



**Centre**

EXPERTS ON INTERNATIONAL  
HUMANITARIAN LAW



# SHRINKING CIVIC AND HUMANITARIAN SPACE IN ISRAEL- PALESTINE

**An Overview of Recent Developments**

May 2026

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### About the International Humanitarian Law Centre

The International Humanitarian Law Centre is an independent expert group that provides rapid and in-depth legal advice, training and advocacy on the laws of war to ensure the protection of persons in conflict zones worldwide.

Since its establishment in 2004, the Centre has been a source of legal expertise supporting humanitarian and human rights action in the Israeli-Palestinian context.

*Amidst a regional escalation of violence, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) risks falling under the radar. All the while, the already constrained operating environment for journalists, human rights monitors, and humanitarian actors has been rapidly deteriorating even further. This document provides a high-level factual overview of related developments since the onset of hostilities on 7 October 2023; it should be read alongside previous publications by the IHL Centre that set out the legal framework protecting civic and humanitarian space in the oPt.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Continued violence, impunity, and deepening control**

International attention has recently been largely focused on the escalating hostilities in the region, which have once again wrought devastation and plunged millions of civilians into dire conditions. Even if currently less visible in global headlines, the **situation in the oPt remains catastrophic**: in Gaza, Israeli attacks continue despite a tenuous ceasefire that entered into effect in October 2025, claiming the lives of hundreds and injuring thousands more.<sup>2</sup> Israel continues to disregard its obligations under international law, for example by failing to provide for the fundamental needs of the population in Gaza,<sup>3</sup> unlawfully restricting humanitarian operations;<sup>4</sup> destroying property in areas under its control which is not 'rendered absolutely necessary by military operations';<sup>5</sup> and continuing to unlawfully detain and torture Palestinians from Gaza.<sup>6</sup> In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli forces and settlers carry out rampant acts of violence on a near-daily basis with impunity, while the Israeli government has been taking steps

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<sup>1</sup> 'Shrinking Humanitarian Space in the oPt: An IHL Assessment' (IHL Centre, 1 April 2025) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/news/shrinking-humanitarian-space-opt/>>; 'Legality of Restrictions on the Freedoms of Expression, Assembly, and Association in the Occupied Palestinian Territory' (IHL Centre, 12 June 2024) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/news/legality-of-restrictions-on-the-freedoms-of-expression-assembly-and-association-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory/>>; 'Shrinking Civic and Humanitarian Space in Israel-Palestine' (IHL Centre) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/jerusalem/shrinking-space/>>.

<sup>2</sup> 'Palestinians Across Gaza Unsafe Six Months on from Ceasefire Announcement, Says Türk' (OHCHR, 10 April 2026) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/palestinians-across-gaza-unsafe-six-months-ceasefire-announcement-says-turk>>; 'Humanitarian Situation Report | 1 May 2026' (OCHA oPt, 2 May 2026) <<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-report-1-may-2026>>. All links were last accessed on 4 May 2026.

<sup>3</sup> See eg 'Legal and Humanitarian Imperatives for the "Day After" in Gaza' (IHL Centre, 6 February 2026) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/news/legal-and-humanitarian-imperatives-for-the-day-after-in-gaza/>>.

<sup>4</sup> See eg *ibid*; IHL Centre, Shrinking Humanitarian Space in the oPt: An IHL Assessment (n 1).

<sup>5</sup> Geneva Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (adopted 12 August 1949, entered into force 21 October 1950) 75 UNTS 287 (GC IV) art 53. See eg Benedict Garman and Barbara Metzler, 'Israel Has Destroyed More Than 1,500 Buildings in Gaza Since Ceasefire' *BBC Verify* (London, 12 November 2025) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0mxylxw48v0>>.

