

# Interactions *Between The* *UK* and Palestine

February 2026



## Introduction

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

## Government

- This February it was revealed that in 2025, Israel welcomed 104,100 British visitors, solidifying the UK as the country's third-largest tourism market despite ongoing regional instability. This growth, which saw international arrivals rise 37% year-on-year, was primarily driven by travellers from Jewish and Christian communities maintaining religious and family ties. At the IMTM 2026 conference in Tel Aviv, Michael Ben Baruch, Director of the UK Ministry of Tourism, emphasised that 'Israel's appeal as a travel destination is undeniable and unbreakable', noting that many British visitors travelled in a 'show of solidarity' attracted by the nation's unique sites and hospitality.
- On 4 February, it was revealed that the UK government's independent review into protest laws initially failed to invite the Palestine Coalition for consultation. The review, led by Lord Macdonald KC, was commissioned by Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood following a pro-Gaza demonstration in Manchester. The coalition, which has organised over 30 national marches, had to proactively seek an invitation after being excluded from the original list of stakeholders, raising concerns over the transparency and fairness of the process.

Critics have labelled the proposed legislation - which includes new police powers to ban protests based on their 'cumulative impact' - as a 'draconian crackdown' on freedom of expression. Highprofile civil society groups, including Amnesty International and Liberty, warned that the government is seeking to shield itself from accountability. The Palestine Coalition maintains that their marches have been overwhelmingly peaceful, with arrest rates lower than those seen at major sporting events or music festivals.

- On February 5, Labour MP Steve Witherden delivered a scathing speech in the House of Commons, expressing his 'extreme concern' regarding the UK Government's decision to allow three Israeli F-35 fighter jets to stop over at RAF Mildenhall while en route from the US to Israel. Witherden accused the government of failing Palestinians and warned against renegeing on arms export controls to secure trade deals, labelling any potential weakening of international law commitments as 'frankly shameful'.



- On 13 February, Home Office data revealed a 660% surge in terrorism arrests following the July proscription of Palestine Action, with over 1,800 people detained in a single year - more than during the entire 'War on Terror' since 2001. Approximately 1,630 of these arrests were linked to the group, often involving individuals such as priests and doctors detained for holding supportive placards.
- On 15 February, it was reported that policing the now-unlawful ban on Palestine Action has cost taxpayers well over £10m, with the Metropolitan Police alone spending £8.73m during just four days of protests. Following a High Court ruling that deemed the group's proscription disproportionate and a violation of free speech, Scotland Yard confirmed it would cease arresting protesters for holding signs of support. While the Home Office - which spent £700,000 defending the ban - intends to appeal, the court highlighted that the "political" use of anti-terror laws was an abuse of power, as existing criminal law was already sufficient to address the group's direct-action tactics.
- On 18 February, Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper addressed the UN Security Council, reaffirming the UK's recognition of the State of Palestine while warning that the ceasefire remains 'fragile'. She outlined a four-point plan for peace:
  1. Decommissioning Hamas
  2. Stable Palestinian governance
  3. Halting illegal settlements
  4. Ending Gaza's humanitarian catastrophe.

Cooper stressed that 'security cannot be achieved by an indefinite or humiliating occupation'. confirming a UK-hosted peacebuilding conference for March to bolster the two-state solution.

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

- In late February it was revealed that over 1,000 UK local councillors have signed a pledge to support Palestinian rights and divest pension funds from companies linked to international law violations. This movement, backed by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Vote Palestine 2026 coalition, aims to make Israel's war crimes and genocide against Palestinians a central issue in the upcoming May local elections. Signatories span the political spectrum, with campaigners noting that the initiative reflects a broad public desire for accountability, drawing parallels to historical boycotts of South African apartheid.

The pledge has created significant political pressure, particularly for the Labour Party, which faces warnings of potential electoral losses due to its leadership's stance. Of the 1,028 signatories, the Green Party leads with 345 representatives, followed closely by 338 from Labour. Other supporters include 104 Liberal Democrats, 38 from the SNP, 17 from Plaid Cymru, and three Conservatives, alongside hundreds of independents and members of local parties.

- On 6 February, it was confirmed that the General Medical Council (GMC) will appeal a recent tribunal decision that cleared surgeon Ghassan Abu Sittah of misconduct regarding his public advocacy for Palestine. Abu Sittah, who has provided reconstructive care in Gaza and Lebanon, accused the regulator of yielding to political pressure from the British government to weaponise medical licensing against him. Despite the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) previously finding no basis for the allegations, this renewed High Court challenge continues a prolonged legal battle that the ICJP describes as a targeted campaign of repression against the Abu Sittah.



- On 13 February, the High Court ruled the UK government's proscription of Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation was 'unlawful' and 'disproportionate'. The court found the ban caused a 'very significant interference' with free speech and assembly, contradicting the Home Office's own policy. While the Metropolitan Police have ceased immediate arrests for supporting the group, the proscription remains temporarily in place as Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood appeals the judgment, arguing the group's actions still warrant a terror designation.
- On 18 February, the launch of the Reform Jewish Alliance and Reform Friends of Israel within Reform UK was announced, sparking a significant backlash from right-wing nationalists against Nigel Farage's leadership. These new groups aim to strengthen ties between the party and the British Jewish community while defending 'Judeo-Christian values' as a bulwark against Islamism. However, their emergence has exposed deep internal fractures, with critics like Connor Tomlinson accusing the party of prioritising a 'foreign lobby' over English national interests. This growing divide mirrors shifts in the American MAGA movement, pitting traditional pro-Israel conservatism against a rising 'Britain First' isolationist wing that views such alliances as a dilution of traditional national identity.

