



**AL-HAQ**  
Defending Human Rights



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Legal groups seek halt to UK arms sales to Israel over illegal attacks on civilians, forced displacement, and policies in Palestine.**

*Legal submission comes as new Israel policies explicitly call for collective punishment and forced displacement of Gaza's trapped population; enacts ever more aggressive settlement activity in the West Bank*

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18/10/23: Palestinian human rights organisation Al Haq and U.K. based Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) announced they have written to the Secretary of State for International Trade, Kemi Badenoch, asking her to suspend all weapons export licences to Israel. Under the government's Strategic Licensing Criteria, weapons may not be exported where there is a clear risk they might be used in violations of international law. The lawyers set out how Israel's policies and actions have consistently resulted in indiscriminate attacks on civilians and the imposition of a system of apartheid in occupied Palestinian territory. Similarly, they argue, the forced displacement of over 1 million civilians from northern Gaza, amounts to a crime against humanity and is taking place against the backdrop of clear and incriminating statements by the Israeli military characterising their attacks as reprisals against civilians.

British weapons found to be linked to Israel's breaches of international law ought to have their export licences immediately suspended. The legal groups have made clear that failing to do so would result in a judicial review challenge being brought before the High Court. The government's Strategic Licensing Criteria which govern the weapons exports are based on the UK's obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty. The action is supported by the International Centre for Justice for Palestinians (ICJP).

Israel has reacted to the 7th October Hamas attacks on military targets and civilians by unleashing the heaviest and most indiscriminate aerial bombardment Gaza has ever seen, killing civilians at a rate of hundreds per day. Israel has also ordered the forced displacement of over 1 million Gazans from north to south Gaza; the UN stated this transfer would have "[devastating humanitarian consequences](#)".

Statements by Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant make clear these are reprisal attacks against civilians, [ordering](#) *"a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly"*. In the context of ordering the evacuation of northern Gaza he also [stated](#) the aim is *"change the face of reality in Gaza 50 years ahead"*. An IDF spokesperson openly admitted that, in the large-scale bombardment of Gaza, Israel's *"emphasis is on damage and not on accuracy"* and an unnamed Israeli official [told local media](#) that Gaza would be reduced to a *"city of tents"* by the end of the campaign. Legal experts have even suggested these statements demonstrate genocidal intent to destroy Palestinians as a national group.

The Israeli regime violates most of the fundamental human rights of Palestinians. It imposes a comprehensive system of apartheid in occupied territory, including constructing a separation barrier (or 'Apartheid Wall') which the ICJ has declared illegal; its soldiers regularly shoot unarmed civilians with live ammunition; it constantly monitors the Palestinian population and impedes their movement through dozens of checkpoints and advanced technology; it destroys Palestinian property and moves its own population into occupied territory.

The UK government has granted licences for the sale of British weapons to Israel under a wide range of categories in recent years. For example since 2015 there has been £560 million in limited-value "standard" licence grants, and 88 unlimited value "open" licences. The categories include body armour, military communications equipment, military electronic equipment, components for military radars and targeting equipment, components for military aircraft displays and unmanned air vehicles, components for military support and combat aircraft, naval vessel components, and much more. Given that these items are all capable of being used in Israel's actions against Palestinians, many of which are criminal acts under international criminal law, there is plainly a "clear risk" under the Strategic Licensing Criteria meaning the government should not be issuing these licences.

GLAN has launched a [crowdfund](#) to support this work. Al Haq is represented by GLAN lawyers Dearbhla Minogue, Siobhán Allen and Charlotte Andrews-Briscoe, and Alice Hardy of Bindmans LLP. Their counsel are Jemima Stratford KC and Jagoda Klimowicz of Brick Court Chambers.

Wesam Ahmad, the head of the Center for Applied International Law at Al-Haq, said: *"Colonialism and corporations have historically been intertwined. The situation in Palestine is no different. It is not surprising that Israeli and British interests converge in the ongoing devastation of Gaza. If the UK is ever going to break from its legacy of colonialism it cannot continue to support the ongoing colonization of Palestine. Halting arms sales now is the least it can do as a first step in this regard."*

Dearbhla Minogue, GLAN Senior Lawyer, said: *"This challenge was already necessary before the current decimation of Gaza - now it is even more urgent. States like the United Kingdom are emboldening the Israeli government's brutality - especially when they actually supply them with the means to subjugate and kill Palestinians."*

Dr Gearóid Ó Cuinn, Director of the Global Legal Action Network said, *"The humanitarian situation in Gaza is the result of numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity committed"*

*over time. Recent statements by Israeli military leaders now obligates states to review their transfer of arms. There should be no doubt that these weapons are at acute risk of being used to commit further criminal acts and, possibly genocide.”*

**Notes to Editors:**

Al-Haq is an independent Palestinian non-governmental human rights organisation based in Ramallah, West Bank. It was established in 1979 to protect and promote human rights and the rule of law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the organisation has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Al Haq documents violations of the individual and collective rights of Palestinians in the OPT and in doing so it conducts research; prepares reports, studies and interventions on breaches of international human rights and humanitarian law in the OPT; and undertakes advocacy before local, regional and international bodies. For its work protecting and promoting human rights, Al Haq has been awarded numerous international awards.

Website: [alhaq.org](http://alhaq.org)

GLAN is a U.K.-based legal non-profit organisation with offices in the U.K. and Ireland. GLAN works with affected communities to pursue innovative legal actions across borders to challenge powerful actors involved in human rights violations and systemic injustice.

Website: [glanlaw.org](http://glanlaw.org)