

Interactions *Between* *Ireland* and Palestine

May 2026



Introduction

The following monthly interactions report for May 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 May 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 11 May, Irish Foreign Minister Helen McEntee, speaking ahead of the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels, stated that EU nations cannot continue to be 'bystanders' regarding the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza and escalating violence in the West Bank. McEntee strongly advocated for suspending the trade elements of the Israeli-EU Association Agreement, arguing that treating settlement goods with trade tariffs improperly legitimises what international law deems entirely illegal. Her calls for decisive regional accountability coincided with an announcement from French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot that the EU had officially agreed to a new round of sanctions targeting extremist Israeli occupiers and supporting organisations. \
- On 19 May, Taoiseach Micheál Martin condemned Israel's detention of twelve Irish citizens aboard a Gaza-bound aid flotilla as 'wrong' and 'unacceptable', asserting their right to highlight the 'shocking' humanitarian crisis. The 60-vessel convoy, carrying food and medical aid, was intercepted by armed commandos in international waters. Tánaiste Simon Harris declared the detentions a breach of international law, while Foreign Minister Helen McEntee demanded the immediate release of the activists, who included Dr Margaret Connolly, sister of Irish President Catherine Connolly. While opposition leaders urged the Government to take immediate punitive action, Martin noted that unilateral measures like the Occupied Territories Bill would not stop such humanitarian missions, whilst the UN simultaneously highlighted the catastrophic living conditions and failing waste infrastructure affecting Gaza's 2.1 million displaced population.



- On 21 April, Irish Foreign Minister Helen McEntee urged the European Union to suspend its agreement with Israel - or at least its trade provisions - citing clear violations of international law and human rights. Speaking in Luxembourg alongside allies from Spain and Slovenia, McEntee argued that the bloc must uphold its 'fundamental values' in response to an 'unprecedented and unacceptable' escalation of violence in the West Bank and the introduction of a controversial death penalty bill against Palestinian hostages. She noted a growing 'dissatisfaction and annoyance' among EU leaders regarding Israeli policy, suggesting that the current situation requires a collective European response to ensure that trade partners remain compliant with global human rights obligations.

- On 26 May, the Irish Government faced intense criticism during Dáil Leaders' Questions over its revised Israeli Settlements (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill 2026, with Opposition leaders accusing the Cabinet of 'gutting' the original legislation. Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald and People Before Profit TD Richard Boyd Barrett slammed the decision to exclude intangible services, such as tech and IT, arguing it hollowed out the bill drafted by Senator Frances Black and ignored ICJ rulings. Taoiseach Micheál Martin defended the goods-only restriction, maintaining that banning services is 'impossible to implement' and that wider unilateral trade sanctions fall under EU competency. He further justified the omission by stating he must protect approximately 250,000 multinational-supported jobs in Ireland from potential US backlash, while reiterating Ireland's existing leadership in recognising Palestinian statehood.
- On 27 May, Irish Foreign Minister Helen McEntee announced that the Government is progressing with its Israeli Settlements (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill 2026, aiming to pass the legislation by mid- July. The move reflects Dublin's intensifying criticism of Israeli policies and a surge in West Bank settler violence, which McEntee argued shows the Israeli government has 'no desire' for a peaceful solution. Despite facing intense pressure from international business groups, lawmakers in the US Congress, and strong opposition from Israel, Ireland is moving forward independently. This follows warning mechanisms initiated in late 2024 to impose economic measures over continued settlement expansion, consolidating Ireland's position as one of the most vocal European critics of Israel's military campaign.

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

- On 5 May, it was reported that the Palestinian ambassador to Ireland, Dr Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid, received a warm standing ovation from students and staff during a historic visit to Gaelcholáiste Cheatharlach in Carlow. The event was entirely organised by a third-year student and his classmates as part of a classroom-based assessment. Dr Abdalmajid addressed the entire student body on the history of Palestine alongside the deep-seated historic connections between Ireland and Palestine. School principal Orlagh Ní Fhaoláin noted that the ambassador was visibly overwhelmed and emotional due to the immense solidarity displayed by the young community, marking a highly memorable occasion for the school.
- On 11 May, the public broadcasters of Ireland (RTÉ), Spain (RTVE), and Slovenia (RTV) announced they would not broadcast the 70th anniversary Eurovision Song Contest, formalising a five-country television boycott over Israel's participation. Pulling out alongside the Netherlands and Iceland, the broadcasters replaced the typical coverage with alternative formatting, such as Slovenia's 'Voices of Palestine' series and RTÉ's scheduling of a 'Father Ted' special during the grand final. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) faced intense criticism from organisations like Amnesty International, which labelled the decision not to suspend Israel a display of blatant double standards compared to Russia's swift exclusion.

