

Webinar Report: 'Scotland's 2026 Elections: Ensuring Palestine Is a Key Campaign Priority'

12 February 2026



Introduction

This report synthesises the critical insights and strategic proposals discussed during the webinar 'Scotland's 2026 Elections: Ensuring Palestine Is a Key Campaign Priority', jointly organised by EuroPal Forum and the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC) on the evening of 12 February 2026. Chaired by Adam Al-khateb, EuroPal's Scotland Officer, the session convened a panel of prominent political and civil society voices to address the 'stalling of momentum' regarding Palestinian solidarity in Scotland and to determine policy-driven paths forward for the May 2026 Scottish Parliament elections.



Ross Greer

MSP, Co-leader of
the Scottish Green
Party

Lesley Riddoch

Scottish Journalist
& Broadcaster

Sarah McCaffer

Co-convenor,
Scottish Palestine
Solidarity Campaign
(SPSC)

Neil Cowan

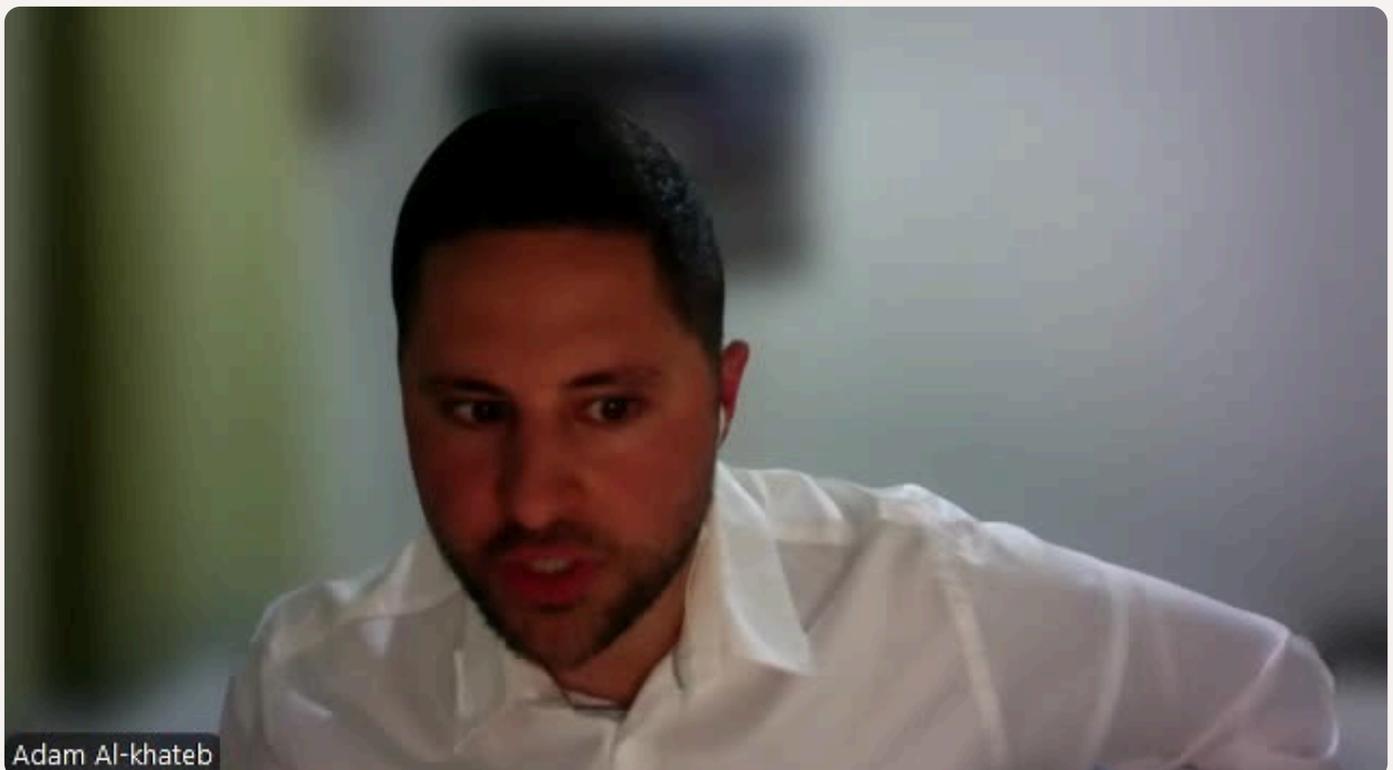
Programme Director
(Scotland),
Amnesty
International UK

