

# UK'S INCONSISTENCY OVER ARMS SALES TO ISRAEL COULD MAKE IT COMPLICIT IN GAZA DEATHS AND DESTRUCTION – OXFAM

EMERGENCIES

Press Releases

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## Government has imposed restrictions on Israel in all previous escalations of violence

The UK Government's continued refusal to suspend arms sales to Israel is not only inconsistent with previous wars and escalations of violence in Gaza, but it could also leave it open to complicity in war crimes, Oxfam warned today.

Despite the fact the Government of Israel has killed over 33,000 people, forced three quarters of the population to flee their homes and destroyed vital infrastructure in Gaza, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have repeatedly defended the UK's decision to continue arms sales. Yet in every previous escalation of violence in Gaza and against Palestinians in the region, the UK has at least revoked some licenses or otherwise suspended arms transfers to Israel.

In 2014, when Lord Cameron was Prime Minister, the UK Government reviewed and suspended twelve export licences to Israel following the outbreak of hostilities between

Israel and Hamas and other armed groups in Gaza. In 2009, licences for naval guns were revoked due to their use against civilians in Gaza in contravention of international humanitarian law. And during escalations in violence in the 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and early 2000s the UK imposed complete arms embargoes on Israel, because of violations of international law.

Aleema Shivji, Oxfam's Chief Impact Officer, said: "It is illegal, immoral and inconsistent for the UK to continue to sell arms to Israel, when it is clear that UK-made weapons and components are being used in serious violation of international humanitarian law – and after it imposed restrictions in previous escalations of violence when the scale of death and destruction had been lower.

"The people of Gaza are facing unprecedented levels of bloodshed, schools and hospitals are being deliberately targeted and starvation is being used as a weapon of war. What more suffering must they endure for the UK Government to act? It must immediately suspend all arms exports – including parts and components – or it risks being complicit in war crimes."

The indiscriminate or deliberate killing of civilians is a breach of international law and may amount to a war crime.

For over 20 years, successive UK Governments have sought guarantees from the Government of Israel not to use any UK-exported weapons in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, known as imposing "end use conditions". However, Israel has frequently disregarded these conditions, and rather than enforcing them the UK government has chosen to stop imposing any conditions.

Later today, campaigners will hand in an open letter, with nearly 45,000 signatories - and fronted by over 50 high profiles names from celebrities such as Annie Lennox, Brian Cox and Robert Lindsay, to a wide range of CEOs, experts and politicians - urging the Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron and Business and Trade Secretary, Kemi Badenoch, to end arms sales to Israel.

Oxfam is calling for the UK Government to immediately suspend the sale of all weapons, parts and components to Israel and to use every diplomatic and economic lever at its disposal to help secure an immediate and permanent ceasefire, to stop the death and destruction, allow more aid in, and to ensure the safe release of hostages.

The attacks committed by Hamas and other armed groups in Israel on 7 October, led to almost 1,200 fatalities and over 200 people taken hostage, and some actions amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Since then, Israel's military forces have carried out continuous airstrikes and intense ground offensives, killing over 33,000 people, including over 14,500 children. There is no justification in international law for crimes committed in

retaliation for other crimes. All of Gaza's 2.3 million population are currently in need of humanitarian assistance and most families are facing catastrophic levels of hunger.

/Ends

### Notes to editors:

The full open letter and list of high profile signatories is here: <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-oxfam/sign-now-uk-must-stop-selling-arms-to-israel/>

### Israeli misuse of UK Arms and UK suspensions of transfers to Israel:

- **1953:** Suspended sale of the sale of 30 Centurion tanks to Israel because of the Qibya massacre during Operation Shoshana, a reprisal operation that occurred in October 1953, when Israeli troops under Ariel Sharon attacked the village of Qibya in the West Bank, which was then under Jordan's control, and killed 69 Palestinian civilians. The suspension was lifted in 1958.

Clive Jones, Getting the Better of the Bargain, Diplomacy and Statecraft 2021, vol Vol 32 No 3, Taylor and Francis. <https://durham-repository.worktribe.com/output/1223615/getting-the-better-of-the-bargain-technical-intelligence-arms-sales-and-anglo-israeli-relations-1967-1974>.

Ganin, Zvi (2005), An Uneasy Relationship: American Jewish Leadership and Israel, 1948–1957, Syracuse University Press, p. 191.