- On 14 May, Sinn Féin spokesperson on Foreign Affairs, Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire TD, demanded an urgent explanation from the Government following disclosures that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment had sanctioned €20 million worth of dual-use technology exports to the IDF and Israeli Defence Ministry in 2024. Ó Laoghaire branded the approvals 'utterly appalling and reckless', arguing they left Ireland complicit in what he termed a horrific genocide in Gaza. He heavily criticised the coalition parties for permitting the trade of dual-use technology during the height of the military campaign and questioned why the practice was allowed to continue until it was eventually halted in 2025, accusing the state of delaying promised measures like the Occupied Territories Bill.



- On 15 May, Seán Farrell, CEO of Trócaire, published an urgent letter in the Irish Times warning that the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is dangerously fading from the global news cycle. Farrell noted: *'This week, Trócaire's humanitarian response partner in Gaza reported that children are waking screaming in overcrowded tent camps as rats bite their fingers and toes while they sleep beside piles of garbage and sewage. Families who have already lost homes, loved ones and any sense of safety are now battling infestations and disease in conditions unfit for human survival. Our medical experts warn that the collapse of waste management since October 2023 has created a public health disaster. Flies and rodents are spreading hepatitis A, severe diarrhoeal diseases and potentially deadly infections, including leptospirosis and rat-bite fever. Doctors on the ground say they are treating rodent-related incidents daily, even before the height of summer arrives.'*
- On 18 May, Ireland's newly elected President, Catherine Connolly, expressed immense pride and deep concern for her sister, Dr Margaret Connolly, who was among the Irish activists detained at sea by Israeli naval forces. The interception occurred in international waters south of Cyprus as the Global Sumud Flotilla attempted to breach the maritime blockade to deliver food and medical aid to Gaza. In a pre-recorded video released by the campaign, Dr Connolly stated she was being 'held illegally' and declared the Palestinian cause to be 'the moral compass of our time'. The high-profile detention coincided with President Connolly's official three-day state visit to the UK and threatened to further strain diplomatic relations between Dublin and Israel, following the closure of the Israeli embassy in Dublin.



- On 27 May, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) strongly challenged the Government's revised trade restrictions, stating there is 'no legal basis' for excluding commercial services from the upcoming Occupied Territories Bill. While IHREC Chief Commissioner Liam Herrick welcomed the commitment to introduce the legislation before the July summer recess, he argued that an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice unequivocally mandates states to prohibit all forms of trade supporting the occupation. Herrick rejected the Taoiseach's justification that a services ban would endanger 250,000 domestic jobs, pointing out that Ireland has previously taken significant diplomatic risks, such as demanding a suspension of the EU-Israel trade agreement, without suffering economic consequences.



- On 27 May, a delegation of DUP politicians met with the Parades Commission to express severe concerns regarding an upcoming June 6 Palestinian solidarity march organised by the Irish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC). The planned route from Lurgan to Omeath passes through the quiet rural community of Scarva, a location DUP MLAs Diane Dodds, Jonathan Buckley, and Diane Forsythe argue has no genuine local connection to the cause. Citing significant disruption and public disorder during a similar event the previous year, the politicians urged the Commission to place strict restrictions on the 'deliberately provocative' parade to protect community relations, while a counter-application was submitted by the Scarva Concerned Residents group.

- On 29 May, former President of Ireland Michael D Higgins delivered a powerful address at the launch of a policy paper by the Ireland Palestine Alliance, Sadaka, explicitly using the word 'genocide' to describe the situation in Gaza due to the 'elimination of a people, their culture, their memory, their civilisation'. Ahead of Ireland's upcoming Presidency of the European Union, Higgins asserted that the state must 'recover a moral significance' and actively hold fellow EU members accountable to the UN charter and human rights conventions. He dismissed concerns over potential economic costs as 'exaggerated', arguing that the moral instincts of the public should be the dominating force guiding Irish foreign policy.

