



Friday 9th February, 2024

We wanted to take this opportunity to state why we believe it is so important for you to speak out and vote against the Economic Activity of Public Bodies Bill when it comes before the House of Lords in February.

If passed, the Bill would prevent public bodies, including democratically elected and accountable entities, such as local councils and the devolved administrations, from considering ethical issues related to the conduct of a foreign state when making investment or procurement decisions. Taking into account considerations such as alleged, or proven complicity in human rights abuses, would be deemed illegal unless explicitly sanctioned by the UK government.

Such a high-handed approach on the part of our government is unprecedented in peacetime, and entirely contrary to the stated goals of the UK government to uphold international and humanitarian law, free speech, devolved and democratic accountability, and the liberty of the British people and their institutions to stand against injustice, wrongdoing, and illegality.

The government, notably the Secretary of State - Michael Gove - when introducing the Bill, stated that a primary motivation was to combat antisemitism. The State of Israel is singled out on the face of the Bill for special protection against boycott campaigns. Whilst the Bill provides for Ministers to make exemptions to its provisions in relation to unnamed states in the future, by explicitly excluding Israel from possible future exemptions, the Bill accords the State of Israel unique rights in UK law.

Moreover, this special protection for the State of Israel extends to settlements within the occupied Palestinian Territories and the occupied Golan Heights – also highlighted on the face of the Bill.

This represents an extraordinary and troubling departure from long standing UK policy which is currently consistent with the position of the UN Security Council and practically the whole of the international community; and which clearly differentiates between the sovereign State of Israel and the territories it occupies which are not and cannot legally be considered part of its sovereign territory.

This departure from established policy is bewildering, and the more troubling given recent events, and the hope of some for a renewed effort to bring about a sovereign Palestinian state in the near future.

Over 70 diverse civil society organisations have publicly expressed their opposition to the Bill. Many more would, but for fear of retribution. Over 40 Israeli NGOs have written to the Conservative and Labour Parties urging them to ensure that the Bill is not enacted.

We hope you will vote against the Bill and give voice to the concerns of many Christians. As Churches and Christian civil society organisations we believe the Bill to be misguided and undermining of the legitimate right to campaign against injustice.

SIGNED BY

Amos Trust | Anglican Pacifist Fellowship | Christian Aid | CAFOD The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
Community of Christ | Ekklesia | Embrace the Middle East | The Iona Community | The Methodist Church in Britain
National Justice and Peace Network | Pax Christi | Quakers in Britain | Sabeel-Kairos UK | The United Reformed Church