

# Israel adopts the death penalty only for Palestinians

Jordan Shilton  
2 April 2026

By a vote of 62 to 48, Israel's Knesset approved a law Monday enshrining the death penalty as the default punishment for Palestinians who carry out an "act of terrorism" on citizens of Israel. The law does not apply to the state-backed terrorism of far-right Zionist settlers, who routinely assault and kill Palestinians in the illegally occupied West Bank.

Anyone who deliberately kills a person with the intent of "negating the existence of the state of Israel" is to be executed by hanging. The law restricts access to legal counsel for the accused in Israel's civil courts and grants immunity to all persons involved in carrying out such state executions.

For the system of military courts established by the Zionist regime in the West Bank, under which only Palestinian residents fall, execution by hanging will be the standard punishment for "acts of terrorism," even without a prosecutorial request. Such executions must be carried out within 90 days. The only power given to the courts in this setting is to impose a life sentence in "exceptional circumstances." Given how rampant torture and other forms of abuse in Israel's prison system are, such a decision would in many instances amount to a death sentence by other means.

Monday's parliamentary vote was held two-and-a-half years into an ongoing genocide carried out by Israel with the backing of the imperialist powers against the people of Gaza. This has been accompanied by a vast expansion of far-right settler violence across the West Bank, which is coordinated with the government under the watch of former settler and fascist Finance Minister Bezalil Smotrich. The annexation of Gaza and the West Bank, combined with the expansion of Israeli territory into southern Lebanon being pursued as part of Tel Aviv's ongoing participation in the US-led war on Iran, are component parts of a Greater Israel policy that enjoys strong support within the far-right Trump administration.

The blatantly discriminatory, racist law is the logical outcome of the Zionist project. Zionism drew on a 19th-century ethno-nationalist ideology that sought to base the establishment of a "Jewish state" based on racial and religious exclusivism. Always dependent on securing the backing of imperialism, the founders of Zionism and Israel as a state explicitly conceived of and pursued their programme through the violent dispossession of the Arab population to secure the "return" of a "chosen people" to their homeland after 2,000 years of exile.

As David North emphasised in his *Logic of Zionism*,

"Reinterpreting religious myth in the spirit of extreme national chauvinism, contemporary Zionist theology imparts to the concept of a 'chosen people' a thoroughly racist and fascistic character."

It is fitting that the law was presented to parliament by the fascist National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who described the measure as the most important piece of legislation in decades and toasted its passage with a glass of champagne. He and his fellow celebrants wore a lapel pin in the shape of a noose, to celebrate the hangings to come.

Ben-Gvir is a follower of the fascist ideologue Meir Kahane, who advocated the conception that Israel must pursue "redemptive revenge" against its gentile enemies by all necessary means to redeem God and his "chosen people." The Zionist regime can now add institutionalised murder to the long list of means at its disposal to pursue this goal, alongside systematic torture, military and paramilitary violence, and assassinations.

It takes nothing away from the barbaric character of Israel's death penalty law to note that its passage is hardly surprising. On the contrary, it arises out of over three-quarters of a century of sustained persecution of the Arab population in Palestine. Israel's founding in 1948 took place through the violent expulsion of some 750,000 Palestinians in the Nakba, or "Catastrophe"—and it illegally seized the West Bank, Golan Heights in Syria, and Gaza Strip during the Six Day War of 1967.

Prior to the launching of the genocide in October 2023, the Zionist regime had for decades carried out murderous persecution against the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and systematically discriminated against Israel's Arab minority. From 2007 onwards, Gaza was correctly described by international organisations as an "open-air prison" due to the brutal blockades imposed on the enclave and Israel's total control over the flow of basic necessities like electricity and foodstuffs.

In 2018, the Knesset passed the "Nation-State Law." It defined Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people and stated that the right to national self-determination is "unique to the Jewish people." Arabic was downgraded as an official language and Jewish settlement was declared to be a national value.

International organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as independent United Nations experts, determined that the Nation-State Law confirmed the character of Israel as an apartheid state. Taken together with the different legal systems for Jews and Palestinians in the West Bank, restrictions on movement for Palestinians, and land ownership

laws, it codified the systematic discrimination by the state based on race.

The Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1973, declared apartheid to be an international crime applicable to individuals, members of organisations and representatives of a state guilty of “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them,” including “murder, torture, inhuman treatment and arbitrary arrest of members of a racial group; deliberate imposition on members of a racial group of living conditions calculated to cause its physical destruction; legislative measures that discriminate in the political, social, economic and cultural fields; measures that divide the population along racial lines by the creation of separate residential areas for residential groups; the prohibition of interracial marriages; and the persecution of persons opposed to apartheid.”

Only four countries voted against the Apartheid Convention: South Africa, Portugal, which was a fascist dictatorship at the time, Britain, and the United States.

Netanyahu, Ben-Gvir, and the other fascists in the Israeli government know full well that their imperialist paymasters have no intention of holding them to account for this or any other of the horrific crimes they have committed. Netanyahu has continued to travel freely internationally, including multiple visits to the White House to plan the genocide with Trump and to the United Nations in New York to give an address in September 2025, since he was indicted by the International Criminal Court on war crimes charges almost two years ago.

Reflecting its affinity with the fascist policies pursued by the Israeli government, the Trump administration responded to the death penalty law by simply declaring that Israel has the right to pass its own laws. The European imperialist powers felt compelled to issue a token statement of protest that portrayed the vote as a dangerous misstep in an otherwise healthy democracy. The foreign ministers of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Australia,

express[ed] our deep concern about a bill that would significantly expand the possibilities to impose the death penalty in Israel...We are particularly worried about the de facto discriminatory character of the bill. The adoption of this bill would risk undermining Israel's commitments with regards to democratic principles.

What hypocrisy! All of the signatories to this statement are close allies of the Zionist regime. They have not only sanctioned, but also facilitated the Gaza genocide, while at the same time relentlessly suppressing the democratic rights of anyone in their countries who dared to oppose the genocide. In the case of Germany, it is Israel's second-largest weapons supplier behind the United States. Berlin outrageously exploits the German bourgeoisie's responsibility for the Holocaust to justify unquestioning support for Zionism, even as Israel's fascist regime

carries out crimes against humanity akin to those of Hitler's Third Reich.

Netanyahu now passes fascist legislation, prompting a murmur of criticism from Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome animated solely by concern that it makes their continued collusion in Israel's crimes more politically difficult.

The reality is that the general lawlessness of imperialism prevailing around the world has encouraged the fascist Israeli government to employ ever more barbaric methods in its drive to exterminate the Palestinians and establish a Greater Israel.

US President Donald Trump openly declares his intention to bomb Iran—a country of over 90 million people—“back to the stone age,” without even a peep of protest from the imperialist capitals. They all aspire to pursue their own imperialist interests with the same brutality as the would-be dictator in the White House amid a new redivision of the world to secure markets, raw materials, and cheap labour. The only thing hindering them at this point is the need to catch up with American military power, which they are attempting to do by intensified and vicious attacks on the working class aimed at destroying the social and democratic gains achieved by workers following World War II.

Israel's descent into barbarism underscores the urgency of Jewish workers breaking decisively from the national exclusivist politics of Zionism, which has shaped Israel not as a “safe haven” for the Jews but as a fascist outpost of imperialism steeped in monumental historic crimes.

Above all, workers throughout the region, Arabs, Turks, Persians, Kurds, Azerbaijanis and Jews, must fight for a United Socialist States of the Middle East, ending its division into rival bourgeois states dominated by imperialism, in alliance with the working class of the imperialist centres in a revolutionary struggle to put an end to capitalism.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**