<sup>6</sup> See eg 'Unlawful Incarceration: Legal Analysis of Israel's Military Detention Regime' (IHL Centre, 30 August 2024) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/news/unlawful-incarceration-legality-military-detention-regime-gaza/>>;

'"Security" Inmates in Prisons Inside Israel' (HaMoked, 3 May 2026) <<https://hamoked.org/>>.

to further cement its hold on the territory.<sup>7</sup> This conduct in itself contravenes applicable legal norms and leads to further violations of international law, including the forcible displacement of Palestinian communities and unlawful seizure and destruction of property.<sup>8</sup>

Against the backdrop of these deeply concerning events, it is crucial to ensure continued humanitarian access as well as monitoring and documentation of conduct that may amount to violations of international law, including international crimes, and of the humanitarian consequences of such conduct. Despite this pressing need, the already constrained operating environment for journalists, human rights monitors, and humanitarian actors – evidenced, for example, by Israel’s longstanding refusal to grant entry to United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteurs and a Human Rights Council-mandated Commission of Inquiry, in addition to the 2021 designation of leading Palestinian NGOs as ‘terrorist organisations’ – has shrunk even further.<sup>9</sup> This is the result of additional restrictive measures imposed by the Israeli authorities since the onset of hostilities on 7 October 2023; intensifying delegitimisation campaigns; as well as the overall security environment, which is characterised by a blatant failure to protect civilians, including journalists and humanitarian personnel.<sup>10</sup> The following section outlines the impact of these developments on Palestinian and international actors.

## **Escalating repression of critical voices and relief actors**

**Palestinians** have continued to bear the brunt of repression, and even paid with their lives: Israeli attacks have killed 260 Palestinian journalists and media workers in Gaza,

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<sup>7</sup> Humanitarian Situation Report | 1 May 2026 (n 2); ‘Israel’s Security Cabinet Approves Measures to Strengthen Control Over the West Bank’ *The Associated Press* (Jerusalem, 8 February 2026) <<https://apnews.com/article/west-bank-israel-settlement-palestinians-cabinet-328429d96099bc33275035b85244797a>>.

<sup>8</sup> See eg ‘Responsibility Under International Law for Settler Violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory’ (IHL Centre, 8 July 2024) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/news/responsibility-international-law-settler-violence/>>; ‘Overkill: A Critical Appraisal of the Use of Force by Israel in the West Bank’ (IHL Centre, 6 January 2025) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/news/overkill-a-critical-appraisal-of-the-use-of-force-by-israel-in-the-west-bank/>>; ‘Settlement of Land Title in the oPt: An International Law-Based Appraisal’ (IHL Centre, 27 March 2026) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/news/settlement-of-land-title-in-the-opt-an-international-law-based-appraisal/>>.

<sup>9</sup> See eg ‘Timeline: Shrinking Space in Israel-Palestine. Illustrating the Clampdown on Civil Society’ (IHL Centre, last updated 5 October 2023) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/jerusalem/shrinking-space/interactive-timeline-shrinking-space/>>; ‘Call to Protect Civil Society Watchdogs in Israel-Palestine on Human Rights Day’ (IHL Centre, 10 December 2024) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/news/call-to-protect-civil-society-israel-palestine-human-rights-day/>>; ‘Designation of Palestinian CSOs as “Terrorist Organisations”’ (IHL Centre, 18 November 2021) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/news/designation-of-palestinian-csos-as-terrorist-organisations/>>.

<sup>10</sup> See eg IHL Centre, Shrinking Humanitarian Space in the oPt: An IHL Assessment (n 1); IHL Centre, Call to Protect Civil Society Watchdogs in Israel-Palestine on Human Rights Day (n 9); ‘Humanitarian Operations Undermined by Delegitimization, Access Restrictions, and Administrative Constraints’ (OCHA oPt, 16 January 2019) <<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-operations-undermined-delegitimization-access-restrictions-and-administrative>>.

