

AMENDED PAPER

Imperial College Union Union Council / 7th November 2023 Union's Stance on the Situation in Gaza

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Decision(s): To approve

Union Notes -

1. On the 7th of October, there were a series of attacks led by Hamas in Southern Israel. At least 1,400 individuals were killed. [1]
2. The Israeli Government responded to Hamas' attack with a bombing campaign which had, by November 2nd, killed more than 10,000 Palestinians and injured more than 25,000, as of the 8th November 2023 [28]. The UN reports that the Israeli Government has dropped 'on average 6,000 bombs a week' on Gaza since the 7th of October. [2]
3. On the 9th of October, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant ordered 'a complete siege on the Gaza Strip', stating there is to be 'no electricity, no food [and] no fuel'. He added 'We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly.' [3]
4. Human Rights Watch confirmed Israel's use of white phosphorus in military operations within Gaza which 'violates the international humanitarian law prohibition on putting civilians at unnecessary risk.' [4] The violation of international humanitarian law constitutes a war crime, as defined by the United Nations. [5]
5. Israeli offensives have resulted in the destruction of multiple civilian targets including:
 - a. The Greek Orthodox Church of St Porphyrius (which according to Palestinian officials was sheltering at least 500 Muslims and Christians). [6]
 - b. A three-storey residential building in the Al-Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City; Al-Sahabah Street Gaza City; the Nuseirat refugee camp; the Jabalia refugee camp; and a six-storey building in Sheikh Radwan. All five attacks were investigated by Amnesty International, who concluded that Israeli forces gave inadequate evacuation notice that would prevent civilian casualties. [7]
 - c. A fifth of the bakeries supported by the UN's Agency for Palestinian Refugees contributing to food shortages within Gaza. [8]
 - d. More than 136 attacks on health care services, resulting in the death of many civilians, at least 16 health workers, 15 staff of the United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA) and four Palestine Red Crescent paramedics. [9] [10]
 - e. Al-Ahli Arab hospital, killing 470 civilians. [9]
 - f. The Turkish-Palestinian friendship hospital, the sole hospital in Gaza that could provide treatment for cancer patients, has gone out of service after running out of fuel due to Israel's blockade of the territory. [11]

6. Medical facilities are protected under international humanitarian law [12], attacks on hospitals therefore constitute war crimes. [5]
7. Conditions in Gaza have exacerbated the risk of maternal and newborn fatality. Electricity blackouts and exhaustion of fuel due to the blockades Israel has imposed put patient lives at risk, including the lives of '130 newborn infants in incubators [which] cannot operate without electricity.' There are reports of pregnant women being forced to undergo C-sections without anaesthesia, and hospitals which are running out of baby formula. [13] [14]
8. Amnesty International has declared the Israeli Government's order for citizens in Northern Gaza to evacuate to the South a 'violation of international humanitarian law.' [15]
9. The Israeli Government has precipitated the mass forced displacement of more than 1.1 million people from Gaza City and the entire northern part of the Gaza Strip. This has left thousands of internally displaced Palestinians sleeping on the streets, unable to shelter against Israeli attacks. Many of those who followed Israel's order were killed by subsequent air strikes in South Gaza. [16]

The WHO Director-General described the evacuation threat as 'deeply concerning', commenting that it is 'impossible to evacuate hospitals full of patients without endangering their lives.' [17]

10. The Israeli Government has imposed a blockade which has severely restricted the amount of aid passing through the Rafah crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. UN experts have warned that 100 aid trucks are needed daily to cover urgent needs. Before the escalation, several hundred trucks were passing through the crossing daily. On October 21st, only a 20-truck convoy was allowed to pass through the crossing, and as of November 3rd, aid passing through the crossing is still restricted below the required levels. [18]
11. On the 27th of October, the Israeli Government imposed a communications blackout in which '15 Internet Service Providers in Gaza faced near-complete outages'. Landline, cellular and internet communications were cut off. The Palestine Red Crescent reported having lost contact with its entire operations room in the Gaza Strip, severely hampering its emergency services, including tending to victims of attacks. [19] This initial blackout lasted 36 hours. A second blackout was reported on the morning of the 1st of November, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the besieged Palestinian enclave. [20]
12. On Wednesday the 25th of October, the Israeli Prime Minister declared preparations for a 'ground invasion' [21] of the Gaza Strip and by the 29th of October a spokesperson for Israel's military said the army had been 'expanding' operations on the ground following two nights of limited incursions [22]. As of November 2nd, Israeli officials announced that military forces have encircled Gaza. [3]
13. Article 33 of the Geneva Convention prohibits collective penalties and punishing people for an offence they have not personally committed [24]. Article 8 of The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court [25] details that 'intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities' constitutes a war crime.
14. The former Director of the New York Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights described the bombardment of the Palestinian civilians in Gaza by the Israeli government as a 'genocide' which the UN was 'failing in its duty to prevent'. They cited the US, UK and much of Europe as 'wholly complicit in the horrific assault.' [26]
15. A large number of Imperial students have signed an open letter to the College condemning the actions taken by the Israeli government, and are frustrated by the

College's lack of a statement of support for the Palestinian people. [27]

16. The Union Council passed a paper in response to the Russia-Ukraine Invasion in March 2022. [23]
17. The Imperial President and Provost released a statement in which they said they "condemn the Russian Federation's unjustified and inhumane invasion." [29]
18. Neither the Imperial College Union Officer Trustees statement [30] nor the Imperial College President's [31] statement named the Israeli Government as the perpetrators of violence or war crimes against the Palestinian people. They both however, explicitly named and condemned Hamas.

Union Believes -

1. The Union should condemn the violent actions of the Israeli government, as well as the actions of Hamas, and any use of military force against civilians.
2. The Union Council passing a paper in response to the Russia-Ukraine Invasion in March 2022, sets a precedent for the Union Council to pass papers responding to 'rapidly evolving' geopolitical situations when they 'clearly affect a number of the Union's members.' [21]
3. The absence of a statement from Constituent Unions, the Imperial College Union, and the College clearly condemning the killing and targeting of civilians by the Israeli Government in Gaza, and showing support for the Palestinian people, in context of their statement of solidarity for Ukraine:
 - a. has led to a dehumanisation of the people of Palestine, and demonstrates a lack of consideration towards the Arab community within Imperial.
 - b. disregards the voices of the wider community of students on campus who have expressed solidarity for Palestine.
 - c. leaves some students feeling disenfranchised on campus with some students losing confidence in the Union's ability to represent their views.
4. That Imperial College Union supports all students, and stands against all incidences of Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and racism.

Union Resolves -

1. For the Union to take an official, public stance condemning the killing and targeting of civilians by the Israeli government in Gaza, and to continue their condemnation of the actions of Hamas.
2. For the Union to lobby the College to take an official, public stance condemning the killing and targeting of civilians by the Israeli government in Gaza, and to continue their condemnation of Hamas.
3. For the Union President to write a letter to Constituent Unions (CUs) reassuring them they are allowed to reiterate the Union's stances as outlined in Resolves 1.
4. For the Union to continue to promote and signpost students affected by the conflict to the relevant support.
5. For the Union to support the university in its stance condemning the harassment and bullying of Israeli, Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian students.

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