

Hundreds of British and Irish writers demand immediate ceasefire, as opposition to Gaza genocide escalates

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More than 380 writers, organisations and cultural figures have issued an open letter stating that the Israeli government is committing genocide in Gaza and demanding an immediate ceasefire.

The letter follows several other statements and open letters expressing horror and outrage at the crimes being committed in Gaza by the fascist government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Britain's collusion with the Zionist state. It reflects increasing anger over Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's full-throated support for Israel and his use of anti-terrorism laws against protesters, as well as contempt for the hypocritical and weasel words of his government's recent criticisms of the war and refusal to take any real action.

Organised by Horatio Clare, Kapka Kassabova and Monique Roffey, the writers' letter includes prominent authors such as Zadie Smith, Ian McEwan, Russell T Davies, Hanif Kureishi, Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Irvine Welsh, William Dalrymple, Jeanette Winterson, Brian Eno, Kate Mosse, George Monbiot, Elif Shafak, Scottish PEN, Jonathan Coe, Susie Orbach, Kevin Barry, Benjamin Myers, Andrew O'Hagan, Sarah Bernstein, Philip Marsden, Fiammetta Rocco, Lucy Jones, Monique Roffey, India Knight, Nick Laird, Nina Stibbe, Seán Hewitt, Xiaolu Guo, Chris Power, Joe Dunthorne and Marina Warner.

It opens with a call to the people of Britain, the Republic of Ireland and the world, pointing out that public statements by Israeli ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir are open expressions of genocidal intent, adding that human rights organizations, Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières, Human Rights Watch, the International Federation for

Human Rights, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and many other specialists and historians have clearly identified genocide or acts of genocide in Gaza by the Israeli military on government's orders.

The letter notes that over 40 of the UN's Special Rapporteurs and independent experts recently concluded, "While States debate terminology—is it or is it not genocide?—Israel continues its relentless destruction of life in Gaza, through attacks by land, air and sea, displacing and massacring the surviving population with impunity." The experts said, "No one is spared—not the children, persons with disabilities, nursing mothers, journalists, health professionals, aid workers, or hostages. Since breaking the ceasefire, Israel has killed hundreds of Palestinians, many daily—peaking on 18 March 2025 with 600 casualties in 24 hours, 400 of whom were children."

The writers' letter states, "Palestinians are not the abstract victims of an abstract war... The term 'genocide' is not a slogan. It carries legal, political, and moral responsibilities."

The letter draws attention to the concept of "bystander-approver" at the Special Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in 2017 that refers to a senior official who looks on, remaining silent, and whose silence is interpreted as a green light by the perpetrators: "We refuse to be a public of bystander-approvers. This is not only about our common humanity and all human rights; this is about our moral fitness as the writers of our time, which diminishes with every day we refuse to speak out and denounce this crime."

The writers state their opposition to antisemitism and call for the unrestricted distribution of food and

medical aid to Gaza by the UN, an immediate ceasefire, the release of all Israeli hostages and the thousands of Palestinian prisoners arbitrarily held in Israeli jails and the imposition of sanctions on Israel if it does not heed their call. The letter concluded, “This genocide implicates us all. We bear witness to the crimes of genocide, and we refuse to approve them by our silence.”

The letter follows an open letter signed by more than 800 British lawyers, academics and retired judges, including former Supreme Court justices Lord Sumption and Lord Wilson and former Court of Appeal judges Sir Stephen Sedley, Sir Anthony Hooper and Sir Alan Moses.

The lawyers called on Starmer to impose sanctions on Israeli government ministers and other civil and military figures “reasonably suspected of involvement in unlawful conduct”, to review existing trade ties with Israel, impose trade sanctions and suspend a roadmap for a closer UK-Israel partnership. They accused Israel of “an unparalleled assault on the United Nations” through its banning of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, and its “attacks on UN premises, property and personnel.”

They even suggested that the government initiate action at the UN Security Council to expel Israel as a UN member state, an unprecedented action, for its repeated violations of the UN Charter. They called on the government to abide by its fundamental international legal obligations and “use all available means to secure an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza and to ensure the urgent, unconditional and unimpeded resumption of aid” to the Palestinians. They concluded by saying, “Your government must act now, before it is too late”.

Last week, 120 film, television and creative industry professionals wrote an open letter to Starmer calling for him to “Stand up for justice and human rights. Stop all arms export to Israel. Comply with the International Court of Justice, including through banning trade in settlement goods and services. Support the International Criminal Court and those working with it. Help end this genocide, this occupation, this apartheid”.

Reflecting the refusal of many British Jews to be identified with Israel’s war of annihilation against the Palestinians, 36 members of the 300-strong Board of Deputies of British Jews—the largest organisation

claiming to represent British Jews that is a fervent supporter of the Zionist state—broke ranks. They wrote an open letter published in the *Financial Times* highly critical of Israel’s unilateral ending of the ceasefire and resumption of the war, prompting a furious response from the Board.

The signatories said they could no longer “turn a blind eye or remain silent” over the war in Gaza. “The inclination to avert our eyes is strong, as what is happening is unbearable, but our Jewish values compel us to stand up and to speak out. This most extremist of Israeli governments is openly encouraging violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, strangling the Palestinian economy and building more new settlements than ever... Israel’s soul is being ripped out and we, members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, fear for the future of the Israel we love and have such close ties to.”

One of the signatories, Daniel Grossman, a deputy for the Union of Jewish Students who is studying at the University of Bristol, has resigned from the British Board of Deputies over the failure of its leaders to explicitly criticise “the Israeli government’s ongoing genocidal assault on Gaza”. He described recent meetings between Board leaders and Israeli ministers and officials, including Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, as “both untenable and morally bankrupt”. Board leaders had “both failed to act ethically and also to represent the increasing diversity of opinion” over Gaza within Jewish communities.

Naa’mod, a British Jewish organisation that opposes Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories and is critical of the Board of Deputies, welcomed Grossman’s resignation, while a letter written by 30 rabbis from Reformist and Liberal synagogues to the *Financial Times* said they too could “no longer turn a blind eye or remain silent”.



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