according to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, in addition to 593 aid workers, including 400 UN staff.<sup>11</sup> UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini stated in January that 'Gaza is the deadliest place in the world to be a journalist, just as it is the deadliest place to be a humanitarian worker',<sup>12</sup> and recently called for a formal investigation into the killings of UN staff members.<sup>13</sup> Palestinian organisations continue to be driven out: in early April this year, for example, Ramallah-based Defense for Children International-Palestine announced that it was ceasing operations due to 'challenges resulting from Israel's targeted criminalization of Palestinian human rights organizations'.<sup>14</sup>

International oversight and relief efforts too have been rendered extremely challenging: Since October 2023, **foreign journalists** have been denied independent access to Gaza – except when escorted by the Israeli military; this ban persists even amidst the fragile ceasefire.<sup>15</sup> The Israeli authorities have also prevented the Qatari news channel Al Jazeera from broadcasting, raiding its offices in East Jerusalem and Ramallah.<sup>16</sup>

In a similar vein, the **International Committee of the Red Cross** – which is mandated by States to monitor conditions of detention and treatment – has not been able to visit Palestinian detainees for more than 2.5 years.<sup>17</sup> This is particularly troubling given the numerous reports by released detainees, prison guards, and doctors attesting to systematic torture and ill-treatment being inflicted upon Palestinians in detention, including acts of sexual violence.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 'Reported Impact Snapshot | Gaza Strip (29 April 2026)' (OCHA oPt, 1 May 2026) <<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-29-april-2026>>.

<sup>12</sup> 'UNRWA Commissioner-General: Gaza's Ban on International Journalists Fuels Disinformation—Lifting it is a Necessity' (UNRWA, 25 January 2026) <<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-commissioner-general-gaza%E2%80%99s-ban-international-journalists-fuels>>.

<sup>13</sup> Emma Farge, 'UNRWA Head Seeks Investigation into Killing of Staff in Gaza War' *Reuters* (Geneva, 31 March 2026) <<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/unrwa-head-seeks-investigation-into-killing-staff-gaza-war-2026-03-31/>>.

<sup>14</sup> DCI Palestine (X, 7 April 2026) <<https://x.com/DCIPalestine/status/2041511884549988771?s=20>>.

<sup>15</sup> Yolande Knell, 'Israel Court Hears Appeal Over Ban on Independent Media Access to Gaza' *BBC News* (Jerusalem, 26 January 2026) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clv3jwz98do>>.

<sup>16</sup> Vicky Wong, 'Al Jazeera Office Raided as Israel Takes Channel Off Air' *BBC News* (London, 5 May 2024) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68961753>>; 'Israeli Forces Raid Al Jazeera's West Bank Office, Issue 45 Day Ban on its Journalism' (CPJ, 22 September 2024) <<https://cpi.org/2024/09/israeli-forces-raid-al-jazeeras-west-bank-office-issue-45-day-ban-on-its-journalism/>>; Al Jazeera staff, 'Israel Extends Ban on Al Jazeera's Operations by 90 Days' *Al Jazeera* (Doha, 25 January 2026) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/25/israel-extends-ban-on-al-jazeeras-operations-by-90-days>>.

<sup>17</sup> 'Israel and the Occupied Territories: Addressing Misconceptions and False Information' (ICRC, 8 October 2025) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/FAQ-misconceptions-false-information-icrc-work-israel-and-occupied-territories>>; 'Opinion on ICRC Access to All Places of Detention Where Protected Persons Are Present' (IHL Centre, 11 July 2024) <<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/news/opinion-icrc-access-detention-protected-persons/>>.

