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Backbench Business Debate - Genocide Prevention

Summary

Israel's genocide has devastated Gaza to an unrecognisable state, leaving behind a landscape of rubble, deprivation and death. Genocide has rarely been so extensively documented yet so routinely dismissed and denied by political actors as in the case of Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

Egregious violations of international law, left unchecked by the international community, have entrenched Israel's impunity and enabled the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The mass killing of civilians, forced displacement and destruction of the conditions necessary for life have been selectively addressed, and ignored or instrumentalised for political gain, with Palestinian suffering treated as expendable.

Repeatedly vague and hollow attempts by Western leaders to bring peace have failed to centre Palestinian voices or confront the root causes of the violence. So-called peace proposals and ceasefire initiatives, including those advanced under the Trump administration, obscure rather than challenge Israel's decades-long occupation and conduct, leaving intact the conditions that allow Israeli aggression to be repeated without accountability or deterrence.

What Is Genocide?

Genocide is a crime under international law and is defined narrowly in The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as 'any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.' (Article 2)

Incitement, conspiracy and attempt to commit genocide are also prohibited by the Convention (Article 3(c) and (e)). Genocide is a crime of individual responsibility but there is also an obligation on States, which can also be held responsible for genocide. States also have an obligation to prevent and punish genocide by others (Article 1). [1]

Genocide in Gaza

Palestinians, wherever they live, in Israel, under military rule in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), or as refugees displaced outside of historic Palestine, identify as a single Palestinian people, with shared political, ethnic, social and cultural ties. Palestinians constitute a protected group under the Genocide

[1] General Assembly resolution 260 A (III) (12 January 1951), Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Convention as a national and ethnic group. Palestinians in Gaza form a distinct part of that protected group.[2] They share a common language and culture across religious differences, meaning they constitute a protected national, ethnic and racial group under the Genocide Convention, as recognised by the ICJ in its 26th January 2024 order. Under international law, genocide does not require intent to destroy the whole group; intent to destroy a *substantial part* is sufficient to meet the threshold. A "substantial part" is assessed by its significance to the group, not by numbers alone.[3]

A report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel (UN COI) confirms that there are reasonable grounds to conclude that four of five genocidal acts defined under international law have been carried out by Israel against Palestinians since October 2023: killing members of a group, causing serious bodily and mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions calculated to destroy the group, and preventing births.[4]

South Africa complaint at the International Court of Justice (ICJ)

On 29th December 2023, South Africa launched a complaint at the ICJ alleging that Israel was breaching its obligations under the Genocide Convention. At the time of submission, South Africa reported that more than 21,110 Palestinians had been killed including 7,729 children since 7th October, and 7,780 were missing and presumed dead under the rubble. South Africa's submission also indicated that more than 355,000 Palestinian homes had been damaged or destroyed; bakeries, schools universities, businesses, places of worship, cultural and archaeological sites and critical infrastructure including water and sanitation facilities had been targeted; and Palestinian medical healthcare systems had been destroyed.

On 26 January 2024, the ICJ delivered its order on the South Africa's request for the indication of provisional measures. The Court accepted both its jurisdiction to look into the case against Israel and South Africa's standing to bring these proceedings. South Africa's proceedings alleging the commission of acts that fall within the scope of Genocide against Israel will proceed to a full trial. The Court found that Israel's acts are plausibly acts of Genocide while outlining the statements made by Israeli politicians that support intent to commit Genocide.

The court indicated the following measures:
a) Israel shall take all measures to prevent Genocidal acts in accordance with article II of the Genocide Convention;
b) Israel should take all measures within its power to prevent the direct and public incitement to commit genocide.
c) Israel should increase the humanitarian aid and enable the provision of urgently needed basic services in Gaza.
d) Israel shall take effective measures to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence related to allegations of acts within the scope of Article II and Article III of the Genocide convention;
e) Israel was ordered to report in 1 month to the ICJ what steps it has taken to prevent Genocide;
f) The Court called for the immediate release and unconditional release of hostages abducted by Hamas and other armed groups.

[2] International Court of Justice (26 January 2024), Summary of the Order of 26 January 2024.
[3] Amnesty International (5 December 2024), 'You feel like you are subhuman': Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza
[4] Gritten, David and Foulkes, Imogen (16 September 2025), Israel has committed genocide in Gaza, UN commission of inquiry says. BBC.

