

# Interactions *Between* *Ireland* and Palestine

January 2026



## Introduction

The following monthly interactions report for January 2026 provides a comprehensive overview of the current landscape of Palestinian rights campaigns and advocacy in Ireland. This report aims to offer readers a clear understanding of the status of the Palestinian issue and the advocacy movement in Ireland as of January 2026. The information presented is crucial for NGOs, iNGOs, interest groups, private individuals, and all other relevant stakeholders engaged with matters concerning Palestine and Ireland, providing essential insights.

## Government

- On 5 January, Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, alongside six European allies, condemned Israeli legislation designed to dismantle UNRWA. The coalition warned that cutting off water, power, and communications to UN facilities violates international law and defies the International Court of Justice. Beyond defending the UN mandate, the statement demanded an end to the deregistration of international NGOs, framing these organisations as the final safeguard against total humanitarian collapse. The group delivered a sharp legal rebuke, asserting: 'Respect for the privileges and immunities of the United Nations and for international humanitarian law is imperative'.
- On 7 January, it was revealed that Irish imports from the Occupied Palestinian Territories surged to over €396,000 in the first nine months of 2025, already eclipsing the total for the entirety of 2024. While exports to the region have plummeted, the rise in imports - primarily chemicals and machinery - has sparked sharp criticism from politicians like Fine Gael TD Barry Ward, who expressed shock that companies are 'ramping up' trade despite the government's clear signal that such activity will soon be criminalised.

The data has intensified pressure on the government to finally pass the Occupied Territories Bill, which has faced repeated delays and accusations of being 'watered down'. Critics, including Social Democrats senator Patricia Stephenson, argue that the current draft's focus on physical goods is insufficient, as services like tech and tourism account for nearly 70% of trade with the region. With the International Court of Justice ruling that such economic support is illegal, the growing trade figures are being framed by the opposition not merely as a moral failing, but as a direct breach of Ireland's international legal obligations.

- On 13 January, during a visit to the Rafah crossing, Minister for Foreign Affairs Helen McEntee announced that Ireland will allocate €42 million in aid to Palestine for 2026. This package - an increase from the €36 million provided in 2025 - includes €20 million in core funding for UNRWA and €2 million for the Red Crescent Societies. McEntee described the humanitarian situation as 'incredibly stark', framing the unwavering support for UNRWA as a vital lifeline against 'enormous outside pressure' and Israeli legislation designed to restrict the agency's essential services.



- On 22 January, during Leaders' Questions, Tánaiste Simon Harris voiced 'very serious red flags' regarding Ireland's participation in Donald Trump's newly launched Board of Peace. Speaking after the charter's signing in Davos, Harris highlighted the paradox of a peace initiative that includes Vladimir Putin and requires a \$1 billion entry fee, warning that the body appears designed to 'undermine, replace, or usurp' the United Nations. While Taoiseach Micheál Martin initially suggested the government was 'examining' the invitation, the Irish leadership is now pivoting toward a collective European refusal to join what critics have dubbed a 'board of autocrats'. This delicate balancing act reflects Ireland's struggle to defend the UN's primacy as the sole legitimate arbiter of global conflict while navigating the economic pressures of its critical relationship with the United States.



- On 22 January, on the sidelines of the Davos summit, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa met with Taoiseach Micheál Martin to address the escalating humanitarian crisis and financial instability facing his government. Mustafa urged European pressure to halt the demolition of UNRWA facilities and intensified settler violence in the West Bank, while Martin reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to relief efforts and a two-state solution.