<sup>18</sup> See eg 'Living Hell: The Israeli Prison System as a Network of Torture Camps' (B'Tselem, January 2026) <[https://www.btselem.org/publications/202601\\_living\\_hell](https://www.btselem.org/publications/202601_living_hell)>; CNN's International Investigations and Visuals

Furthermore, legislation adopted by the Israeli Knesset in October 2024, which entered into force in January 2025, bars **UNRWA** from operating in Israel and illegally annexed East Jerusalem and prohibits the organisation from coordinating its activities with the Israeli authorities, thus also rendering its humanitarian efforts in Gaza and the West Bank all but impossible.<sup>19</sup> Israeli forces have since stormed UNRWA schools and shut them down,<sup>20</sup> while UNRWA's international staff members have left the oPt.<sup>21</sup> In December 2025, additional legislation was passed halting the organisation's access to 'water, electricity, fuel, and communications',<sup>22</sup> and in January this year, UNRWA's headquarters in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah was demolished.<sup>23</sup> In its Advisory Opinion of 22 October 2025, the International Court of Justice called the UN, and UNRWA in particular, 'an indispensable provider of humanitarian relief in the Gaza Strip', echoing the words of the UN Secretary-General that "'there is currently no realistic alternative to UNRWA that could adequately provide the services and assistance required by Palestine refugees'".<sup>24</sup> The restrictions on UNRWA also entail negative repercussions for local providers of aid and the humanitarian community in the oPt at large.<sup>25</sup>

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teams, 'Strapped Down, Blindfolded, Held in Diapers: Israeli Whistleblowers Detail Abuse of Palestinians in Shadowy Detention Center' CNN (Sde Teiman, Israel, 11 May 2024) <<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd>>; Hagar Shezaf and Michael Hauser Tov, 'Doctor at Israeli Field Hospital for Detained Gazans: "We Are All Complicit in Breaking the Law"' *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv, 4 April 2024) <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-04-04/ty-article/premium/doctor-at-idf-field-hospital-for-detained-gazans-we-are-all-complicit-in-breaking-law/0000018e-a59c-dfed-ad9f-afdfb5ce0000>>.

<sup>19</sup> See eg 'UNRWA "Continues to Deliver" as Israeli Ban Comes into Effect' (UN News, 30 January 2025) <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/01/1159601>>.

<sup>20</sup> "'Assault on Children": UN Experts Condemn Renewed Attacks on UNRWA Schools in Gaza and East Jerusalem' (OHCHR, 20 May 2025) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/05/assault-children-un-experts-condemn-renewed-attacks-unrwa-schools-gaza-and>>.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Beaumont and Sam Jones, 'International Unrwa Staff Leave as Israel's Ban on Activity Takes Effect' *The Guardian* (Jerusalem and Madrid, 30 January 2025) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/30/unrwa-staff-forced-to-leave-israel-after-ban-comes-into-effect>>; 'UNRWA Situation Report #216 on the Humanitarian Crisis in the Gaza Strip and the Occupied West Bank, Including East Jerusalem' (UNRWA, 8 April 2026) <<https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-216-humanitarian-crisis-gaza-strip-and-occupied-west-bank>>.

<sup>22</sup> 'UNRWA Commissioner-General on New Anti-UNRWA Legislation Passed by the Israeli Parliament' (UNRWA, 30 December 2025) <<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-commissioner-general-new-anti%E2%80%91unrwa-legislation-passed-israeli-Parliament>>.

<sup>23</sup> Lorenzo Tondo, 'Israel Bulldozes Unrwa Headquarters in East Jerusalem' *The Guardian* (Jerusalem, 20 January 2026) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jan/20/israel-bulldozes-unrwa-headquarters-in-east-jerusalem>>.

<sup>24</sup> *Obligations of Israel in Relation to the Presence and Activities of the United Nations, Other International Organizations and Third States in and in Relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory* (Advisory Opinion) General List No 196 [2025] (2025 Advisory Opinion) [124].