Up-to-date data

Israel's military has effectively acknowledged that Gaza's health ministry death toll is broadly accurate, reversing years of claims that the figures were unreliable or "Hamas propaganda". As of January 2026, Israel's military now estimates around 70,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 2023, excluding those missing, broadly aligning with Gaza authorities' figure of over 71,600 dead, with at least 10,000 more believed buried under rubble. This marks the first time Israel has publicly estimated the total death toll, and the shift sharpens questions around Israel's defence of its campaign, amid accusations by the UN, human rights groups and legal scholars that its actions in Gaza may amount to genocide.[5]

Correspondence in world-leading medical journal The Lancet in June 2024 projected that the total death toll in Gaza could reach 186,000, when accounting for disease, starvation, lack of medical care; in essence, excess mortality arising from elements of the genocide beyond direct military killing by Israel authorities.[6]

Acts of genocide committed in Gaza

1. **Killing members of the group (Article II(a))**

- **More than 71,600 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed since October 2023**, most of them civilians.[7]
- The Gaza Ministry of Health data (as reflected in UN reporting) shows **over 20,000 children killed** of tens of thousands of fatalities up to early October 2025, with children making up around 30% of those killed.[8]
- Investigative reporting shows that over **2,700 Palestinian families have been completely wiped out in Gaza** as a result of the conflict since October 2023. This refers to cases where **all members of an extended family were killed,** effectively erasing entire family units from the civil registry. [9] In genocide and mass atrocity contexts, **patterns of multiple related deaths in single events or campaigns** are often used as evidence of widespread and systematic targeting of a group, especially when civilians are involved and lack of legitimate military necessity can be shown.
- Attacks have repeatedly struck civilian infrastructure across Gaza, not just isolated targets. According to UN and independent assessments, **around 92% of homes have been damaged or destroyed** and **nearly all school buildings have been hit or rendered unusable**[10]**. Half the hospitals are only partially functioning,** and many health facilities are out of service, severely limiting medical care. These figures show sustained and widespread damage to civilian life and essential infrastructure, not isolated incidents.

2. **Causing Serious Bodily or Mental Harm (Article II(b))**

[5] Graham-Harrison, Emma (30 January 2026), Israel accepts health authorities' Gaza death toll is broadly accurate, saying 70,000 have died. The Guardian.
[6] Human Rights Council (16 September 2025), Legal analysis of the conduct of Israel in Gaza pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.
[7] Graham-Harrison, Emma (30 January 2026), Israel accepts health authorities' Gaza death toll is broadly accurate, saying 70,000 have died. The Guardian.
[8] Bajec, Alessandra (21 October 2025), Counting the dead in Israel's genocide in Gaza. The New Arab.
[9] Al Jazeera (26 January 2026), Israel's genocide wiped out over 2,700 families in Gaza.
[10] Yilmaz, Hamdi and Yilmaz, Betul (20 May 2025), 92% of Gaza homes destroyed by Israel war: UNRWA.

- Tens of thousands more have been injured, many with life altering injuries, amputations, and disabilities. **More than 42,000 people in Gaza have life-changing injuries** requiring years of rehabilitation, including **approximately 6,000 amputations,** according to the World Health Organisation.[11]
- The war in Gaza has deeply fractured the social fabric, severely affecting the psychosocial wellbeing of the population. Beyond immediate psychological disorders, the conflict has led to the loss of social networks, disintegration of community structures and breakdown of family cohesion, compounding trauma and creating complex psychosocial challenges.[12] Survivors exhibit widespread psychological trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). UN reporting shows acute mental health needs across Gaza, with **over a million people, including huge numbers of children, requiring mental health and psychosocial support** because of constant bombardment, displacement, fear and loss.[13]

3. **Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part (Article II(c))**

This is one of the clearest and most extensively documented elements of the case.

- In August 2025, famine was declared in Gaza by the UN's hunger monitor. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) assessed that 513,720 Palestinians in Gaza are experiencing the fifth and most severe degree of food insecurity, 'Catastrophe/Famine'. [14] This famine, the first to ever be declared by the IPC outside of Africa, was entirely designed by Israel and could have been averted.
- Destroyed and inoperable hospitals, bakeries, water facilities, agricultural land, and sanitation infrastructure. About 93% of schools have been destroyed or damaged[15]; the UN estimates that **92% of all residential buildings in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged**[16]**; 70% of the water and sanitation facilities have been damaged or destroyed**.[17]

