

Interactions *Between The* *UK* and Palestine

April 2026



Introduction

The following monthly interactions report for April 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 April 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

- On 8 April, Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper welcomed a two-week ceasefire between the US, Israel, and Iran, describing it as a 'vital step' towards regional stability. The FCDO's primary focus remains the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to restore freedom of navigation and mitigate global economic impacts. While the UK has prioritised 'deescalate and reopen' strategies through international talks, Cooper stressed that the proposed negotiations must lead to a permanent end to hostilities, specifically calling for Iran to cease all 'attempts to block commercial shipping' and for a resolution to the conflict in Lebanon.
- On 10 April, it was revealed that the UK flew a Protector RG1 drone over Baalbek, Lebanon, during an Israeli bombardment that killed at least 303 people. Flight data indicates the drone - equipped for both surveillance and armed operations - circled the area for hours despite Keir Starmer's claims that British involvement in the region remains purely 'defensive'. These actions, occurring amid a breach of the US- Iran ceasefire, have prompted accusations of complicity in 'atrocious crimes' and led the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention to update its Red Flag alert for Lebanon.



- On 12 April, it was revealed that former Air Vice-Marshal Philip Lester has urged Sir Keir Starmer to repair defence relations with Israel to address 'notable gaps' in Britain's air and missile defences. In a report for Labour Friends of Israel, Lester argued that the UK must set aside political tensions over Gaza to learn from Israeli systems - such as Iron Dome and David's Sling - which he deems vital for countering threats from Russia and Iran. He stressed that re-energising this dialogue is essential for national security, suggesting that diplomatic considerations should not prevent collaboration in critical areas like intelligence and counter-drone technology.
- On 21 April, Home Secretary Yvette Cooper was grilled in Parliament over revelations that an Israeli charity, Shivat Zion, is helping British citizens move to illegal West Bank settlements. Independent MP Shockat Adam demanded urgent sanctions after an undercover investigation by Declassified UK filmed the group promoting 'awesome' settlements and suggesting it could benefit from UK Gift Aid. Adam argued that these activities break international law and 'rub salt in the wound' by implicating British taxpayers in illegal land grabs.

The call for action was backed by Labour MPs Grahame Morris and Jon Trickett, who described the facilitation of settlements as 'a crime' and part of a 'process of ethnic cleansing'. While Cooper stated that 'no one should be building illegal settlements', she was criticised for side-stepping the specific request for sanctions against the group. The Charity Commission has since confirmed it is assessing the findings to determine if the organisation's financial links breach the Geneva Conventions or UK charitable regulations.

- On 23 April, reports emerged that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has shut down its international humanitarian law cell - a unit dedicated to documenting Israeli war crimes in Gaza - due to funding cuts. This closure ends financial support for the Conflict and Security Monitoring Project, an initiative run by the Centre for Information Resilience that maintains a verified database of roughly 26,000 incidents. Although the FCDO claims this work will be absorbed by a different internal team, critics argue the move significantly undermines the UK's capacity to independently monitor the situation in Israel-Palestine amidst broader departmental restructuring.
- On 23 April, it was revealed that the Labour government has rejected calls for a public inquiry into the influence of pro-Israel groups in British politics, despite a parliamentary petition gaining over 114,000 signatures. Although the petition met the threshold for a Commons debate, the government stated it has no plans to investigate specific or general foreign lobbying - even as several cabinet members face scrutiny over accepting more than £300,000 in donations from pro-Israel sources. Critics, including petition author Andy Kalil, have dismissed the official response as 'deflection', arguing that the failure to include Israel in recent reviews of foreign interference ignores a significant conflict of interest regarding UK policy in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Parliamentarians, political parties, and semi-official bodies

- On 7 April, it was announced that Newcastle City Council has approved the installation of a permanent memorial for Palestinian civilians in the Civic Centre's Peace Garden. Proposed by Councillor Habib Rahman and funded entirely by the local community, the project-which includes a memorial stone and an olive tree-will be the first of its kind in the UK and Europe. The site will stand alongside existing memorials for the Tutsi, Roma, and Srebrenica genocides, reinforcing Newcastle's 'long- standing tradition of solidarity' and its identity as a 'City of Sanctuary' for those affected by war and violence.