Key Takeaways

- **Implementation Gap:** Despite a historic vote for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) in September 2025, there is no evidence that Scottish Government officials have yet been commissioned to develop implementation plans.
- **Media Fatigue:** Campaigners must combat a drop in mainstream visibility caused by 'media erasure' and exhausted international reporting budgets.
- **Hustings Pressure:** Activists are urged to use election hustings to 'pulverise' candidates with specific, non-evasive questions that expose political complicity.
- **Transparency Crisis:** Public bodies suffer from a 'culture of secrecy' regarding the funding of arms companies complicit in human rights abuses.
- **Leveraging Devolved Powers:** Holyrood can bypass 'reserved' restrictions by using its 'bully pulpit' to influence pension funds and amending local government laws.
- **Legislative Reform:** A priority is repealing the 1988 Local Government Act, which currently prevents Scottish councils from adopting procurement policies based on geography.
- **Grassroots Agency:** Solidarity must move beyond symbolism; public institutions will only act when grassroots pressure makes the political cost of inaction too high to ignore.

Adam Al-khateb: Opening Remarks

EuroPal's Scotland Officer, Adam Al-khateb, opened the webinar by framing the current moment as a critical 'crossroads' for the Palestinian movement as the May elections approach. He noted that the political landscape is 'quite fragmented,' specifically highlighting the rise of parties like Reform UK as a factor that makes ensuring the Palestinian issue is not 'sidelined' more vital than ever. Al-khateb emphasised that despite a relative drop in media focus, the genocide in Gaza has not stopped and the situation in the West Bank continues to deteriorate, yet there has been 'no accountability' for these atrocities. He expressed deep frustration with the 'lack of progress' on the boycott and divestment proposals agreed upon by the Scottish Parliament in September, suggesting it is as if the public is 'expected to forget' the ongoing violence.



Ross Greer MSP: Beyond Symbolic Gestures

Ross Greer, Co-Leader of the Scottish Greens, provided a detailed critique of what he termed a 'real stalling of the momentum' following the September 2025 vote for BDS principles. While acknowledging the symbolic victory of Scotland becoming the first country to have its national parliament formally endorse such a policy, Greer was blunt: 'Symbolism in and of itself is not going to save Palestinian lives'. He revealed that Freedom of Information requests showed ministers have 'not even commissioned their officials' to come up with implementation proposals, suggesting the government feels the 'political heat' has reduced due to the so-called ceasefire.



To break this impasse, Greer argued for a highly specific tactical approach to domestic policy. He highlighted the 'Russia precedent' - where the Scottish Government sent an open letter to every business in Scotland urging a boycott following the invasion of Ukraine - as 'lowest hanging fruit' that the government has failed to replicate for Israel. This comparison, he noted, effectively 'traps' political opponents in their own logic of selective international law application. Greer further detailed the necessity of amending the 1988 Local Government Act, a Thatcher-era relic designed to sabotage anti-apartheid efforts in South Africa, which currently prevents Scottish councils from setting procurement policies based on 'geography'.

Finally, Greer addressed the 'divestment' pillar of the campaign, focusing on the billions held in public sector pension funds. While the Scottish Government cannot legally 'instruct' these funds, Greer proposed using the 'bully pulpit' of the administration to reframe investment in complicit companies as a violation of 'fiduciary duty'. By highlighting the legal, reputational, and financial risks of being linked to genocide, the government could nudge funds toward divestment. He also floated the sophisticated legal strategy of using the International Criminal Courts Act to investigate and prosecute Scottish residents who have served in the Israeli occupation forces, thereby bringing the consequences of the conflict into the realm of Scots law.

