

GAPS Secretariat Statement on October 7th

Today, a year on, our thoughts are with the family of all those killed, the hostages, the detainees, and those forcibly displaced. GAPS continues to stand in solidarity with all those who lost their lives on October 7th and the proceeding days, including in the recent assault on Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. One year has now passed since the beginning of, what the ICJ calls, a 'plausible risk of genocide' unfolding in Gaza and the heightened violence in the occupied Palestinian Territory. As [stated](#) by the UN Chief following October 7, 'one cannot dissociate 56 years of occupation from our engagement with the tragedy that unfolded on that day'. On October 10th, 2023, GAPS released a [statement](#) calling for accountability for Israeli Government actions undermining international law, for the absence of such accountability would directly undermine the entire edifice of international law. Now, a year later in which impunity for atrocity crimes by the IOF (Israeli Occupation Forces) has prevailed, Israel is escalating a regional conflict following attacks in Yemen, Lebanon and Syria. Violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory – including Gaza, the West Bank and East-Jerusalem – has worsened significantly.

It is important to pay heed to the totality of violence enacted by the Israeli Government, including the specific harms and violence against women and children. Women and girls have accounted for over half of all fatalities and an estimated 177,000 women face life-threatening health risks, as per [UN Women's recent Gender Alert](#). Every hour, [two Gazan mothers](#) are killed by IOF attacks. [GAPS member, Action Aid, reports](#) that Palestinian women and girls are facing greater food insecurity, obstetric harms, with the highest health and malnutrition risks occurring during pregnancy, and both Palestinian and Israeli women have reported experience sexual violence and harassment. Care International has [detailed](#) the compounding of 'pre-existing gender inequalities and multidimensional vulnerabilities which have disproportionately impacted women and girls', including disproportionate care burdens for the very young, older people and people with disabilities, who are often unable to flee or to do so quickly.

The UK has fallen short on its implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the wider region. GAPS and its partners have advocated for a consistent application of the UK's commitments to the WPS agenda over the last twelve months. The UK's response has demonstrated inconsistency, which has resulted in an undermining of the UK's reputation on WPS globally. It is creating risks for existing and new partnerships as well as fracturing trust, especially with Women-Led Organisations (WLOs) and Women's Rights Organisations (WROs). The new Government has committed to partnerships with those in the Global South. This must translate into reckoning with the colonial dimensions of the violence and investing in genuine and meaningful partnerships, specifically with WLOs and WROs. GAPS and its members have long held partnerships with Palestinian and Israeli WROs and wider civil society working across communities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel. Direct funding to support a now decimated civil society, especially WLOs and WROs, is essential and must follow and enable the self-identified priorities of these organisations.

GAPS welcomed that the [UK supported](#) the central findings of the Advisory Opinion. However, we were disappointed that the UK did not join the 124 votes in favour. GAPS and 14 UK-based NGOs [published a statement](#) in response to this, urging the UK to join collective action towards ending the illegal settlement expansion and settler violence. This was a critical opportunity for the UK to uphold international law and act upon its role as the penholder on WPS and protection

of civilians. The UK's decision to abstain, ultimately, undermines the right-based international system.

Reflecting one year on, the UK Government must now make provisions to centre civil society voices, specifically Palestinians who are often ignored, to define justice and accountability, and for this to be embedded in any political process and negotiation. This requires all states, including the UK as the penholder on WPS and a leader on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, to stridently uphold international law, enforce its consistent application, and ensure accountability for **all survivors** of gender-based violence. Any considerations of early recovery and reconstruction must have a principled rights-based approach, which consciously includes women, girls and other marginalised groups and guarantees the right to return.

As our Palestinian partner, Women's Counselling for Legal Aid (WCLAC) outlined to the Security Council in 2018, *'little space has been made to integrate Palestinian women's concerns into key political processes, including for achieving Palestinian statehood or for national reconciliation. [...] Palestinian women have not been consulted in shaping political or humanitarian responses in our country and our needs have therefore been overlooked'*.

GAPS reiterates our asks from [The First 100 Days in Office](#), for the UK Government to:

- Immediately suspend all arms sales to Israel.
- Implement an embargo on all goods manufactured and traded by illegal settlements in the West Bank and consider necessary sanctions.
- Release a strategy on how the UK will adhere to and implement the Advisory Opinion of the ICJ and support the ICC and ICJ jurisdiction over all crimes that may have occurred in Israel, Palestine and Lebanon.
- Provide core, flexible and unrestricted immediate emergency funding for Palestinian WROs and CSOs to continue their vital work and rebuild both their workforce and physical infrastructure.
- Leverage the UK's position to facilitate an immediate and long-term combined ceasefire in both Gaza and Lebanon, ensuring that this details an end to the blockade in Gaza.

GAPS Secretariat, 7th October 2024