- On 27 February, the Green Party secured a historic first parliamentary by-election victory as Hannah Spencer captured the once-safe Labour stronghold of Gorton and Denton. Campaigning as an avowedly pro-Palestine candidate, Spencer capitalised on widespread angry at Israel's genocide in Gaza and a platform of Palestinian solidarity to mobilise the constituency's 28% Muslim population and younger voters. Her win, which pushed a struggling Labour Party into an embarrassing third place behind Reform UK, signals a major electoral backlash against the government's stance on the conflict and highlights a significant fracturing of the UK's traditional political landscape.



## NGOs – Solidarity groups

- The Index of Repression, launched on 26 February 2026 by the European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) in collaboration with Forensic Architecture, provides the first comprehensive mapping of what researchers describe as a ‘systematic architecture’ of anti-Palestinian repression in the UK. Documenting 964 verified incidents between January 2019 and August 2025, the database identifies a recurring three-stage pattern: initial smear or distortion, followed by institutionalisation through disciplinary or legal processes, and culminating in material enforcement such as arrests, job losses, or event cancellations. The education sector emerged as the most frequent site of these incidents, with 336 cases involving students and staff, highlighting a broader trend where internal or informal acts of silencing often go unreported.

A central actor identified in the Index is UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI), which was linked to 128 verified cases - though researchers suggest this likely understates the true scale of their involvement. According to the ELSC, UKLFI often functions as an ‘initiating’ or ‘escalating’ force, utilising legal threats and formal complaints to pressure schools, universities, and employers into taking punitive action. While UKLFI maintains its interventions are accurate and necessary to combat ‘anti-Jewish or anti-Israel hatred’ and support for terrorism, the ELSC argues these tactics ‘exploit the law’ to create a chilling effect on solidarity with Palestine. This scrutiny has led to further legal challenges, including a formal complaint filed with the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) alleging that UKLFI’s conduct constitutes ‘intimidation dressed up as law’.

- A report by Declassified UK on 14 February revealed that at least 2,069 British nationals have served in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) amidst the genocide in Gaza, a figure significantly higher than previous estimates. Drawing on Israeli freedom of information data from March 2025, the research indicates that these individuals are part of a larger contingent of over 50,000 dual nationals serving in the Israeli military. Amidst Israel's war crimes and the UK's 2025 recognition of Palestine, legal experts and advocacy groups are calling for the Metropolitan Police to investigate and prosecute British citizens linked to atrocities, citing potential violations of the Foreign Enlistment Act and international law.



- On 26 February, it was confirmed that a petition calling for a public inquiry into the influence of pro-Israel groups on British politics has reached the 100,000-signature threshold required for parliamentary debate. The petition raises concerns over 'reported Israeli state-linked and pro-Israel lobbying activity' and its impact on government policy regarding Gaza and the West Bank. It highlights that several members of the Labour cabinet, including Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Health Secretary Wes Streeting, have previously accepted significant donations from pro-Israel figures and groups. This development follows a similar debate on Russian influence held on 9 February, as campaigners demand greater transparency over how such networks shape UK public debate and party policy.

## Conclusion

The interactions between the UK and Palestine in February 2026 reveal a profound and widening chasm between high-level government diplomacy and the domestic legal and electoral reality. While Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper's address to the UN suggests a strategic pivot towards a formal 'four-point plan' for peace and a UK-hosted conference, this diplomatic posture is increasingly undermined by internal contradictions. The government finds itself entangled in 'frankly shameful' optics - such as the stopover of Israeli F-35s at RAF Mildenhall - and a heavy-handed domestic security approach that has seen terrorism arrests surge by 660%. The High Court's ruling that the proscription of Palestine Action was 'unlawful' and 'disproportionate' serves as a critical judicial rebuke, signalling that the state's attempt to use anti-terror frameworks to suppress dissent is hitting a legal ceiling. This creates a volatile strategic environment where the executive branch is attempting to project the image of a 'neutral peacebroker' abroad while facing accusations of 'draconian' repression and the 'weaponisation' of medical and legal licensing at home.

Strategically, the tide of advocacy is shifting from street protests to institutional and electoral leverage, marking a sophisticated evolution in the UK's pro-Palestine movement. The Green Party's historic byelection victory in Gorton and Denton, coupled with the pledge of over 1,000 local councillors to divest pension funds, demonstrates that Palestinian rights have moved from the periphery to the centre of the UK's electoral map.

The emergence of the 'Index of Repression' suggests a move towards data-driven advocacy, mapping the 'systematic architecture' of silencing to challenge groups like UKLFI in the courts and regulatory bodies. Meanwhile, the fractures within Reform UK over the 'Reform Jewish Alliance' illustrate that the Palestine-Israel issue is now a primary fault line in the British right, pitting traditional pro-Israel conservatism against a new 'Britain First' isolationism. As the 100,000-signature petition for a public inquiry into pro-Israel lobbying moves towards Parliament, the UK enters a phase where the transparency of political funding and the legal accountability of dual nationals in the IDF will become unavoidable flashpoints for the Starmer administration.

@ admin@europalforum.org.uk

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