Lesley Riddoch: Navigating Media Erasure and the Hustings

Journalist Lesley Riddoch focused on the mechanics of political engagement and the reality of 'media erasure'. She observed that while the humanitarian catastrophe continues, it has slipped down the news agenda, requiring activists to employ 'crafty organisation' to force it back into the spotlight. Riddoch noted that major outlets like Channel 4 News, which provided 'incredible coverage,' have seen their 'budgets totally bust' by the costs of long-term foreign reporting. This, combined with competing global crises like Ukraine and the US election, has created a vacuum that she argued must be strategically filled.



Riddoch's strategic advice for the election was for activists to move beyond friendly platforms and 'get off your back sides' to engage in mainstream hustings. She emphasised the need to 'pulverise' candidates with one or two very specific, non-evasive questions - such as the government's stance on Palestine Action activists or the implementation of divestment - that make it impossible for them to offer 'warm words' without consequence. By creating 'flash points' around news pegs like sporting sanctions or potential disqualifications in international football, Riddoch argued that the movement could 'catapult' itself into the headlines.

Her analysis also touched on the need for collective storytelling, highlighting the importance of giving a voice to those directly affected by the genocide, such as Palestinian families who have undergone incredible loss. Riddoch argued that personal testimony, combined with a strategy that targets candidates where they are most vulnerable - at public meetings and in the media - is the only way to ensure the issue remains a priority for the incoming government.

Neil Cowan: Transparency and the Human Rights 'Litmus Test'

Neil Cowan of Amnesty International Scotland delivered a sharp critique of the 'culture of secrecy' that persists within Scottish public bodies, specifically regarding the funding of arms companies. He forcefully rejected the 'dangerous nonsense' that the Scottish Parliament should focus solely on domestic issues like the NHS, arguing that human rights obligations are not a 'zero-sum game' or an 'either-or situation'. For Cowan, the 2026 election is a 'litmus test' for whether the Parliament will move beyond 'pleading neutrality' on international atrocities.

