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CEC Statement on Israel and Palestine

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GMB Congress

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CEC Statement on Israel and Palestine

The loss of life and destruction witnessed in Gaza and Israel has been horrific, and the past eight months have become one of the most shocking and gravest periods facing humanity and peace.

After over 75 years of suffering, Palestinians now face a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza as the Israeli military has made civilians pay the price of its response to the shocking Hamas attack of 7th October 2023, in which 1,200 people were killed, including children and over 250 Israelis taken as hostage. 36,000 Palestinians have been killed so far in 8 months of incessant bombardment and siege, with the majority of casualties identified being women and children according to United Nations (UN) reports. UN figures also show 500 Palestinians have been killed in the occupied West Bank since October 07th by Israeli forces, despite there being no armed hostilities.

Congress unequivocally condemns and rejects any attempts to legitimise any acts of terror, atrocity and killing of innocent civilians – be they Palestinian, Israeli or foreign nationals. We are also outraged that 3,500 Palestinians remain in prison without charge in Israel, while over 120 Israeli hostages are still being held by Hamas. All innocent civilians must be released unharmed immediately and unconditionally. They have the right to live in safety, security and dignity, and to never be subjected to collective punishment, regardless of the justification.

There is nowhere left to go in Gaza. Thousands remain under the rubble as over half of buildings lie damaged or destroyed, including schools and hospitals. Almost the entire population has been forcibly displaced, and into areas now in famine. Safe zones for refugees and even aid convoys are not spared from Israel's bombardment, with targeted strikes killing three UK nationals delivering aid.

This is a trade union issue. GMB abhors Israel's targeting of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions' offices in Gaza. All attacks on civilians are attacks on workers and must be condemned. We must also condemn the hate which inspire them from right-wing Israeli politicians, Hamas and those regional state actors who have sought to escalate this conflict into a wider regional war.

Conflict abroad must never be used to spread hate at home. Congress is deeply concerned by the dramatic increase of racist attacks, abuse, and rhetoric against Muslim and Jewish communities, and by intimidation over peaceful protest. We

restate our zero-tolerance of anti-semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and any attempts to disguise such racism in support for the rights of Palestinians or Israelis.

Perpetuating a cycle of violence will not bring the security or dignity that Palestinians and Israelis deserve. This statement sets out GMB's support for a just and lasting peace. It does not propose new policy on events before October 07th which Congress policy extensively covers, but refers to this policy where relevant.

GMB's solidarity following October 07th

In the early days of this conflict, our General Secretary and National President wrote to both the Israeli Histadrut and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions to extend our solidarity with their affiliates' members in their darkest hours.

GMB has many members who are connected to Israel and Palestine through family and work ties. As a health and emergency service workers union our members know the physical and mental scars that terrorism and conflict inflict. At least 300 health workers were killed in the first ten weeks of military action in Gaza.

GMB is proud to represent Muslim and Jewish workers here in the UK and our union will always provide a welcoming home to people of different backgrounds and faiths. We will continue to offer practical solidarity to members affected by the conflict and rising racism in the UK, and we can explore where the union can offer further support through training for GMB branches and representatives, including anti-Hate Crime training.

Congress recognises the contributions made by GMB branches and National Office totalling £11,450 for Medical Aid for Palestinians, one of the only international organisations able to provide humanitarian and medical services in Gaza. Congress sends its solidarity to civilians in Gaza and to the medical and emergency service personnel working under incredible risk to save lives.

Supporting human rights and humanitarian relief for Gaza

Effective and prompt access to medicine, medical equipment, power, food, and water in Gaza must be enabled. The UK Government must immediately resume funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), as have Canada, France, Sweden and the European Union.

Congress reaffirms the CEC's 25th October 2023 Statement's call for international law to be upheld in this conflict. GMB has long deplored any action by a standing army or armed group which deliberately targets civilians, healthcare personnel and facilities, or takes insufficient care to ensure their safety (Motion 362: 2017).

Deliberate killing of civilians, hostage taking and collective punishment fall under categories of war crimes and crimes against humanity. We note that allegations of these acts and the responsibility of Hamas and Israeli government leaders for them are being considered by independent international institutions, namely the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

These allegations must be allowed to be investigated fully and freely, with warring parties taking action to ensure they are not complicit in such acts. Israel must comply fully with the binding provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 29th January and 24th May. The UK Government also has a legal responsibility to respect the decisions of the ICC and ICJ and to take action to ensure international law is upheld and applied consistently.