NGOs – Solidarity groups

- On 7 May, the 'Stop the Game' campaign, organised by Irish Sport for Palestine, intensified public pressure by demanding that the Republic of Ireland national football team boycott its upcoming autumn Nations League fixtures against Israel. An open letter addressed to the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) drew signatures from prominent sporting and cultural figures, including former manager Brian Kerr, Louise Quinn, and the musical acts Fontaines D.C. and Kneecap, asserting that sporting fixtures must not normalise actions described as apartheid and genocide. Despite an internal poll revealing that 76% of football fans opposed playing the matches, and a previous FAI general assembly vote urging UEFA to suspend Israel, both Taoiseach Micheál Martin and FAI Chief Executive David Courell maintained the matches should proceed, citing the complex intersection of sports and politics alongside the heavy risk of severe international competition bans for Irish football.
- On 12 May, the advocacy group Sadaka - The Ireland Palestine Alliance launched a major policy paper titled 'Beyond Words: Strategic Unilateral Measures for Ireland in Response to Genocide in Gaza'. The document serves as a blueprint for concrete domestic and foreign policy actions to hold Israel accountable under the Genocide Convention, arguing that Ireland is currently failing its international obligations as a third-party state. To bypass stalled EU consensus, the paper outlines critical unilateral steps, including an immediate end to dual-use technology export licenses for the Israeli military, closing Irish airspace to weapons trans-shipments, and enacting an un-compromised version of the Occupied Territories Bill covering both goods and services.



- On 16 May, Irish Eurovision champion Charlie McGettigan joined forces with ActionAid Ireland to condemn Israel's participation in the 2026 Eurovision contest, aligning with Ireland's official decision to withdraw from the competition alongside Spain, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Iceland. Both McGettigan and ActionAid CEO Karol Balfe criticised the event's organisers for hypocrisy, noting that Russia was excluded over the Ukraine invasion while Israel remains included despite a '60-year-long illegal occupation'. In lieu of the broadcast, the charity successfully mobilised the public to boycott the finals in Vienna by hosting alternative Palestinian solidarity events under the hashtag #MyEuroVisionIs, whilst renewing calls for the Irish Government to pass the stalled Occupied Territories Bill.

- On 16 May, thousands of demonstrators joined an Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) march from the Garden of Remembrance to Leinster House in Dublin to commemorate the 78th anniversary of the Nakba. IPSC Chair Zoë Lawlor heavily criticised the Irish Government and Western allies for complicity in what she described as an engineered, 'slowed-down genocide', demanding the total implementation of the Occupied Territories Bill and a sports boycott against Israel by the FAI. The mobilisation featured emotional testimony from Palestinian journalist Hamza Salha, a survivor of a 2023 airstrike, and concluded with a call from People Before Profit TD Richard Boyd Barrett for mass public attendance at an upcoming Dáil vote on an all-party sanctions bill.
- On 23 May, eleven Irish activists with the Global Sumud Flotilla returned to Dublin Airport via Turkey after their 54-boat aid fleet was intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters near Cyprus. Their return sparked political friction as opposition politicians, notably Richard Boyd Barrett of People Before Profit, accused the coalition government of 'cynical gaslighting' and 'duplicity' for defeating the Sanctions on Israel Bill immediately after publicly condemning the activists' detention. Tensions were further heightened by reports from returnees regarding torture on Israeli 'prison ships', coupled with a video posted by Israel's National Security Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, showing himself goading the bound detainees.

- On 28 May, Irish football supporters disrupted an international friendly match against Qatar at the Aviva Stadium by throwing dozens of tennis balls onto the pitch. Organised by 'The League of Ireland fans for Palestine', the 'Stop the Game' protest was specifically aimed at pressuring the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) to cancel its two upcoming autumn UEFA Nations League fixtures against Israel. The demonstration led to two separate multi-minute stoppages in the first half. While Ireland's manager, Heimir Hallgrímsson, expressed frustration over the disruption to the sport, he explicitly stated his respect for the fans' right to protest. The incident underscored escalating national pressure, which has included political demonstrations at the Dáil, despite the FAI's warnings about potential international competition bans if they boycott.



Conclusion

The interactions throughout May 2026 reveal a profound chasm between the Irish state's rhetorical condemnation of Israel and the concrete actions demanded by civil society. While the Government condemned the interception of the Global Sumud Flotilla and pushed for EU-wide settler sanctions, it faced intense backlash for voting down an all-party sanctions bill and 'gutting' the Occupied Territories Bill by excluding commercial services. This domestic friction was further exacerbated by revelations regarding €20 million in dual-use technology exports to the IDF, alongside robust frameworks from former President Michael D Higgins and the advocacy group Sadaka urging the state to regain its 'moral significance'.

Simultaneously, grassroots solidarity groups and cultural figures bypassed state hesitation to enact their own forms of civil accountability. This bottom-up mobilisation manifested in RTÉ boycotting the Eurovision Song Contest and football fans disrupting an international friendly against Qatar to protest upcoming matches against Israel. However, the movement also faced local resistance, such as the DUP's push to restrict an upcoming Irish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) march in Scarva. Ultimately, May 2026 underscored an Irish activist sphere moving at a far faster pace than a government attempting to balance international legal rhetoric with its multinational economic interests.

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