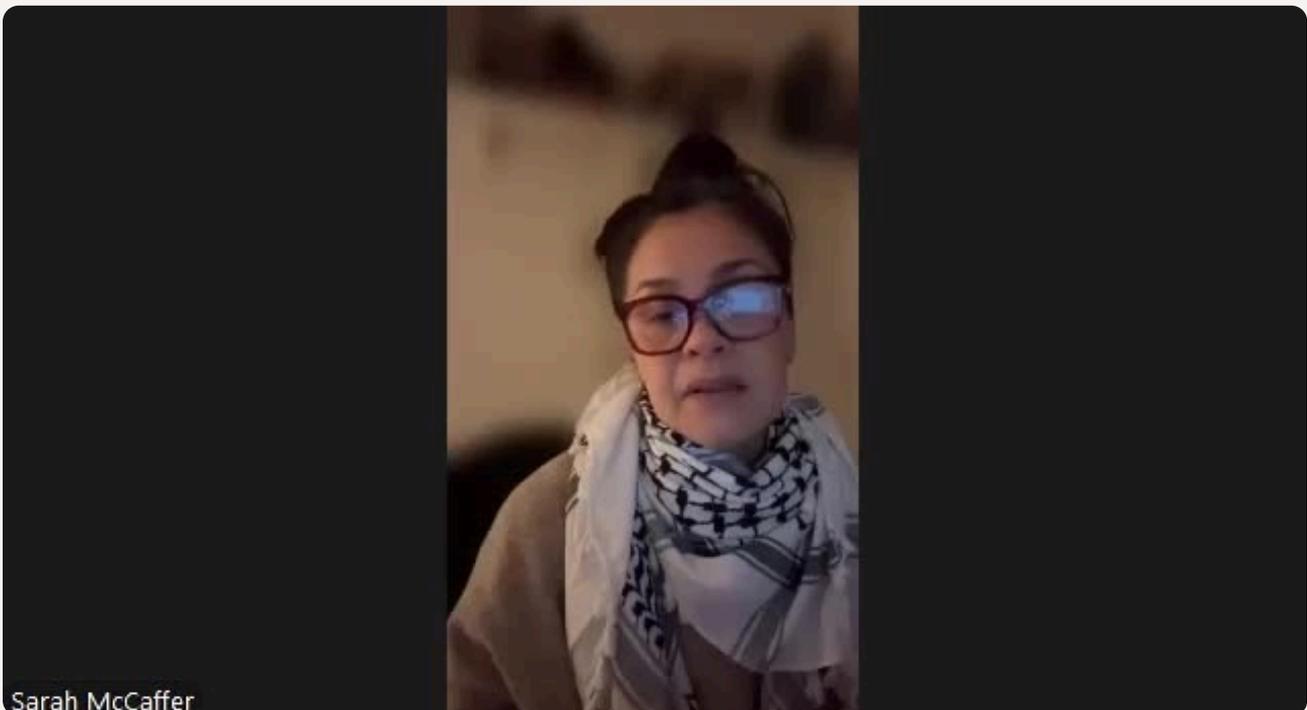


Cowan detailed how current 'human rights checks' for grants to companies like Leonardo - which manufactures jets used in Gaza - have historically been used to provide 'reputational and financial protection' for agencies like Scottish Enterprise, rather than to protect human rights. He noted that as of July 2025, some of these firms had not undergone a check since 2019, even after Israel's genocidal war against the people of Gaza triggered global alarm. While he welcomed the September 2025 commitment to stop grants for firms linked to Israel, Cowan warned that the public still does not know the criteria for these bans or whether firms are still receiving money under 'existing contracts'.

Cowan also positioned the upcoming election as an opportune moment to seek clarity and demand assurance from candidates that these commitments will be maintained and implemented properly. He pointed out that while foreign affairs are reserved, the Scottish Government's silence on issues like the Rosebank oil field amounts to a form of complicity when Scottish resources or legal systems are involved.

Sarah McCaffer: Grassroots Resistance and Institutional Accountability

Sarah McCaffer, Co-Convenor of the SPSC, provided a powerful closing perspective on the necessity of grassroots resilience and the risks of 'institutional capture'. She cautioned activists against being 'placated' by politicians who offer 'warm words' but refuse to use terms like 'apartheid' or 'occupation'. McCaffer's central thesis was that 'solidarity will not be symbolic' and that genuine progress is only achieved when grassroots work is done 'alongside' electoral lobbying, rather than relying solely on elected representatives.



McCaffer's message was one of uncompromising accountability, urging activists to get involved in 'grassroots organising of BDS work' rather than simply relying on candidate promises. She suggested that by working together on joint hustings, the movement can ensure that the presence of large numbers creates a 'pressurised' environment where candidates must answer specifically. Her contribution served as a final call to 'trust our own power' to influence the political landscape through persistent, unyielding grassroots agency that sees real results independently of the electoral cycle.

Conclusion

The webinar concluded with a definitive call to move beyond symbolic gestures and transform recent parliamentary victories into tangible legislative and economic actions. Speakers emphasised that while Scotland's 2025 vote for BDS was a historic first, it remains a hollow victory without official implementation. The 2026 election serves as a critical 'litmus test' to ensure Palestine is not sidelined by media fatigue or political fragmentation.

The final consensus of the evening was that the movement must now pivot from demanding recognition to demanding results, leveraging every devolved mechanism - from pension fund divestment to public procurement reform - to isolate complicity. As the speakers made clear, the true measure of Scotland's solidarity will not be found in the speeches made at Holyrood, but in the courage of the next government to dismantle the 'culture of secrecy' surrounding arms funding and to ensure that public institutions no longer bankroll occupation.

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