

Unheeded Ultimatum: Israel's Never-Ending Occupation and Defiance of International Law

One year ago, on 18 September 2024, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted a [resolution](#) calling upon Israel to bring its unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) to an end within 12 months.

Adopted by an overwhelming [majority](#) of States – 124 in favour, 14 against, and 43 abstentions – the resolution affirmed the conclusions of the landmark [Advisory Opinion](#) rendered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 19 July 2024, which found that Israel's policies and practices as well as its continued presence in the oPt are unlawful and must be terminated as rapidly as possible. The General Assembly further demanded that Israel comply without delay with all its obligations under international law, including by withdrawing from the oPt, putting an end to its unlawful policies and practices, returning the property illegally seized since the start of the occupation, allowing Palestinians displaced during the occupation to return to their original place of residence, making reparation, and complying with the [orders](#) on provisional measures issued by the ICJ in separate, ongoing [proceedings](#) instituted by South Africa concerning alleged violations of the Genocide Convention in Gaza.

These legal proceedings and resolutions carry profound significance for the international (legal) order. The ICJ is the [principal judicial organ](#) of the UN whose pronouncements on matters of international law are authoritative, while the General Assembly represents the collective voice of the international community. Both have framed Israel's prolonged occupation of the oPt as a violation of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination as well as of the prohibition of the acquisition of territory by force; identified a risk to the rights of the Palestinian people protected under the Genocide Convention; and imposed specific demands on Israel with a view to terminating its unlawful conduct.

Reality check

Israel has responded to the demands of international law outlined by the ICJ and affirmed by the UN General Assembly with blatant defiance. Far from adhering to these demands, it has only intensified its systematic displacement and

dispossession of Palestinians, entrenching the occupation and further undermining any remaining prospects for realising the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

In the **West Bank, including East Jerusalem**, Israel has cemented its control and oppression of Palestinians.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), since the beginning of the year and as of 15 September, Israeli forces have killed 180 Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and injured 2,341 others, employing excessive force in contravention of the [applicable legal framework](#). An [ongoing](#) operation by the Israeli military in the north of the West Bank has [emptied](#) refugee camps of residents and [destroyed](#) entire residential blocks.

Israeli officials have been advancing the illegal settlement enterprise by approving several [new](#) settlement projects. Construction according to the so-called '[E1 plan](#)' stands to further fragment the West Bank, displace the Palestinian communities living in the area, and further restrict Palestinians' [freedom of movement](#). Israeli authorities continue to confiscate and [destroy](#) Palestinian property for the benefit of settlement expansion.

[Settler violence](#) against Palestinians, their homes, and livelihoods has reached [unprecedented levels](#), with documented attacks perpetrated with the [protection](#) of Israeli forces. In the vast majority of cases, Israeli authorities have [failed](#) to take any meaningful accountability measures.

These conditions amount to a [coercive environment](#) that leads to the forcible transfer of Palestinian communities, a [grave breach](#) of the Geneva Conventions.

Earlier this month, ultranationalist Finance Minister and Minister in the Defence Ministry Bezalel Smotrich put forward a proposal to formally [annex](#) large parts of the West Bank.

In the **Gaza Strip**, Israel has created [conditions of life](#) that threaten the very survival of its Palestinian residents.

After almost two years of hostilities, more than 64,000 persons have been killed and over 163,000 others have been injured according to the [Gaza Ministry of Health](#)

(while [other sources](#) estimate that the actual number of casualties is significantly higher). Much of the built-up area lies in ruins; homes, [hospitals](#), [schools](#), [roads](#), and other [critical](#) civilian infrastructure have been destroyed; and entire neighbourhoods, villages, and towns have been [levelled](#). Israel has repeatedly blocked the entry of humanitarian aid and commercial supplies in contravention of its obligations under [IHL](#) and [ICJ orders](#), depriving civilians of essential items and services. Severe food insecurity prevails across the entire Strip, with hundreds having [reportedly](#) died of [starvation](#), and many more at risk; famine has been [declared](#) in Gaza Governorate. At least 2,256 persons [have been killed](#) seeking aid in Gaza between 27 May and 9 September 2025 – many [reportedly](#) at the hands of the Israeli military.

Amidst these catastrophic conditions, [about 90% of the population](#) has been displaced, often repeatedly, and driven into ever-smaller slivers of land under constant bombardment. According to [data](#) collected by OCHA, as of 17 September, 82% of Gaza is located either in a militarised zone or subject to [instructions](#) by the Israeli military for civilians to leave, leaving nowhere safe for civilians to go. Most recently, in another instance of [unlawful mass forcible transfer](#), the Israeli military [ordered](#) the hundreds of thousands of persons remaining in Gaza City to move south.

The Israeli government has also [on multiple occasions](#) signalled its intention to deport Palestinians from Gaza in what would amount to ethnic cleansing, paving the way for [annexation](#) and the re-establishment of Israeli [settlements](#).

A call on third States

Acknowledging the responsibility of the community of States in ensuring respect for the law, the General Assembly [called upon](#) all States to take concrete steps to address Israel's ongoing presence in the oPt. In line with the ICJ Advisory Opinion, the Assembly urged States to promote the realisation of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, to refrain from recognising Israel's presence in the oPt as lawful, to ensure that they do not provide aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the occupation, and to ensure respect for IHL.

Some States have taken encouraging – albeit slow and insufficient – steps, such as banning or [suspending](#) arms transfers to Israel, [taking steps](#) to [ban](#) trade with settlements, [divesting](#) from companies associated with Israel’s unlawful conduct in the oPt, [imposing](#) sanctions on high-level officials including travel bans and asset freezes, and [closing](#) ports and airspace to Israeli ships and aircrafts carrying fuel or defence materials. However, many more States have neglected their obligations, either failing to take any meaningful action or actively facilitating violations and obstructing accountability mechanisms, including through the imposition of [sanctions](#) against the International Criminal Court (ICC) and [organisations](#) supporting its [investigation](#) into the Situation in Palestine. The IHL Centre notes that the announcement by some States to belatedly [recognise](#) a Palestinian State cannot substitute for concrete measures required of them to uphold international law in the oPt. If Israel is left to continue obliterating Gaza and to expand and entrench its takeover of the West Bank with impunity, formal recognition of Palestine will be cold comfort to Palestinians whose right to self-determination is being eviscerated.

In September last year, the overwhelming [majority](#) of UN member States ‘strongly deplore[d] the continued and total disregard and breaches by the Government of Israel of its obligations’, which ‘seriously threaten regional and international peace and security’. These breaches, and Israel’s contempt for the demands of the UN General Assembly, constitute an act of defiance towards the international community and undermine the authority of international law. They leave the question of Palestine unresolved – a spectre haunting the world’s conscience and hovering ominously over the future of the global rules-based order.