- On 7 April, it was announced that 32 former UK ambassadors and high commissioners have urged the government to take decisive action against Israel's planned E1 settlement, warning it is 'designed to divide the West Bank in two' and destroy any hope of a two-state solution. In a letter to the Guardian, prominent signatories - including Sir David Manning (former ambassador to the US), Sir Peter Westmacott (former ambassador to the US), and Sir Vincent Fean (former consul-general to Jerusalem) - called for a trade ban on settlement products and the suspension of trade concessions with Israel over its 'systemic West Bank annexation'. The diplomats argued that 'rhetorical condemnation' has failed to deter the project and insisted that the UK must warn potential bidders that involvement in E1 will 'endanger their business interests' domestically, ensuring that the 'unlawful occupation' finally faces meaningful consequences.
- On 16 April, it was confirmed that former SOAS student leaders Alexander Cachinero-Gorman and Abel Harvie-Clark settled a legal claim against their students' union after being sacked from elected sabbatical roles in 2024. The pair, elected to lead on welfare and democracy, alleged their dismissal before taking office was due to their 'anti-Zionist philosophical beliefs' and pro-Palestine activism. While the union cited conduct concerns, the activists viewed the settlement as a 'bittersweet victory' and a clear recognition of a 'profound wrong' intended to bypass student democracy.

This settlement follows intense friction at SOAS, including one of the UK's longest-running student encampments and the expulsion of other activists. Protesters have frequently challenged the university's links to Barclays and the Ministry of Defence-leading management to secure High Court injunctions against unauthorised demonstrations. Legal representatives for the pair argued the case highlights a systemic suppression of 'anti-Zionist speech' and trade union activity, describing the ordeal as a symptom of 'institutional anti-Palestinian racism' on campus.

- On 17 April, Westminster Magistrates' Court dismissed a private prosecution by the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) against a British-Israeli reservist as a 'legally flawed' abuse of process. Senior District Judge Paul Goldspring issued a scathing judgment, ruling the case was driven by an 'improper' political motive and facilitated by a lack of candour-notably failing to disclose that the 'partisan' expert witness was an active campaigner within the ICJP's own ranks.

The court found the ICJP misinterpreted laws on foreign enlistment, a ruling UK Lawyers for Israel hailed as a vital protection for dual-national reservists. While the judge condemned the use of courts for 'political posturing', the ICJP defended the attempt as a test of UK accountability for foreign military activity-insisting that legal and ethical concerns remain unresolved despite the procedural dismissal.

- On 20 April, it was revealed that twelve British universities - Oxford, UCL, LSE, KCL, Imperial, Bristol, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan, Sheffield, Nottingham, Leicester, and Cardiff Metropolitan - paid Horus Security Consultancy at least £440,000 to monitor student protesters and academics. The firm, led by former military intelligence officials, conducted secret 'counter-terror' assessments and trawled social media to track pro-Palestine activists and guest speakers. While the institutions defended the practice as 'horizon scanning' for campus safety, the UCU union condemned the expenditure as 'shameful' spying on their own staff and students.



The investigation sparked 'profound legal concerns' over the use of AI to harvest student data, which UN experts warn creates a 'state of terror' among campus activists. Horus, directed by former SAS Colonel Tim Collins - who has previously attributed Gaza solidarity protests to 'orchestrated' foreign campaigns - provided 'bespoke' alerts on protest activity across several cities. Despite institutional claims that these checks are merely necessary due diligence for 'security risks', campaigners argue the systematised surveillance targets those expressing solidarity with Palestine and undermines fundamental academic freedoms.

- On 21 April, the High Court dismissed a human rights challenge against the UK's expansion of live facial recognition, despite revelations that the software is supplied by Israeli firm Corsight AI. The technology- reportedly used by the Israeli military for surveillance and detentions in Gaza-will power an expanded fleet of 50 vans nationwide. While claimants argued the system facilitates 'mass surveillance', judges ruled the policy lawful, stating that privacy risks are 'only minimal' compared to the public safety benefits.