## Parliamentarians, Political Parties, and Official/Semi-official Bodies

- On 1 January, Palestinian Ambassador Dr. Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid joined Archbishop Dermot Farrell at the Church of the Guardian Angels in Blackrock for a poignant mass marking the 59th World Day of Peace. Invited as a guest of honour, the Ambassador participated in a service themed 'Towards an unarmed and disarming peace', where the Archbishop underscored that 'when we invest in peace, everybody wins'. The event highlighted the enduring spiritual and diplomatic solidarity between the Dublin Archdiocese and the Palestinian people
- On 1 January, former Basketball Ireland and FAI chief executive Bernard O'Byrne resigned from the board of FIBA Europe in protest against Israel's continued participation in international competitions. O'Byrne, who had previously sought a suspension of the Israeli team following the genocide in Gaza, stepped down after his proposal was rejected by the European governing body. Describing his departure as a 'small gesture' to keep his conscience clear, O'Byrne called on fellow sports administrators to take a definitive stand for Palestine, highlighting a growing rift in international sports governance over the ethical implications of maintaining competitive ties during a genocide.



- On 12 January, local councillors in Drogheda backed a motion by Mayor Michelle Hall (Labour) to declare the town an 'Apartheid Free Zone,' urging a comprehensive boycott of Israeli goods and services. The initiative, which local leaders framed as a necessary stand against 'colonialism and racial discrimination', moves beyond a targeted boycott of illegal settlements to challenge the broader Israeli state framework. While councillors acknowledged the potential for "negative kickback" against Ireland, they argued that the severity of the humanitarian crisis - likened by Mayor Hall to a system even more exclusionary than historic South African apartheid - rendered political neutrality impossible.

The motion received broad cross-party support, seconded by Independent Cllr. Kevin Callan and bolstered by councillors including Pio Smith (Labour), Debbie McCole and Eric Donovan (Sinn Féin), Anne Marie Ford (Fine Gael), and Paddy McQuillan (Independent). Even as they targeted the state's economy, proponents were careful to distinguish their opposition to the Netanyahu government's "expansionism" from the views of the Israeli public.

- On 18 January, Independent Republican TD Brian Stanley urged Taoiseach Micheál Martin to 'stop dancing around' the Occupied Territories Bill and enact the legislation immediately. Highlighting that the Bill has been stalled for eight years despite the International Court of Justice's trade ban mandate, the Laois TD cited the 'murderous' escalation in the West Bank—where over 700 Palestinians have been killed by settlers and military forces in two years. Stanley argued that with 700,000 Israelis now living on 'stolen Palestinian land', the government must prioritise legal action over further diplomatic stalling.

- On 22 January, Palestinian Ambassador Dr. Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid conducted her first official visit to Áras an Uachtaráin to meet with Catherine Connolly, the 10th President of Ireland. Following the meeting, the Embassy of the State of Palestine praised the President's 'warmth and passion' for global justice, noting that her commitment to a peaceful world serves as a vital motivation for their ongoing work on behalf of the Palestinian people. The visit signals a continued strong diplomatic bond between the two nations under the new presidency, reinforcing Ireland's prominent role as a vocal advocate for Palestinian rights on the international stage.



## NGOs – Solidarity groups

- On 4 January, it was reported that Buchra Abdul-Bari, a Palestinian mother whose son Mohammed lost a leg in a tent bombing, described their evacuation to Ireland as a 'golden opportunity' and a 'survival call'. Having endured the trauma of burying her husband alongside her son's severed limb, she expressed profound gratitude to the Irish community, authorities, and hospitals for providing a 'second home' that reflects 'the values of humanity'. As part of a state-backed mission to treat 30 paediatric patients from Gaza, Abdul-Bari's story highlights a poignant connection between the two nations, with her family finally finding respite and reunification within a society she praised for its overwhelming responsibility and warmth.
- On 14 January, a coalition of over 30 Irish organisations, including leaders from Sinn Féin, Labour, and the ICTU, sent an urgent open letter to Keir Starmer warning that three Palestine Action hunger strikers are in 'imminent danger of death'. Signatories included prominent political figures such as Mary Lou McDonald (Sinn Féin), Ivana Bacik (Labour), Roderic O'Gorman (Green Party), Cian O'Callaghan (Social Democrats), and Richard Boyd Barrett (PBP). The group condemned the use of 'broad terrorism laws' to hold activists like Heba Muraisi and Kamran Ahmed on remand for periods far exceeding standard limits.

