

RECOGNITION

Background

The State of Palestine was officially proclaimed on 15th November 1988 by the Palestine Liberation Organization, who claimed sovereignty over the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza.

146 of the United Nations' 193 members currently recognise Palestine as an independent state. This represents 76% of member states. Palestine is also recognised by the Holy See (Vatican City), which is not a UN member. Nearly the entirety of the Global South recognises Palestine, whereas the UK is in a small minority worldwide that does not. Recognition of the Palestinian people's rights to self-determination and autonomy over their homeland should be unconditional.

The State of Palestine has held non-member observer state status at the United Nations General Assembly since 2012, following UN GA Resolution 67/19 on which the United Kingdom abstained.¹ The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) failed in 2011 to vote on a resolution on Palestinian UN membership, and Palestine has, in April 2024, 12 UNSC members voted in favour of recognising Palestine, with only one veto from the United States, and two abstentions from the UK and Switzerland.²

European Union recognition

The European Union officially supports the two-state solution, but only eight EU countries recognised Palestine as a state before the beginning of Israel's War on Gaza: Czechia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Sweden, and Cyprus. Seven of these eight recognised Palestine in 1988, Sweden took the decision in 2014. Since October 2023, Spain, Ireland, Malta, and Slovenia also recognised Palestine, in late May and early June 2024.

In an official statement, Spain, Ireland, Malta and Slovenia said; "the only way to achieve lasting peace and stability in the region is through the implementation of a two-state solution, with Israeli and Palestinian States living side-by-side, in peace and security."³ Norway, Portugal and Belgium are also said to be considering a push for a change in EU position, but have not unilaterally recognised Palestine. Since October 2023, six other non-EU states have also recognised Palestine, including Norway, Armenia, The Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and Barbados.

¹ UNGA. (2012) [Status of Palestine in the United Nations: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly](#). UNGA A/RES/67/19.

² UNSC (18th April 2024) [Security Council Fails to Recommend Full United Nations Membership for State of Palestine, Owing to Veto Cast by United States](#). SC/15670. 9609th Meeting (PM).

³ Department of the Taoiseach. (22nd March 2024) [Statement by the Prime Ministers of Ireland, Malta, Slovenia and Spain](#).

United Kingdom recognition

After the House of Commons voted in favour of a non-binding motion on recognition of Palestine in October 2014, the government stated that “[t]he UK will bilaterally recognise a Palestinian state when we judge that it can best help bring about peace.”⁴

In February 2024, Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron said that the UK could officially recognise a Palestinian state after a ceasefire in Gaza, prior to the conclusion of negotiations between Israel and Palestine regarding a two-state solution. However, he said recognition would not happen while Hamas remained in Gaza.⁵ Lord Cameron’s comments were then even further moderated by Prime Minister Sunak, who suggested recognition would only come at a point “where it is most conducive to the process.”⁶

In June 2024, The Times reported that the incoming Labour government planned on delaying recognition of a Palestinian state to avoid a rift with US.⁷ This is despite the fact that as of November 2024, 84% of the UK public want the UK to officially recognise the State of Palestine, with 57% wanting it to do so immediately.⁸

Double Standards

In contrast, the United Kingdom has not made recognition of Israel conditional on domestic political factors. This is despite the questionable-at-best conduct, since its inception, of the State of Israel, currently facing trial for both genocide and for the illegality of its occupation, and despite recent statements, including from the UK Ambassador to the General Assembly, describing Israel’s settlement activity as being a hinderance to the very peace process upon which the acceptability of Palestinian statehood is conditional.⁹

Recent UK Government policy has insisted on recognising Palestine only at the end of a peace process. However, the principle of self-determination for Palestinians should not be withheld as a bargaining chip until the end of direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israel. In fact, withholding recognition actively hinders the peace process, as lack of international pressure allows Israel to further entrench its illegal occupation and annexation, in line with longstanding attempts by the State of Israel to prevent Palestinian statehood, and the governing coalition’s official position.

⁴ Patrick Wintour (13th October 2014) [MPs vote to recognize Palestinian State, adding to pressure on Israel.](#)

⁵ Associated Press. (1st February 2024). [UK could recognise a Palestinian state before a deal with Israel, says Cameron.](#) The Guardian.

⁶ Andrew McDonald (5th February 2024) [No change in UK policy on recognizing Palestinian state, Sunak insists.](#) POLITICO.

⁷ George Grylls. (27th June 2024) [Keir Starmer will delay recognition of Palestinian state to avoid rift with US.](#)

⁸ UKPAN. (November 2024) [Palestine, Israel and the British.](#) New research findings on the views of the British public on the war in Gaza and solutions to the wider conflict.

⁹ Archie Young. (22nd November 2024) [Expansion of settlements undermines peace and must cease immediately: UK Explanation of Vote at the UN Fourth Committee.](#)