



An open letter to the Government of Aotearoa New Zealand

21 March 2022

Prime Minister Right Hon Jacinda Ardern

Cc Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Nanaia Mahuta

Tēnā koe Prime Minister

NZ Government must act now to implement sanctions for Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine and disregard for the human rights of Palestinians

Justice for Palestine writes to support the voices both here in Aotearoa and globally drawing attention to the double-standards of Western governments standing up against Russia's invasion and occupation of Ukraine, while denying the same solidarity and action to Palestinians living under Israel's illegal occupation.

We urge the Government of Aotearoa New Zealand to adopt a consistent approach towards such flagrant breaches of international law, international humanitarian law, and human rights and implement sanctions against the state of Israel.

We support the Government's strong response to Russia's war, in particular the swift passage of the Russia Sanctions Bill. The illegal and violent occupation of Ukraine has been rightly condemned in the strongest terms. Appropriate legal measures have been taken to enable Aotearoa New Zealand to implement sanctions against Russia, despite Russia's veto on the UN Security Council.

Our genuine human solidarity with Ukraine does not prevent us from pointing out the double-standards in the West's response. In fact, it is important that we do, not only because Palestinian lives matter, but because as Illan Pappé has explained:

Legitimizing internationally the invasion of sovereign countries and licensing the continued colonization and oppression of others, such as Palestine and its people, will lead to more tragedies, such as the Ukrainian one, in the future, and everywhere on our planet.

We call on the Government to apply a consistent approach towards breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights violations by implementing sanctions against the state of Israel. This would demonstrate our nation's commitment to international law, international humanitarian law and human rights standards is principled and founded in an independent foreign policy, and not susceptible to hypocrisy.

The reality of Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine and oppression of Palestinians is clear, it is time for Aotearoa NZ to act

Israel has subjugated Palestinians through a 53-year illegal military occupation in the occupied territories and a 13-year blockade in the Gaza Strip. 74 years ago, approximately 750,000 Palestinians were violently displaced from their homes, villages and cities during the creation of Israel. Today there are millions of Palestinian refugees unable to return to their homeland.

United Nations bodies have passed hundreds of resolutions in condemnation of Israel's actions. The United Nations Human Rights Council has passed more resolutions condemning Israel than any other country. In 2016, Aotearoa NZ co-sponsored UN Security Council resolution 2334 condemning the ongoing expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied territories. There has been a growing consensus amongst UN treaty bodies, UN Special Procedures, UN member states, as well some of the world's largest human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid against Palestinian people.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon Nanaia Mahuta addressed the House during the passage of the Russian Sanctions Bill and explained the failure of the UN to issue sanctions against Russia was a result of the veto power available to its five permanent member states. Similarly, the UN has demonstrated an inability to impose sanctions against Israel due to the United States' veto power. Over the past five decades, the US has vetoed at least 53 UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israel. Aotearoa New Zealand needs to take independent and principled action against Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine.

We strongly support the statements made by Te Paati Māori co-leader Rawiri Waititi on the Russia Sanctions Bill: "Any imperial power illegally invading a sovereign nation should be sanctioned. ... This bill will establish a framework of sanctions sanctioning Russia, but we need a consistent sanctions regime that reflects our position as an independent Tiriti-centric nation in the South Pacific."

A Call to Action: Implement sanctions against illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine

The ongoing grave violations of international law have been enabled by the continued failure of the international community, including Aotearoa NZ, to hold Israel to account.

Most immediately, we call on the Government to implement sanctions against Israel until it complies with international humanitarian law, ends its illegal occupation of Palestine and its widespread violation of the human rights of Palestinians.

We also reiterate the demands we have made on other occasions

- Uphold international law and condemn the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories.
- Call for an end to the blockade of Gaza.
- Recognise the state of Palestine.
- Adopt an approach to foreign policy that respects Palestine as a partner.
- Act to end the detention and abuse of Palestinian child prisoners.

In solidarity – ngā mihi nui,

Neil Ballantyne and Kate Stone

Co-Chair and Secretary of Justice for Palestine Co-ordinating Group