<sup>25</sup> See eg 'Israel UNRWA Ban Will Undermine Gaza Ceasefire, Security Council Hears' (UN Geneva, 28 January 2025) <<https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/news/2025/01/102682/israel-unrwa-ban-will-undermine-gaza-ceasefire-security-council>>; 'UN Agencies and NGOs Call for Immediate Lifting of Impediments to Humanitarian Access and NGO Operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory' (OCHA oPt, 17 December

In yet another severe blow to international civil society operating in the context, the Israeli government introduced a new registration process, demanding that **international NGOs** re-register with the authorities.<sup>26</sup> Pursuant to new guidelines introduced for this purpose, a request for registration can be rejected, for example, if '[t]he organization has ... expressed support for legal proceedings against Israeli citizens in a foreign country or before an international tribunal, for actions carried out in the course of their duties in the [Israeli military] or in any security agency of the State of Israel'.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the guidelines envisage the disclosure of personal information about Palestinian and foreign staff members, in contravention of applicable data protection laws.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of this process, Israel has already revoked the licenses of dozens of organisations – including MSF, Norwegian Refugee Council, DanChurchAid, and Oxfam Novib – inter alia on the grounds that they did not share this sensitive information, or that they allegedly 'delegitimise' the Israeli State;<sup>29</sup> amidst ongoing legal proceedings, these NGOs face a highly uncertain future.<sup>30</sup> Should they have to cease operations, the repercussions for relief efforts would be dire – especially in Gaza, where these organisations 'run or support the majority of field hospitals, primary healthcare centers, emergency shelter responses, water and sanitation services, nutrition stabilization centers for children with acute malnutrition, and critical mine action activities'.<sup>31</sup>

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2025) <<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/un-agencies-and-ngos-call-immediate-lifting-impediments-humanitarian-access-and-ngo-operations-occupied>>.

<sup>26</sup> See eg Eitan Diamond, 'New Israeli Guidelines Threaten to Eliminate Humanitarian Action in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Almost Entirely' (*Just Security*, 8 April 2025) <<https://www.justsecurity.org/109772/israel-humanitarian-ngo-guidelines/>>.

<sup>27</sup> 'International Non-Governmental Organizations Primarily Engaged in Activities with Palestinian Residents for the Purpose of Humanitarian Aid: Guidelines for the Registration of Organizations and Issuance of Recommendations for Their Foreign Employees' (The Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, last updated 14 September 2025) s 7.1(11) <[https://www.gov.il/en/pages/interministerial\\_team\\_registration\\_humanitarian\\_organizations\\_foreign\\_employees](https://www.gov.il/en/pages/interministerial_team_registration_humanitarian_organizations_foreign_employees)>.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*; Diamond (n 26).

<sup>29</sup> See eg Amy Walker and David Gritten, 'Israel to Bar 37 Aid Groups as UK and EU Warn of Severe Impact in Gaza' *BBC News* (Jerusalem, 31 December 2025) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1evp7weyv2o>>; 'List of Aid Groups Working in Gaza that Israel is Suspending' *The Associated Press* (Jerusalem, 30 December 2025) <<https://apnews.com/article/gaza-humanitarian-aid-suspension-israel-ec535cea548ddc75080f1e6bffe53801>>; Yolande Knell and Sophie Williams, 'Aid Groups in Gaza and West Bank Thrown Lifeline as Israel Court Pauses Ban Threat' *BBC News* (Jerusalem, 27 February 2026) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd6z382de8yo>>.

<sup>30</sup> Knell and Williams (n 29); Nir Hasson, 'Israel's High Court Poised to Allow Expulsion of Aid Groups From West Bank, Gaza' *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv, 24 March 2026) <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-security/2026-03-24/ty-article/premium/court-to-reject-petitions-against-expulsion-of-aid-groups-from-west-bank-gaza/0000019d-1c5c-d72c-a5fd-9c5f0f8e0000>>.

<sup>31</sup> OCHA oPt, UN Agencies and NGOs Call for Immediate Lifting of Impediments to Humanitarian Access and NGO Operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (n 25). See also 'Statement by the Humanitarian Country Team of the Occupied Palestinian Territory' (OCHA oPt, 28 February 2026) <<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/statement-humanitarian-country-team-occupied-palestinian-territory>>.

