

## 850+ UK LAWYERS SAY ISRAEL BREACHING INTERNATIONAL LAW

Belfast, 12 November 2023 –

**More than 850 members of the legal profession - barristers, solicitors, former judges and legal academics** – including many practicing in Northern Ireland today called on the UK Government to press for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the West Bank and to take urgent steps to ensure the UK Government does not violate international humanitarian law or aid or assist its violation by others, steps which they say include immediately halting arms exports to Israel.

The letter sent to the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, and the Secretary of State for Defence, Grant Shapps, which has been signed by over 850 lawyers, including over **60 Kings Counsel, 113 partners/directors, 37 law professors and four retired members of the judiciary**, also reminds the UK government of its legal obligation to act to prevent genocide where there is a risk of genocide occurring.

The lawyers urge the Government to call for an immediate ceasefire, the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance to Gaza, the return of hostages in Gaza, the immediate halt of weapons exports to Israel, and to work towards a just, lasting and sustainable peaceful settlement for all those in the region.

Some of the prominent signatories to the letter have spoken out about their reasons for supporting the initiative.

Brian Fee KC, Former Chairman of the General Council of the Bar of Northern Ireland

*“The suffering being inflicted on civilians in Gaza is simply unconscionable, unjustifiable and illegal. Thousands of innocent victims cannot be regarded as some sort of legitimate collateral damage. It is incumbent on Western Governments including Britain to call for an immediate ceasefire”.*

Professor Phil Scraton PhD, Professor Emeritus, School of Law, Queen’s University, Belfast, said:

*“Clear evidence from Gaza demonstrates a systemic, reckless breach of the Geneva Conventions. It is for democratic states to withdraw semblance of support for Israel’s genocidal invasion, insisting its government ceases military action, abides by the precepts of international humanitarian law and seeks a resolution committed to negotiation and the rebuilding of Gaza.”*

Kevin Winters, Partner, KRW Law, Belfast, said:

*“Irish lawyers have a strong tradition in human rights awareness borne out of decades of legal action on Conflict related issues in Ireland. It is therefore only right that with such heightened sense of empathy we endorse the letter urging the UK to demand an immediate ceasefire. We call upon the Government to decouple itself from an escalating Genocide and to prevent and condemn serious breaches of international law”.*

Michael Mansfield KC, Former Judge on the Russell Tribunal on Palestine, said:

*“The United Nations Secretary General has stated that Gaza is becoming a “graveyard for children”. Figures reported by UN OCHA record that over 4,237 children have been killed in Gaza, and a further 1,350 are missing, believed to be buried under the rubble. Enough is enough. The UK Government must act pursuant to its obligations under international law to stop the slaughter.”*

Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh KC has stated:

*“The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has made clear that “the collective punishment by Israel of Palestinian civilians amounts also to a war crime, as does the unlawful forcible evacuation of civilians” by Israel in Gaza. The British Government is duty bound not to support such serious violations of international law and to do everything in its power to bring them to an end.”*

Other prominent Northern Ireland -based signatories include:

- Desmond Fahy KC Arthur Harkey KC
- Karen Quinlivan KC
- Darragh Mackin, Director, Phoenix Law
- Pádraig Ó Muirigh, Director, Ó Muirigh Solicitors, Belfast
- Professor Aoife O’Donoghue, School of Law, Queen’s University Belfast
- Joseph D. McVeigh, Founding Partner, KRW Law LLP, Belfast; Council member of the Law Society of Northern Ireland

The letter demonstrates the strength of concern amongst the legal profession in Britain and Northern Ireland, and comes at a time where there have been significant developments internationally in calls for a ceasefire.

The lawyers’ letter recalls that the Geneva Conventions to which the UK is a signatory require the State to *“respect and ensure respect”* for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. That means that the UK must not itself violate international humanitarian law and that it must not encourage, nor aid or assist its violation by others. States must also do everything in their power to prevent or bring to an end any such violations of the law by other parties. They must also search for and prosecute those alleged to have committed grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions.

The letter also makes clear that, as a State party to the Genocide Convention, the UK Government is also required to act to prevent genocide where there is a risk of genocide occurring. The letter records the warnings of United Nations Special Rapporteurs that *“the Palestinian people are at grave risk of genocide”*.

More than 250 lawyers signed the original letter on 26 October 2023 when the government failed to engage with the call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the West Bank. This letter has been resent to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, now signed by over 850 lawyers.

The letter has given rise to similar initiatives in other countries, including in Australia where over [300 lawyers have signed a letter to Australian senior government leaders calling for an immediate ceasefire](#)(paywall).

The letter to the Prime Minister, the original letter of 26 October and the list of signatories are attached. The signatory list is being constantly updated.

**For more detail, please respond to this email with a number on which you can be contacted and one of the lawyers involved in the initiative will return your call as soon as possible.**