

Interactions *Between* *Ireland* and Palestine

January 2025



Introduction

The following monthly interactions report covering January 2025 provides an overview into the current situation for Palestinian rights campaigns and advocacy in Ireland over the course of January 2025. It is hoped, through reading the report, that the reader can gather an understanding as to where the Palestinian issue and advocacy movement finds itself in Ireland. This information can be seen as vital to NGOs, iNGOs, interest groups, private individuals working on issues pertaining to the Ireland and Palestine, and all other relevant stakeholders.

Government

- On 6 January, it was announced by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that Ireland had joined South Africa's genocide case against Israel, first brought in December 2023, alongside several other countries. Ireland's intervention does not introduce new allegations but focuses on the legal framework, arguing that genocide can be inferred if a reasonable person would foresee it as a likely consequence of actions taken. The Irish government had previously declared its intention to intervene in March 2024, reflecting its growing criticism of Israel's genocide of Gaza.
- On 17 January, the Irish Government announced its endorsement of the IHRA's non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism, despite concerns from human rights organisations that it suppresses legitimate criticism of Israel. The decision is particularly controversial given that Irish politicians, including President Michael D. Higgins, have faced baseless accusations of antisemitism under the IHRA's logic for supporting Palestinian rights. Critics highlight Germany's use of the definition to equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism, weaponising it to silence dissent and racialise opposition. Over 100 civil society groups, including HRW and Amnesty International, have condemned the definition's chilling effect on free speech.

- It was reported on 19 January that the Irish Government, led by Fianna Fáil's Micheál Martin, plans to replace the stalled Occupied Territories Bill with new legislation to prohibit imports from the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Martin stated that the current Bill, introduced by Senator Frances Black in 2018, was considered 'unconstitutional' and required significant amendments. The Bill aimed to ban goods and services from illegal Israeli settlements in occupied territories. Despite initial concerns over EU law, the government sought fresh legal advice after the International Court of Justice's 2024 opinion declared Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories illegal under international law. Pro-Palestine activists are now concerned that the new Bill may be watered down, potentially excluding services from its scope.



Parliamentarians, political parties, and official/ semi-official bodies

- On 9 January, Sinn Féin MEP Lynn Boylan urged the government to pass the Occupied Territories Bill in the first weeks of the new Dáil, rejecting intimidation from Israel and the U.S. She criticised Fine Gael MEP Regina Doherty for backtracking on election commitments, calling it 'shameful' and a 'climbdown'. Boylan stressed that the International Court of Justice's 2024 ruling confirmed Palestine's occupation as illegal and that Ireland has a duty to act. She dismissed claims that the bill violates EU law, citing legal experts, and rejected fears over U.S. anti-BDS laws, stating, 'We cannot claim to stand on the side of international law if this commitment buckles at the first mention of FDI'.
- Speaking to RTÉ Radio One's *This Week* programme on 12 January, People Before Profit leader Richard Boyd Barrett urged the Irish government to pass the long-delayed Occupied Territories Bill, rejecting concerns about U.S. or Donald Trump's opposition. The bill, which would ban the import of goods from illegal settlements, has been stalled since 2018, but Barrett argued that Ireland must not bow to external pressure. He criticised successive governments for inaction on sanctions against Israel and dismissed fears of economic fallout, stating that multinational companies profiting in Ireland are unlikely to leave over a justified stance on human rights.

- On 14 January, a debate took place in Ireland over the Occupied Territories Bill, with Sinn Féin's Matt Carthy advocating for its passage while former Irish Ambassador to the US, Daniel Mulhall, urged caution. Carthy argued that Israel has systematically violated international law, citing illegal occupation, annexation, and collective punishment, yet continues to receive preferential treatment from the EU and Western nations. He maintained that the Bill would be a necessary step in holding Israel accountable and sending a strong moral message. Mulhall, however, warned of potential diplomatic and economic repercussions, particularly with the US, and advised a more cautious approach.



- On Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January, Irish President Michael D. Higgins delivered a keynote speech in Dublin, condemning both the horrors of the Holocaust and the ongoing genocide in Gaza, calling for an urgent ceasefire and humanitarian aid. While his remarks drew criticism from some Israelis accusing him of politicising the event, he received strong support from Irish political figures, including Fine Gael leader Simon Harris.



- On 28 January, Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland, Dr. Abdalmajid, gave an interview with Hot Press, where she dismissed concerns that Israel's decision to close its Dublin embassy would harm Ireland's international standing. She remarked, 'Ireland is strong', and emphasized that 'Ireland has a very good image internationally when it comes to international law and human rights – any country in this world would be proud [to have Ireland's record]. You don't use double standards. You always have a consistent and clear position. Ireland must be proud and confident of what they are doing'.

Dr. Abdalmajid also stressed the importance of Ireland's role in advocating for Palestinian rights, stating, 'We need a strong voice from Ireland within the United States, within the Trump administration. I know that you have strong relations with the Americans, whether on the nation level, on the government level. We need to invest in that to protect the rights of the Palestinians, because we're afraid the Trump administration will take it in a different level of abuse, or take it in a different level of less recognition of the Palestinian rights'.

NGOs – Solidarity groups

- On 6 January, a protest was staged outside the Central Bank in Dublin over its role in approving the sale of Israel Bonds in the European Union. Dozens of participants called on the Bank to stop authorising the sale of these bonds across EU markets. Organised by the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC), the demonstration accused the Central Bank of enabling genocide in Gaza by approving the bonds, which are marketed as supporting Israel's economy and have recently been promoted as aiding the country during the ongoing war.
- On 8 January, it was reported by the Jerusalem Post that Malcolm Gafson, chairman of the Israel-Ireland Friendship League for two decades, was devastated by Israel's decision to close its embassy in Ireland. Gafson, who was in Amsterdam at the time, had previously worked to strengthen Israeli-Irish relations, notably with diplomat Zvi Gabay, who became Israel's first ambassador to Ireland in 1993.