4. **Imposing Measures Intended to Prevent Births (Article II(d))**

- Pregnant women face catastrophic conditions, lack of medical care, unsafe births, malnutrition, and stress.
- Birth rates in Gaza have fallen sharply, reflecting not just disruption but the collapse of the conditions needed for new life.
- In the first half of 2025, only about **17,000 births were recorded**, a **41% drop** compared with the same period in 2022, as healthcare, nutrition and safe childbirth became increasingly impossible.[18]

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[11] Al Jazeera (14 November 2026), Amputees from Israel's Gaza war use homemade prosthetics to re-enter life.
[12] Aqtam, Ibrahim (8 January 2025), A narrative review of mental health and psychosocial impact of the war in Gaza. World Health Organisation.
[13] OCHA (29 April 2024), Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel flash update #159.
[14] World Health Organisation (22 August 2025), Famine confirmed for first time in Gaza.
Al Jazeera (15 December 2025), Israel demolishes more buildings in military-controlled Gaza: Analysis.
[16] Al Jazeera (11 October 2025), 'Another Nakba': UN expert says Gaza recovery will take generations.
[17] Brown, Paul and Devlin, Kayleen and Rivault, Erwan and Metzler, Barbara (15 October 2025), 'Worse than starting from scratch': How big is the task of rebuilding Gaza?. BBC.
[18] Tondo, Lorenzo (14 January 2026), Gaza war leads to 41% fall in births promoting allegations of reproductive violence. The Guardian.

- Two reports by Physicians for Human Rights, in collaboration with the Global Human Rights Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School, and Physicians for Human Rights–Israel (PHRI) document how the war has led to high figures for maternal and neonatal mortality and forced births in dangerous conditions and systematically dismantled health services – consequences of "a deliberate intention of preventing births among Palestinians, meeting the legal criteria of the genocide convention," researchers said. [19]
- Between January and June 2025 there were **2,600 miscarriages, 220 pregnancy-related deaths, 1,460 premature births,** and more than **2,500 infants requiring neonatal intensive care** amid fuel shortages, blocked medical supplies and destroyed hospitals. [20]
- The drastic decline in births, rising maternal and newborn deaths, and the dismantling of reproductive health services have been described by researchers as reproductive violence that undermines Palestinians' ability to sustain their community. While less visible than mass killing, these conditions directly undermine the ability of Palestinians in Gaza to reproduce safely.

UK complicity

The UK has a positive obligation to prevent and punish genocide beyond its territorial borders. Not only must it ensure it is not complicit in genocidal acts, but it must also 'employ all means reasonably available to them, so as to prevent genocide so far as possible.'[21]

Given State Party obligations to *prevent* as well as punish genocide, states must intervene when they become aware of a 'significant risk' of genocide in an area. Since at least 18th October 2023, UN experts, civil society organisations and genocide studies scholars warned of an imminent risk of genocide against the Palestinian population in Gaza. This threshold has since been passed, considering the ICJ provisional order and the fact that genocide has now been confirmed by the UN Commission of Inquiry, leading genocide scholars, and numerous Palestinian and international human rights organisations. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office were put on notice regarding the risk of genocide by the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians in November 2023.[22]

Despite overwhelming evidence of mass killing, forced displacement, and the starvation of Gaza's entire population, the UK Government has sought to evade accountability through deliberate legal and linguistic manoeuvres, continuing to support a state committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide while avoiding clear legal conclusions. The UK's complicity is defined not only by inaction, but by active complicity. The UK has continued to support Israel in its military operation and further provided material support through the continuation of approximately 91.4% of weapons export licenses to Israel.

This position continues to isolate Britain from international consensus and perpetuates violations of the inalienable rights of Palestinians. The Government must immediately release a legal assessment on genocide in Gaza, issue a full response to the ICJ Advisory Opinion[23] on the illegality of the Israeli occupation in Palestine, end all arms sales and military cooperation with Israel, and fully implement the

[19] Ibid.
[20] UNFPA (23 July 2025), UNFPA warns of catastrophic birth outcomes in Gaza amid starvation, psychological trauma and collapsing healthcare.
[21] International Centre of Justice (19 July 2024), Summary of the Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024.
[22] ICJP. (22nd November 2023). Foreign Office notified of 'serious risk of genocide' in Gaza by International Centre of Justice for Palestinians.
[23] International Centre of Justice (19 July 2024), Summary of the Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024.

Commission of Inquiry's recommendations, including sanctions against Israel and against individuals or entities involved in or facilitating genocide or incitement to genocide, including sanction of Israeli ministers in their official capacity.