

29th of March 2023

WCLAC's Statement

on the 2030 Roadmap for UK-Israeli Bilateral Relations

WCLAC strongly condemns the signing of the UK-Israel Bilateral Relations Roadmap, which comes at a time when Israel unashamedly, and in an unprecedented manner, violates Palestinian Human Rights on a daily basis.

Just recently in early March 2023, Jamila, 59, was preparing dinner for her family in her town of Huwara, when a settlers' attack on her home burned all of their belongings and put their lives at risk. The Israeli senior minister Bezalel Smotrich made the following comment on the attack: "Huwara needs to be wiped out, the State of Israel should do it". Jamila described how the attack left her traumatised and dreading the next one, fearing for her life and her children's.

Less than two weeks later, on the 21st of March 2023, British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly and Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen signed an agreement titled "The 2030 Roadmap for UK-Israeli Bilateral Relations". According to the UK Government's Official Website, this agreement aims at deepening and expanding cooperation across mutual priorities until 2030. It identifies twelve cooperation areas, including diplomacy, academic, and parliamentary cooperation; challenging Anti-Semitism, delegitimisation, and anti-Israel bias; defence and security; trade and investment; cyber security, science, innovation and technology; health; culture; development; education; climate; and finally, gender.

Palestinian people, including women and girls, face systematic discriminatory practices and IHL's violations by Israel's Occupation. These violations include settlers' and Israeli Occupation Forces' violence, extrajudicial killings, excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, the confiscation and annexation of Palestinian land, coercive displacement of Palestinians, demolition of Palestinian houses and structures, the illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip since 2000, and the denial of Palestinians' basic and inalienable rights — particularly the right of return, the right to self-determination and independence, and the right to live in peace and security.

It comes as a surprise to WCLAC that, in light of the current ongoing Israeli violations against Palestinians in general and women in particular, the last item enlisted on this Roadmap is "Gender" on which the two parties vow – among other commitments — to "develop a bilateral agenda on gender equality and women empowerment in general, and in the context of UN Security Council resolution 1325". Simultaneously, Palestinian women and girls continue to face extremely high risks of gender-based violence (GBV), including lack of essential services, such as sexual and reproductive health, and denial of residency rights and family reunification, and numerous other Israeli violations which disproportionately affect women. Not too far away from the Israeli Prime Minister's home in Jerusalem, homes in Silwan and Jabal Al-Mukaber are being demolished, leaving women and their children homeless. On the 15th of January 2023 Nada (a widow)'s home was demolished for the second time, leaving her and her disabled son homeless.

The Roadmap states that “the UK and Israel disagree with the use of the term ‘Apartheid’ with regards to Israel.” Nevertheless, several human rights groups, including B'tselem, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Amnesty International (AI), have concluded that the term “Apartheid” applies to the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, reiterating Palestinian and Israeli human rights activists’ calls and evidence-based data on the matter, including Al Haq’s recently published report “Israeli Apartheid Tool of Zionist Settler Colonialism”¹,

While the 7th item in the Roadmap, focusing on climate-related matters contains a pledge to cooperate for a more sustainable and clean growth, Israel continues to dump its military toxic waste in the oPt,² some of which was confirmed by the UNEP³ to be radioactive. WCLAC has also documented testimonies of women and children whose health has been affected by the Israeli industrial waste in Tulkarem and other parts of the West Bank. In the Jordan Valley, Israeli military training is used as a pretext to forcefully evict Palestinians from their houses/tents, destroy villages, bulldoze crops, and put Palestinians’ lives on the line. Furthermore, military waste poses serious health threats to Palestinians, as remnants may explode at any time and injure or even kill Palestinian shepherds or anyone walking on pasture land.

Moreover, Israel continues its systematic policy of spraying herbicides along the 40kms-long Israeli separation fence to the east of the Gaza Strip. Crops are sprayed deliberately twice a year on Palestinian agricultural land, especially when the produce is ripe. The spraying of chemical herbicides such as the toxic Oxygal and Glyphosate⁴ on agricultural land on the eastern perimeter of the Gaza Strip causes adverse health complications including cancer.⁵ Despite a ban by the Israeli Supreme Court on the use of these toxic substances, the Israeli occupying authorities still use them regularly.⁶

WCLAC calls on the UK Government to acknowledge AI’s reports on the Human Rights situation in the oPt, in line with the UK’s recognition of other AI’s reports, namely on the dire human rights situation in Ukraine in the context of Russia’s current offense.

Additionally, WCLAC calls on the UK to reconsider the implementation of the roadmap agreement with Israel at a time where the International community can no longer ignore the constant Israeli human rights violations towards Palestinians.

WCLAC also calls on the international community at large to take effective action to end Israel’s violations and to hold Israel, as an Occupying power, accountable for its incessant violations of the rights of Palestinian women, particularly those most affected by the occupation policies and practices, and ending the culture of impunity.

¹ Full report available at <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/20931.html>

² Z. Brophy and J. Isaac, *The environmental impact of Israeli military activities in the occupied Palestinian territory*, Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ)

³ Ibid.

⁴ <http://www.miftah.org/Display.cfm?DocId=26703&CategoryId=4#:~:text=Israel%20conducts%20sudden%20spraying%20operations,vegetation%20and%20germination%20of%20plants.>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.