- On 11 January, a group of recently arrived Palestinian refugees, including young children, were welcomed at an All-Ireland club football championship semi-final between Errigal Ciarán and Dr Crokes in Newbridge. The refugees, who fled Gaza due to Israeli attacks, were honoured guests at the match. Pascal Canavan, former Errigal Ciarán captain, and Co Tyrone activist John Hurson, known for his aid work in Gaza, were among those who extended a warm welcome.



- On 15 January, the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) cautiously welcomed news of a ceasefire in Gaza. IPSC Chairperson Zoe Lawlor stated, 'We salute the heroism and steadfastness of the Palestinian people who have endured 15 months of unimaginably horrific brutality at the hands of the genocidal apartheid state of Israel and yet remain proud, dignified, and defiant. We welcome the news of a ceasefire, and hope that it will be a lasting one that allows Palestinians to rebuild their lives and finally achieve freedom. However, Israel's track record suggests that this will merely be a temporary lull before it launches another round of colonial violence against the Palestinian people'.

- On 15 January, prominent voices within the Ireland-Palestine movement reacted to news of a ceasefire in Gaza. KNEECAP, known for their outspoken support for Palestine, welcomed the ceasefire but stressed that Israel must be held accountable, demanding sanctions and prosecution for its actions. 'They've murdered 100,000 people, mostly kids, and left Gaza as an unliveable wasteland', they posted, condemning Israel's actions.

Irish-Palestinian artist Roisin El Cherif expressed deep sorrow for the victims in Gaza, describing the horrors endured by Gazans, particularly the children. 'Grief is the ocean. You are the ocean. Forever Palestine', she wrote, emphasizing the lasting trauma. Izz Cafe, a Palestinian restaurant in Cork, also shared their thoughts, mourning the loss of over 46,000 lives while pledging support for Gaza's long road to recovery. 'Today we stand united with Gaza', the owner stated, highlighting the destruction left in the wake of the violence.

- On 25 January, Irish healthcare workers joined a global movement in Geneva, rallying outside the United Nations as part of the 'White Tent Protest' to demand urgent action for Palestine. Calling for a permanent ceasefire, the release of imprisoned civilians and healthcare workers, and the restoration of humanitarian access, they urged the UN to hold Israel accountable for violations of international law under the powerful message: 'Healthcare is Not a Target.'
- On 25 January, at an event in Dubai, Usman Nurmagomedov defended his Bellator Lightweight World Championship belt against Irish fighter Paul Hughes, who suffered the second defeat of his MMA career. After the fight, Khabib Nurmagomedov, Usman's cousin, expressed his respect for Hughes and thanked Ireland for being a strong supporter of Palestine, saying, 'Don't forget – Ireland is the biggest supporter in the world for Palestine'.

Conclusion

January 2025 marked a critical juncture in Ireland's evolving relationship with the Palestinian cause, with the government, political parties, civil society, and grassroots activists each playing distinct yet interconnected roles in shaping the discourse.

At the governmental level, Ireland's decision to join South Africa's ICJ genocide case against Israel underscored a growing confidence in its international positioning, reinforcing its commitment to upholding international law even as geopolitical pressure intensifies. However, this principled stance sits uneasily alongside the government's endorsement of the IHRA definition of antisemitism—a move that risks emboldening those who seek to silence legitimate criticism of Israel under the guise of combating hate speech. This contradiction reveals a deeper tension within Ireland's foreign policy: the attempt to balance moral clarity on Palestine with the pragmatism of maintaining relationships with more powerful Western allies, particularly the United States.

Meanwhile, the ongoing debate over the Occupied Territories Bill signals both the resilience of Ireland's pro-Palestinian stance and the persistent barriers to enacting tangible policy change. While the government's reconsideration of the Bill reflects the shifting legal landscape following the ICJ ruling, concerns remain that the new legislation may be diluted to accommodate external pressures. The discourse among Irish parliamentarians—ranging from Sinn Féin's unwavering push for the Bill to be passed, to Fine Gael's more cautious approach—reflects the broader political struggle between idealism and realpolitik in Ireland's Palestine policy.

Beyond institutional politics, Irish civil society and grassroots movements continue to assert Ireland's place as one of the most vocal European supporters of Palestine. From protests targeting financial complicity in Israel's war economy to the cultural and symbolic gestures of solidarity at sporting and artistic events, Ireland's advocacy for Palestinian rights extends far beyond governmental corridors. The presence of newly arrived Palestinian refugees at national sports events and the public response to the ceasefire illustrate how deeply the Palestinian struggle resonates with Irish historical memory—linking colonial resistance, forced displacement, and struggles for self-determination.

Crucially, this month also highlighted the growing international recognition of Ireland's stance. The remarks by Palestinian Ambassador Dr. Abdalmajid, as well as Khabib Nurmagomedov's statement, serve as reminders that Ireland is increasingly viewed as a global leader in advocating for Palestinian rights. Yet, as the prospect of a second Trump administration looms, Ireland will face mounting challenges in maintaining its principled position while navigating the complexities of transatlantic relations.

As we move forward, a key question remains: will Ireland's moral leadership translate into substantive political and economic action, or will external pressures temper its ambitions? The trajectory of the Occupied Territories Bill, the government's approach to accountability mechanisms, and the resilience of grassroots activism will provide the answer in the months ahead.

@ admin@europalforum.org.uk

X Twitter

f Facebook

Instagram