- **1967:** The UK imposed a unilateral arms embargo on both Israel and Arab States, including withholding vital spare parts from Israel for UK supplied Centurion tanks. The embargo included the denial of the US of British and Cypriot bases to the US Air Force for flights to Israel. The embargo was applied only during the period of fighting and its immediate aftermath, although the UK remained reluctant to sell equipment including Chieftain tanks and Harrier aircraft to Israel.

Clive Jones, Getting the Better of the Bargain, Diplomacy and Statecraft 2021, vol Vol 32 No 3,

<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1967/jul/25/arab-states-and-israel-supply-of-arms>

- **1973:** The UK chose to impose a unilateral arms embargo on Israel, including denying the sale of Centurion tank spare parts and shells for the tanks' guns. Unlike 1967, the embargo in 1973 did not apply to Arab States.

<https://fathomjournal.org/the-yom-kippur-war-and-british-politics/>, and Jones *op cit*

- **1982 until 1994:** The UK placed Israel under arms embargo because of the use of UK supplied equipment in the invasion of Lebanon, and the crimes against humanity committed during that war of aggression and in particular the Israeli-facilitated massacres of civilians in Sabra and Chatila refugee camps. The total embargo was lifted in 1983, but an end use condition banning Israel from using UK supplied arms in Lebanon was lifted only in 1994.

Azriel Bermant, Chronicle of a Failure Foretold, International History Review, December 2017

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321989356> and

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/britain-lifts-arms-embargo-against-israel-1438791.html>

- **End Use Conditions 1994 onwards:** Following this resumption of an arms trading relationship, the UK, under both Labour and Conservative governments, routinely sought guarantees from the Israel government not to use any UK exported weaponry in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Over a long period, Israel has equally routinely disregarded those conditions over the past twenty years, using UK arms in the occupied territories with no regard for UK law and Israeli contractual obligations.
- **2002:** The Labour government secretly halted UK arms exports to Israel following confirmation of the use of UK equipment in the Occupied Territories in breach of end use requirements. This involved the use of armoured personnel carriers based on UK Centurion tank chassis. Publicly, the then-FCO said they could no longer accept Israeli end use assurances in deciding whether to export arms. However, in July 2002 Foreign Secretary Jack Straw courted controversy by easing restrictions on the sale of Heads-Up Displays for F-16 aircraft to Israel. By 2003 the restrictive policy on arms sales had been completely overturned, and shortly after UK arms were once again being transferred to Israel.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/apr/13/israel.armstrade>

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmintdev/718/718ap12.htm>

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/2110081.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2110081.stm)

[https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/39520/The\\_Good\\_the\\_Bad\\_and\\_the\\_Ugly\\_rev.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/39520/The_Good_the_Bad_and_the_Ugly_rev.pdf)

- **2009:** The UK Government first denied and then admitted that British supplied components were used in the 2008-2009 Israeli escalation in Gaza - Operation Cast Lead - in aircraft, tanks, armoured personnel carriers, D9 armoured bulldozers and drones. Then-Foreign Secretary David Miliband apologised to the House of Commons for having misled them on this point, admitting that UK equipment had been used in an Israeli assault on Gaza against end user conditions. He also affirmed that Israeli misuse of equipment would inform future licence applications. During the 2009 escalation the UK decided to cancel five export licences, all relating to spare parts for Sa'ar naval weapons that had been used to attack Gaza. The arms involved include anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles, cannons and heavy machine guns.

Foreign Secretary David Miliband in the House of Commons on 21 April 2009, apologising for having misled the Commons in January 2009 and detailing the extent of UK supplies to Israel.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090421/wmstext/90421m0001.htm>

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090421/wmstext/90421m0001.htm>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/13/uk-halts-israeli-arms-exports>

- **2014:** During the 2014 Gaza escalation - Operation Protective Edge, the UK government reviewed all arms exports licences to Israel because they claimed to be unsure whether UK supplied weapons were being used in Gaza and announced on 12 August that if hostilities resumed, those licenses would be immediately suspended. The business department identified 12 licences for suspension which included equipment for military radar, combat aircraft and tanks.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-findings-of-licensed-exports-to-israel](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-findings-of-review-of-licensed-exports-to-israel)

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/aug/12/british-arms-exports-israel-gaza-block-suspension>

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