The Knesset further passed an amendment to the Entry into Israel Law, mandating in relevant part that no visas or residence permits be granted to persons who have called for the prosecution of Israeli forces before international courts – or if organisations they work for have done so – thus propelling self-censorship on international law-related research and advocacy.<sup>32</sup>

This was merely a snapshot of measures adopted to date; other highly problematic laws **remain on the books in Israel**, including draft legislation that would prescribe sweeping penalties for persons who cooperate and share information with the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>33</sup> Other proposals target NGOs that receive funding from foreign governments.<sup>34</sup>

The impact of these restrictive measures is aggravated by the **extensive sanctions imposed by the Trump administration** on ICC judges and officials;<sup>35</sup> UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese,<sup>36</sup> and leading Palestinian human rights organisations that have been in contact with the ICC.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Noa Shpigel, 'Knesset Passes Bill Banning Entry to Israel to October 7 Deniers and Those Backing Prosecution of IDF Soldiers for War Crimes' *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv, 19 February 2025) <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-02-19/ty-article/premium/knesset-passes-bill-banning-oct-7-and-holocaust-deniers-from-entering-israel/00000195-1f03-d293-a1d5-ff07d8270000>>; Itamar Mann, 'Criminalizing Knowledge: Israel's Legislative Attack on International Law Expertise' (*Verfassungsblog*, 21 February 2025) <<https://verfassungsblog.de/criminalizing-knowledge/>>.

<sup>33</sup> Mann (n 32).

<sup>34</sup> 'The Proposed NGO Taxation Law: A Threat to Civil Society in Israel' (Adalah, 30 June 2026) <<https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/11486>>; Tamar Almog, 'Israel Is Muzzling Its Domestic Opposition' (Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, 31 October 2025) <<https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/54041/israel-is-muzzling-its-domestic-opposition>>.

<sup>35</sup> Marco Rubio, US Secretary of State, 'Imposing Sanctions in Response to the ICC's Illegitimate Actions Targeting the United States and Israel' (Press Statement, 5 June 2025) <<https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/06/imposing-sanctions-in-response-to-the-iccs-illegitimate-actions-targeting-the-united-states-and-israel/>>; Marco Rubio, US Secretary of State, 'Imposing Further Sanctions in Response to the ICC's Ongoing Threat to Americans and Israelis' (Press Statement, 20 August 2025) <<https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/08/imposing-further-sanctions-in-response-to-the-iccs-ongoing-threat-to-americans-and-israelis-2/>>; Marco Rubio, US Secretary of State, 'Sanctioning ICC Judges Directly Engaged in the Illegitimate Targeting of Israel' (Press Statement, 18 December 2025) <<https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/12/sanctioning-icc-judges-directly-engaged-in-the-illegitimate-targeting-of-israel/>>.

<sup>36</sup> Marco Rubio, US Secretary of State, 'Sanctioning Lawfare that Targets U.S. and Israeli Persons' (Press Statement, 9 July 2025) <<https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/07/sanctioning-lawfare-that-targets-u-s-and-israeli-persons/>>.

<sup>37</sup> Marco Rubio, US Secretary of State, 'Sanctioning Foreign NGOs Directly Engaged in ICC's Illegitimate Targeting of Israel' (Press Statement, 4 September 2025) <<https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/09/sanctioning-foreign-ngos-directly-engaged-in-iccs-illegitimate-targeting-of-israel/>>.

## **A call to action for the European Union (EU) and its member States**

Amidst escalating violence in the oPt and persistent disregard for international law, it is essential that actors engaged in the delivery of impartial humanitarian relief, reporting, documentation, and accountability efforts can continue pursuing their vital work. Urgent action is needed to prevent additional journalists, human rights monitors, and humanitarian actors from being pushed out of the context – especially at a time when shrinking civic space and attacks on journalists and humanitarian workers around the world risk becoming normalised.