Supporting an immediate and permanent ceasefire

The CEC has consistently echoed the United Nations' calls on Hamas and Israel to bring about a ceasefire. There must be an immediate and permanent ceasefire to prevent further loss of life and we note proposals to this effect made by the UN Security Council on 25th March 2024 and by US President Biden on 1st June.

While any influence GMB has to bring about a ceasefire will be limited, countries that do must take action. The UK does not permit supplying arms to Hamas, but does continue to permit arms sales to Israel through granting of export licences.

GMB opposes the UK Government's decision to continue exporting arms to Israel. We note UN warnings that any transfer of weapons used in Gaza is likely to violate international humanitarian law. Congress has opposed arms exports to Israel in response to previous conflict with Hamas (Motion 222: 2009, Emergency Motion 2: 2010) and the UK suspended exports from 2009 to 2015.

GMB is proudly a union for defence manufacturing workers. Our members predominantly work in shipbuilding and do not work on arms for export to Israel's military. We always work closely with our representatives when issues relating to exports arise and incorrect claims will be directly addressed. The union does not invest in, or hold contracts with, companies involved in Israel's actions in Gaza.

Supporting a just and lasting peace

Securing a just and lasting peace in Israel and Palestine must be an immediate and a long-term priority of the international trade union movement. GMB continues to support peaceful solutions to crises in the Middle East based on socialist values, the unity of working people and rejection of terrorism, imperialism and fundamentalism (Motion 309: 2016).

Peace will not be just or enduring if decades of oppression, inequality and violence are left to another generation of Palestinians and Israelis to overcome. All efforts must be redoubled for a two-state solution that upholds the territorial integrity of both nations and peoples' inalienable rights to self-determination, safety and security. Israel must cease its expansion of illegal settlements across the West Bank and withdraw from occupying Palestinian territory which continues to be illegal under international law.

Congress restates its full support for an independent and viable Palestinian state, which must be recognised unconditionally by the international community including as a full member of the United Nations.

GMB continues to encourage disinvestment from, and boycott of goods of, companies who profit from Israel's illegal occupation, settlement-building and separation wall (Motion 276: 2011). GMB will carefully weigh the evidence against any UK employer accused of complicity and formulate a response in close consultation with our members in those employers.

Trade unions are an essential pillar of a permanent peace settlement. Congress reaffirms GMB's policy for direct engagement with unions in Palestine and Israel.

Against a backdrop of growing threats to democracy in Israel and systematic denial of equal rights for Palestinian citizens, building dialogue with civil society has never been more important. GMB is affiliated nationally to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (Motion 258: 2021) and we support our members' right to peacefully protest in solidarity with the Palestinian people, which is under attack. We also support efforts of progressive groups in Israel such as B'Tselem, Standing Together and Women Wage Peace to unite communities for peace, equality and independence for all.

For a just and lasting peace, GMB Congress calls for:

- An immediate and permanent ceasefire to prevent further loss of life.
- The immediate and unconditional release of innocent civilians held unharmed, including all Palestinians imprisoned without charge in Israel and all remaining Israeli hostages held by Hamas.
- Warring parties to ensure they are not complicit in war crimes, including that Israel complies in full with the binding provisional measures issued by the ICJ.
- Israel and the international community to ensure humanitarian aid is delivered effectively and promptly into Gaza.
- The UK Government to ensure international law is upheld and applied consistently including respect for ICC and ICJ rulings, to also resume funding to UNRWA and immediately stop UK exports of arms to Israel in line with UN calls.
- Israel to cease its expansion of illegal settlements across the West Bank and withdraw from its illegal occupation of Palestinian territory.
- Redoubling of efforts for a two-state solution that upholds the territorial integrity of both nations and inalienable rights to self-determination, safety and security.
- Zero-tolerance of anti-semitism, anti-Muslim hate and any attempts to disguise such racism in support for the rights of Palestinians or Israelis.
- UK Government and the international community to recognise the State of Palestine unconditionally, including as a full member of the United Nations.