



UK must take urgent action after ICJ genocide ruling

Quakers in Britain welcomes, though with a heavy heart, the historic ruling by the International Court of Justice. In making their interim ruling in South Africa's case against Israel, charging it with the crime of genocide, the court has stated unequivocally that there is a plausible risk Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and that it must stop killing Palestinian civilians with immediate effect.

The court also stated that it is gravely concerned about the fate of the Israeli hostages. Quakers in Britain joins it in calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

Our government, alongside other signatories to the Genocide Convention, is now legally bound to ensure that the measures ordered by the court are taken immediately. As the former colonial power in the Holy Land, the UK bears particular responsibility for the decades-long violence between Israelis and Palestinians. This ruling makes clear that UK actions since 7 October in support of the Israeli military campaign put the British government at risk of complicity in genocidal acts. Rishi Sunak must order the immediate suspension of all UK arms sales and military support to Israel, and put all the pressure at his disposal on Israel to immediately cease fire and abide by the measures ordered by the court.

The court also found that the withholding of basic services and humanitarian assistance in Gaza could amount to a serious violation of the Genocide Convention. Quakers in Britain notes with dismay the UK government's decision to 'temporarily pause' all funding to UNRWA – the UN agency providing urgent humanitarian assistance in Gaza – following the dismissal of 12 UNRWA staff accused of involvement in the 7 October attacks. We hear the words of the UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini who said, "Our humanitarian operation, on which 2 million people depend as a lifeline in Gaza, is collapsing. I am shocked such decisions are taken based on alleged behaviour of a few individuals and as the war continues, needs are deepening and famine looms. Palestinians in Gaza did not need this additional collective punishment. This stains all of us." Quakers in Britain calls on the UK government to immediately reverse its decision. Anything less is not enough and could once again put the UK at serious risk of complicity in genocidal acts.

Over three months have passed since the launch of the Israeli ground invasion of Gaza following the 7 October attacks by Hamas. Quakers in Britain continues to grieve all the lives lost and irrevocably shattered.

We hold in the Light the memory of over 26,000 Palestinians, including 11,000 children, and 1,200 Israelis, including 36 children, who have been killed since the horrendous attacks by Hamas on 7 October. We hold in the Light the thousands more Palestinian men, women and children buried – some already dead, some dying – under the rubble. We hold in the Light the 1.7 million Gazans now homeless and suffering forcible displacement. We hold in the Light the 136 Israelis held hostage far from home. We hold in the Light all Palestinians and Israelis affected and traumatised. The devastation of human life in Gaza that we are

witnessing live on our TV and phone screens day after day goes against our fundamental Quaker belief that every life is sacred.

As the scale of events threaten to overwhelm us, Quakers in Britain takes the moment of this historic ruling to reaffirm our determination to work for an end to the violence. We do this by accompanying, in our personal relationships and corporately, communities affected by the violence here at home, in occupied Palestine, and in Israel. And we do it through urgently advocating for de-escalation, de-militarisation, for nonviolent means of resolving the conflict, an end to the occupation of Palestine, and a just peace.

Quakers pray we will not need to keep writing statements like this calling on the British and other governments to act, and calling for the senseless killing and destruction to stop. But until peace prevails, we are compelled morally and spiritually to speak out and take action. There is no time to delay, the violence must end now – tomorrow is too late to save the many precious lives at risk today.

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