

Foreign Office faces demand for sanctions against Israeli ministers facing West Bank torture claims

Lawyers instructed by Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (“AOHR UK”) have today written to David Cameron requesting that he apply Magnitsky sanctions against Israel’s Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich, and Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir. The letters state that the ministers should be designated as ‘involved persons’ under the UK’s Global Human Rights Sanctions, or *Magnitsky*, sanctions regime for involvement in serious violations of basic human rights. They demonstrate that the Ministers have been involved in inciting murder and other extreme human rights abuses for over 20 years and this has accelerated since 7 October 2023.

Both Ministers lead extreme far right political parties in Israel and hold senior offices of state. As Minister of Finance and head of the Defence Ministry’s Civil Administration, Bezalel Smotrich is responsible for settlement planning, construction, and enforcement against illegal settlements in the West Bank. He has incited violence and actions overseeing the unlawful destruction of civilian property in the West Bank well before October 2023.

Following the events of October 7, Smotrich has been using his position and has been heavily involved in the government’s decisions regarding the ongoing attacks on the Gaza Strip, tightening the siege on it, and preventing the entry of fuel supplies. Smotrich is reported as saying *“We need to deal a blow that hasn’t been seen in 50 years and take down Gaza.”* He proposed the creation of “sterile security zones” in the Occupied West Bank to “prevent Arabs from entering”.

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The letter asking for sanctions against Itamar Ben-Gvir describes his repeated incitement, promotion and support for the torture and murder of Palestinians and Arabs. Palestinian prisoners released on 25 November as part of the hostage/prisoner swap reported being beaten and tortured in prison and witnessing other prisoners being tortured to death in prison. This is consistent with Amnesty International's report of 21 September 2023 on the conditions of Palestinian prisoners. As Minister for National Security, Ben-Gvir is responsible for the Israel Police and Prison Service.

Ben-Gvir advocates the expulsion of Arabs and Palestinians. On 20 November 2023, he introduced a proposed law to introduce the death penalty for Palestinians (only). The letter refers to his convictions for sedition, membership of a terrorist group and incitement to racism.

M Jamil, chairman of AOHR UK, said: *"For once, the British Foreign Minister David Cameron must prove that the Government's foreign policy on Palestinians has a moral dimension. This could only be done by implementing the laws approved by the Parliament to deter two people who have been proven to pose a threat to the rights of the Palestinians, and to peace and security in the Middle East"*.

Sue Willman, solicitor at Deighton Pierce Glynn, said: *"The overwhelming evidence against Smotrich and Ben Gvir is difficult and painful reading. The UK Government has an opportunity here through the Magnitsky sanctions regime to take action against those individuals who have committed the most extreme human rights abuses and hate crimes"*.

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Note to editors

- AOHR UK, is a non-governmental organisation focused on promoting human rights in the Arab world; AOHR UK represents British families based in the UK

who have lost relatives in Gaza and who are waiting for news of survivors trapped there

- The UK operates global anti-corruption sanctions under the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018. Such regimes, which exist in the US, EU and around the world, are named *Magnitsky* after the Russian anti-corruption lawyer who was tortured and murdered in a Russian jail. See further <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-sanctions-relating-to-global-anti-corruption>
- AOHR has instructed solicitors Sue Willman and Ahmed Ali of Law firm, [Deighton Pierce Glynn](#) (DPG)
- A separate letter requesting sanctions against members of the Israel War Cabinet, including Benjamin Netanyahu, was sent to the FCDO on 29 November 2023