It bears noting that attacks on these actors amount to **violations of international law in their own right**. As the occupying power, Israel is bound by international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) in the oPt.<sup>38</sup> It has pertinent obligations to consent to, allow, and facilitate impartial humanitarian relief schemes in case it fails to adequately provide for the needs of the population in the occupied territory; to protect civilians, including journalists and humanitarian personnel; and to respect, protect, and fulfil Palestinians' civil and political rights, amongst others.<sup>39</sup>

Israel's continued violations of international law in the oPt, including measures targeting journalists, human rights monitors, and humanitarian actors, also engage the **legal responsibility of third States**. All States have an obligation to ensure respect for IHL and IHRL by other States, not to recognise as lawful or render aid or assistance in the maintenance of situations resulting from serious breaches of peremptory norms, and to cooperate by lawful means to bring these breaches to an end.<sup>40</sup> They are further entitled to invoke Israel's responsibility for violations of norms that are owed to the international community as a whole (*erga omnes*).<sup>41</sup>

In addition, the EU has only recently 'reaffirm[ed] its unwavering commitment to the universal respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights for everyone, everywhere', condemning 'the current broad assault against the rules-based international order, human rights, internationally agreed norms, and the institutions ... established to enforce them'.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, as part of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, both Israel and the EU have pledged 'respect for human rights and democratic principles, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element' of the agreement.<sup>43</sup> Last June, the Office of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights found 'indications that Israel would be in breach of its human rights obligations under Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement' over its conduct in Gaza.<sup>44</sup>

The EU and its member States:

- Must not recognise attacks or restrictive measures imposed on journalists, human rights monitors, and humanitarian actors as lawful, or render aid or assistance in their implementation;
- Must ensure that they do not contribute to related violations of international law;
- Must exert pressure on Israel to cease attacks on journalists, human rights monitors, and humanitarian actors, and to repeal restrictive measures imposed on them;
- Should continue to support these actors, including by means of providing funding;
- Should consider invoking Israel's responsibility for violations of *erga omnes* norms;
- Should re-evaluate their options regarding a potential suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement in light of Israel's persistent violations of international law in the oPt, including measures targeting journalists, human rights monitors, and humanitarian actors, in addition to concerns about other contexts.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> This was reaffirmed most recently by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinions of 19 July 2024 and 22 October 2025. *Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem* (Advisory Opinion) General List No 186 [2024] [86]-[101]; 2025 Advisory Opinion (n 24) [85]-[87], [146].

<sup>39</sup> IHL Centre, *Shrinking Humanitarian Space in the oPt: An IHL Assessment* (n 1); IHL Centre, *Legality of Restrictions on the Freedoms of Expression, Assembly, and Association in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* (n 1).

<sup>40</sup> GCs common art 1; ILC 'Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts', annex to UN General Assembly Resolution 56/83 of 12 December 2001, and corrected by document A/56/49(Vol. I)/Corr.4. (ARSIWA) art 41.

<sup>41</sup> ARSIWA (n 40) art 48.

<sup>42</sup> Council of the EU, 'Council Conclusions on EU Priorities in UN Human Rights Fora in 2026' (Brussels, 30 January 2026) 5835/26 paras 2-3.

<sup>43</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Agreement Establishing an Association Between the European Communities and their Member States, of the One Part, and the State of Israel, of the Other Part' [2000] OJEC L 147/3 art 2.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Rettman, 'Full Text of EU Report on Israeli Crimes in Gaza' *EU Observer* (Brussels, 20 June 2025) <<https://euobserver.com/32602/full-text-of-eu-report-on-israeli-crimes-in-gaza/>>.

<sup>45</sup> See eg Andrew Rettman, 'EU Sanctions Back on Agenda Amid Israel's "Carnage" in Lebanon' *EU Observer* (Brussels, 9 April 2026) <<https://euobserver.com/210469/eu-sanctions-back-on-agenda-amid-israels-carnage-in-lebanon/>>.

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