The ruling enables a £20 million rollout to proceed, notwithstanding warnings from Amnesty International regarding the ethics of using technology developed in conflict zones. Campaigners raised concerns over racial bias and Corsight's ties to Israeli intelligence, but the court remained unconvinced that these factors rendered the policy illegal. Policing minister Sarah Jones welcomed the decision, insisting that 'law-abiding citizens have nothing to fear' from the technology's deployment.



- On 21 April, Jason Pearlman, head of the newly formed Reform Friends of Israel, claimed that Israel has committed 'no war crimes' in Gaza and dismissed reports of Palestinian detainee abuse as 'the minutiae of individual claims'. Pearlman, a former adviser to Israel's president, confirmed the group received 'seed funding' following a meeting with Nigel Farage. His appointment alongside strategic director Lois Perry and foreign policy adviser Alan Mendoza, who also leads the militia-linked JNF UK charity-marks a hardline shift in Reform UK's inner circle. Critics argue this growing influence of pro-settler figures represents a deepening alliance between the British far-right and radical Israeli interests.

- On 23 April, the Green Party suspended anti-Zionist activist Tony Greenstein, citing a 'documented history of antisemitism' and an upcoming trial under the Terrorism Act. Greenstein, who joined the party in March 2026, dismissed the 11-1 suspension vote as a 'smear' linked to his support for a motion to define Zionism as racism. While Greenstein claims the party is 'acting on behalf of supporters of genocide', a spokesperson stated there remains a 'clear distinction' between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitic conduct.

NGOs – Solidarity groups

- In April 2026, Riverway Law released an update regarding its case challenging the proscription of Hamas, setting out a more detailed account of the procedural position and the issues now before the tribunal. The update explains that the Home Secretary is required to file reasons and evidence for refusing the deproscription application, including any reliance on 'secret evidence', a step that has been delayed for several months alongside the late appointment of a special advocate. It follows earlier developments in which the appeal proceeded despite an attempt to strike it out, with the tribunal indicating concern about arguments that could restrict open scrutiny on the basis of material not available in the public domain.

Looking ahead, the timetable indicates that a response to the Home Secretary's submissions is expected by late June 2026, with further statements and evidence to be filed by the end of July. Riverway Law suggests the case raises complex and contested questions about the proper limits of executive power, the role of closed material procedures and the extent to which decisions affecting political expression can be justified without full public disclosure - issues likely to have wider implications beyond the immediate parties.

- On 1 April, leading activists Ben Jamal and Chris Nineham were found guilty at Westminster Magistrates' Court of breaching 'repressive' police conditions during a pro-Palestine rally in January 2025. Jamal, director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and Nineham, vice-chair of Stop the War, were convicted of public order offences after attempting a symbolic protest at BBC headquarters to mourn victims of the Gaza genocide. While the judge maintained the restrictions were 'lawful', supporters - including Jeremy Corbyn - slammed the verdict as a 'grotesque' assault on civil liberties and a 'calculated' attempt to criminalise dissent. The pair have vowed to appeal, describing the case as a 'seismic threat' to the fundamental right to protest in Britain.