Invoking the grim memory of the 1981 Irish hunger strikes, signatories - among them Phil Ní Sheaghda of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Zoë Lawlor of the IPSC - pleaded with the UK government to grant immediate bail and avoid further deaths in custody. The appeal also demanded the closure of Elbit Systems' UK factories and an end to the proscription of the activist group, framing the strikers' treatment as a 'cruel and inhumane' suppression of protest against British complicity in Gaza.

- On 14 January, as three Palestine Action hunger strikers reached a critical health milestone, an emergency solidarity protest was held outside the Dáil. Speakers including 1981 hunger striker Tommy McKearney and IPSC chairperson Zoë Lawlor urged the Irish government to pressure Keir Starmer's administration to avoid further 'deaths in custody'. Later that evening, it was confirmed that Heba Muraisi, Kamran Ahmed, and Lewie Chiaramello had ended their strike after Elbit Systems UK lost a £2bn government contract. Activists hailed the Ministry of Defence's decision as a 'landmark victory' for the movement, which had seen Muraisi refuse food for 73 days - surpassing the duration of several 1981 Irish republican strikers.



- On 20 January, it was reported that Irish activist Kevin McGibbon was deported from Israel after being detained while shielding a Palestinian family from settler harassment in the West Bank. Accused of ‘strangling a donkey’ following a non-violent intervention, McGibbon was held without charge and strip-searched before being expelled. He described the move as a political strategy to eliminate international witnesses, noting the grim irony that while he was deported for allegedly harming an animal, the fatal shooting of a Palestinian teenager by Israeli forces on the same day met with total impunity.
- On 22 January, pro-Palestine activists and the group Gaels Against Genocide protested outside Croke Park, demanding the GAA sever ties with sponsor Allianz. The demonstration followed a UN report linking the insurer’s parent company to Israeli military operations, a claim the GAA leadership has dismissed as a ‘sibling company’ connection while citing legal risks for maintaining the contract.

The dissent has now permeated the ranks of the association; Offaly became the first county board to formally oppose the deal, and inter-county players have reportedly considered boycotting media duties in front of Allianz signage. Despite the GAA’s concerns over funding, internal critics like Brian Flynn of Ferbane GAA argue that the organisation must apply the same ethical standards to human rights as it does to its bans on tobacco and alcohol sponsorship.



## Conclusion

January 2026 has witnessed a significant hardening of Ireland's stance on Palestine, transitioning from rhetorical condemnation to tangible diplomatic and grassroots friction. The month was defined by a stark contrast between high-level diplomacy - such as the state-backed paediatric evacuations and the €42 million aid pledge - and the rising frustration over domestic legislative delays. While the government pivots toward a 'peace process approach' to navigate the complexities of the US-brokered ceasefire and the controversial 'Board of Peace', the significant surge in imports from occupied territories has provided fresh ammunition for critics who view this hesitation as a direct breach of international legal obligations.

At the community level, the movement has shifted toward local autonomy and direct action, evidenced by Drogheda's 'Apartheid Free Zone' declaration and the escalating internal revolt within the GAA over the Allianz sponsorship. This grassroots surge reflects a growing impatience with the 'law of the jungle' in international affairs, as local councils and sports figures increasingly implement their own ethical frameworks where they feel national policy has stalled. The resignation of Bernard O'Byrne and the widespread support for the Palestine Action hunger strikers demonstrate that for a significant portion of Irish society, the issue has moved beyond mere solidarity into a matter of urgent personal and institutional conscience.

Ultimately, the month's events underscore Ireland's unique and precarious role as a vocal outlier within the Western bloc. The poignant meeting between Ambassador Abdalmajid and President Connolly, alongside the high-stakes advocacy for hunger strikers in British custody, reinforces a national identity deeply rooted in its own history of anti-colonial struggle. As 2026 progresses, the Irish government faces a widening gap between its traditional diplomatic alliances and a domestic electorate demanding more radical measures, such as the full enactment of the Occupied Territories Bill to include services, ensuring that Ireland remains the most prominent, if not most embattled, European advocate for the Palestinian cause.

@ admin@europalforum.org.uk

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