-15-years-blockade-june-2022
- 9 www.ilo.org/resource/news/palestinian-unemployment-rate-year-year-set-nearly-double-result-escalation
- 10 www.ochaopt.org/content/gaza-strip-humanitarian-impact-15-years-blockade-june-2022
- 11 www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/conflict-between-israel-palestinians-gaza-2023-10-07/
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