- On 3 April, over 3,000 prominent Jewish figures - including Sir Malcolm Rifkind (former UK Foreign Secretary) and Lord Michael Levy (former Middle East envoy) - sent an open letter to President Isaac Herzog condemning 'Jewish terror' in the West Bank. Organised by the London Initiative, the letter described settler violence as a 'morally shameful' abomination that appears to be condoned as government policy. Signatories warned that the failure of security forces to protect Palestinian civilians poses a 'strategic threat' to Israel and severely damages the relationship between world Jewry and the state.
- On 10 April, it was revealed that the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and thousands of doctors are demanding the resignation of GMC leadership after the regulator appealed a tribunal ruling clearing surgeon Ghassan Abu Sittah of misconduct. Despite the tribunal finding no evidence of 'antisemitism' or 'support for terrorism' in his writings, the GMC is seeking a High Court review to potentially bar him from practising-a move critics label a 'shameful attempt' to silence a prominent voice exposing Israeli crimes in Gaza. Campaigners argue this 'false and illegitimate attack' is driven by pro-Israel lobbying, undermining the integrity of British medical regulation.
- On 11 April, the Metropolitan Police arrested at least 523 protesters at a Trafalgar Square demonstration for 'showing support for a proscribed organisation'. The activists-aged between 18 and 87- were detained while holding placards reading: 'I oppose genocide - I support Palestine Action'. Despite a High Court ruling in February 2026 declaring the ban on the group unlawful, the Met resumed enforcement under the Terrorism Act. Amnesty International UK condemned the mass arrests as a 'blow to civil liberties' and a blatant attempt by the state to 'criminalise dissent' against peaceful protesters.



- On 16 April, a Freedom of Information request revealed that the BBC's executive committee met with pro- Israel Jewish community groups nine times during the first year of the Gaza genocide, but held only one meeting with a pro-Palestinian organisation. Critics argue this 'disproportionate' access proves senior management is more attentive to the pro-Netanyahu lobby than to those highlighting Palestinian rights. Campaigners claim this imbalance violates the BBC's charter requirement for even-handedness and has contributed to a reporting culture that downplays international legal issues and the scale of the genocide.

- On 23 April, media monitor NewsCord reported that the BBC, Sky News, and the Guardian have systematically dehumanised Palestinian casualties through 'structural patterns' of biased framing. Analysing over 11,000 excerpts, the study found these outlets frequently obscure Israeli accountability- notably via the BBC's use of passive voice in 80% of sentences regarding Palestinian deaths-while disproportionately humanising Israeli captives over Palestinian detainees. With Sky News giving nearly double the word count to Israeli perspectives, campaigners argue this 'systemic bias' serves to normalise atrocities and legitimise a 'long, bloody genocide' by minimising Israel's responsibility.
- On 24 April, 132 prominent figures - including Greta Thunberg, Sally Rooney, and Judith Butler - signed a letter to the Court of Appeal protesting the proscription of Palestine Action. This intervention, coordinated by Defend Our Juries, challenges the government's attempt to reinstate a ban previously deemed unlawful by the High Court. By declaring 'I support Palestine Action', these signatories have joined thousands of others in risking arrest to highlight what they describe as the arbitrary and discriminatory nature of UK terror laws. The letter arrives as a critical test case for freedom of expression, coinciding with the Court of Appeal's hearing on the matter.
- On 27 April, the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians urged the British government to sanction 62 Israeli lawmakers following the introduction of a discriminatory death penalty law targeting Palestinians. The advocacy group argued that the legislation - which allows for executions by a simple majority - violates international human rights standards and entrenches an apartheid judicial system. By submitting these recommendations to the Foreign Office, the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians is calling for a 'preventative' use of the UK's sanctions framework to hold those responsible for these legal escalations accountable.

Conclusion

The events of April 2026 highlight a growing gap between the UK government's official actions and the views of a vocal section of the public. While ministers have focused on practical goals - like protecting global trade routes and strengthening military ties - they have also shut down units designed to monitor war crimes and rejected calls to investigate political lobbying. This suggests a government that is prioritising 'business as usual' and national security over the demand for transparency and humanitarian accountability. By pulling back from independent investigations, the state is trying to manage the conflict as a strategic issue rather than a moral one, even as its own drones continue to circle over the region.

At the same time, the Palestinian issue has sparked a much larger debate about freedom and fairness within the UK. From mass arrests in London to universities spying on their own students, the government's response has turned peaceful protest into a major legal battleground. This is no longer just a debate about foreign policy; it is a test of British civil liberties. As high-profile figures, lawyers, and local councils push back through the courts and public memorials, they are demanding that international law be applied to the UK's allies. This has created a tense environment where the government's push for closer defence links is constantly clashing with a public movement determined to hold the state to account.

@ admin@europalforum.org.uk

X Twitter

f Facebook

Instagram