

9 November 2023

WRONG SIDE OF HISTORY: EU MUST DEMAND CEASEFIRE IN GAZA AND FINANCE JUSTICE

As a network of civil society organisations committed to human rights, justice, equality and peace, we are horrified by the violence in Gaza and Israel.

On October 7, Hamas launched a horrific incursion into Israel, during which over 1,400 Israelis were brutally killed and around 200 taken hostage by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. As a response, the Israeli government launched an unprecedented military campaign in Gaza, having killed over 10,000 Palestinians, of whom at least 4,100 were children¹, and has intensified its 16-year illegal siege of Gaza depriving over 2 million Palestinian civilians of water, electricity, food and fuel, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis.

We express our grief and solidarity with the families of the victims, and condemn all acts of violence considered war crimes under the Geneva Conventions - killing of civilians, hostage holding, denial of humanitarian access, forced displacement and collective punishment. All hostages must be immediately released. Violent settler attacks on the Palestinian communities in the West Bank must immediately end. In addition, a rise in hate crimes and incidents motivated by antisemitism or islamophobia is unacceptable.

Hundreds of thousands of protestors in Europe and across the world, as well as a large majority of countries globally², call for a ceasefire and demand justice for the Palestinians living under occupation for over half a century due to the illegal policies of the Israeli government, including the apartheid regime condemned by leading Palestinian, Israeli and International human rights organisations³.

The failure by most of the European Union's ministers (and the bloc as a whole) to condemn the ongoing collective punishment of civilians in Gaza as a war crime - and to challenge the Israeli government's occupation policies - sends a racist, neocolonial signal about its values. Many EU leaders have expressed support for the Israel Defense Forces' military campaign in Gaza and have shamefully failed to demand a ceasefire. Some decided to freeze aid to Palestine, and to ban peaceful protests in support of Gaza⁴. The EU condemned Russia's illegal invasion and war crimes in Ukraine⁵ very clearly and quickly. The fact that the EU is not able to condemn war crimes being committed by the Israeli government sends the signal that there are double standards for aggressors and international law violations. The EU's position, despite knowledge of mass atrocities and collective punishment being carried out by Israel, casts serious doubt about EU political elites' commitment to international law and people's rights.

Social, environmental and economic justice combined with fair and democratic multilateralism are essential for addressing the manifold crises we are facing, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations in the Global South. The EU's external economic, development and climate strategy must move from resource extraction catering to EU domestic market demand and a wide range of double standards, towards a structural and unambiguous transformation which ensures a decent life for everyone within planetary boundaries. To do so, the EU must show commitment to justice, international law, equal rights, and equitable and sustainable development globally. It must immediately demand a ceasefire in Gaza and address the root causes of the violence, lying in the Israeli occupation, denial of the right to self-determination and settler-colonialism⁶. Without further delay, Europe must recognise the urgency of ending the occupation and apartheid, and help secure a lasting peace and justice for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Taking this stance must be accompanied by aligning EU financing with international law⁷. The European Investment Bank Group (EIB) can play its part by reviewing its current and planned financing portfolio to

align it with international law and end support to illegal Israeli settlements⁸. The current situation is also an urgent reminder of the necessity for the EIB and European leaders to once and for all reject expanding the bank's lending mandate to include defence spending. Finance from a multilateral development bank should not be channelled to arms, ammunition and military equipment as the military-industrial complex keeps amassing massive profits from global conflicts. Effectively, derisking the defence sector threatens to fuel conflicts with proliferation of arms production globally. Instead of increasing security dual-use expenditure to €8 billion⁹ and funding weapons, the EIB and its EIB Global development branch should direct their support toward building peace by making social and climate investments, and where relevant support reconstruction projects.

Now more than ever, it is urgent for the EU's leaders to champion peace and justice across the globe. It is time for the EU to align its policies - outside and inside the EU - with this objective.

Endnotes

1. See [Reuters](#).

2. The UN General Assembly adopted a [resolution](#) demanding an 'immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities'. 120 countries voted in favour, 14 against and 45 abstained. At the EU level, four Member States (Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Croatia) voted against, 8 (Belgium, Ireland, France, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain) in favour, and the rest abstained. The [UN Security Council](#) has failed to support a ceasefire to date.

3. See positions of [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Al Haq](#) or [B'Tselem](#). 4 See [The Guardian](#) and [Amnesty International](#).

5 See [Euronews](#) and [X](#).

6. See statements of [EuroMed Rights](#) and of the [UN Special Rapporteur](#).

7. The EU should withdraw political and financial support to the East Mediterranean gas project, a new gas export infrastructure between Israel, Cyprus and Greece. It is already listed as a [Project of Common Interest](#) and may be included in the 6th PCI list under discussion. The project received EU financial support of [€34.5 million](#) under the Connecting Europe Facility. It is [out of line with the Paris Agreement](#), and entails gas to be exported to Europe exploited [at the cost of besieged Gaza](#). This project should be excluded from any list of EU priority infrastructure and not receive EU funding.

8. International law imposes both duties of [non-recognition and of non-assistance](#) of unlawful situations; some of the examples of activities demanding a review include the following projects:

– The EIB Group has provided credit lines to Israeli banks such as [Bank Leumi](#) and [Hapoalim](#), which have branches in the illegal settlements. The banks appear in the [UN database of businesses](#) involved in activities in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Payments to the Israeli banks can easily spill over into settlement related-credit lines or support companies operating in the settlements. In addition, as a result of the banks' reduced credit exposure, the credit available to extend to settlement entities can be greater. Due to the intermediated nature of these operations, there is no legal requirement for the EIB Group to publish the beneficiaries of these loans. The EIB should suspend disbursement of the credit lines, demand repayment, and exclude financing of businesses listed in the UN database until they are removed from the list. Finally, the EIB must take meaningful steps to improve transparency and disclosure requirements to demonstrate that no illegal activities can receive its support.

– The EIB has been considering financing the [EuroAsia Interconnector](#), an undersea cable connecting the electricity grids of Cyprus, Greece and Israel. The cable would be the deepest and longest in the world and is a Project of Common Interest. It has been awarded

[€757 million in EU grants](#) via the Connecting Europe Facility and Recovery and Resilience Facility. The Israeli Electricity Company (IEC) is the only entity authorised and able to act as lead-implementer, but it does not and cannot legally separate and exclude the illegal Israeli settlements from its electricity infrastructure and operations. Moreover, the IEC holds Palestinians in the oPt captive to the Israeli electricity market by selling and transmitting electricity to Palestinian entities. If implemented, the project will contribute to entrenching the occupation policies of Israel's illegal settlements by connecting them with Europe's electricity grid and allowing for transmission and trade of electricity between Europe, Israel and the illegal settlements. We call on the EIB to definitely reject any requests for financing the EuroAsia Interconnector on those grounds.

– The EIB also approved finance for the Western Galilee Desalination plant in June 2023, built on the Sea of Galilee. The lake borders the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. As a result, Israel benefits from full access to the lake's fresh water which is one of its key water sources. The [Israeli water entities](#) involved in the Galilee desalination project have been criticised for [discriminatory policies](#) on Palestinians' access to adequate supplies of clean and safe water, and for tapping into West Bank water resources to supply Israel and Israeli settlements. The EIB already provided finance to [a subsidiary of Mekorot](#), Israel's Water Authority, in 2011. The EIB should not support this project.

9. See [Strategic European Security Initiative](#).