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## Webinar- Ending Arms Trade to Israel & Protecting Humanitarian Workers

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK ([AOHR UK](https://www.aohr.org.uk)) organised a webinar on Monday, April 8, entitled "[Ending Arms Trade to Israel & Protecting Humanitarian Workers](#)". The event focused on the implications of these acts for global humanitarian efforts, the international community's role in perpetuating such violence through arms trade, and strategic measures to prevent future atrocities.

The webinar featured a panel of esteemed speakers, moderated by activist **Insiya Raja**, who led engaging discussions on the complexities of Gaza's humanitarian crisis and the collaborative measures needed to remedy this dire situation.

The event aimed to unite global voices to examine pressing issues and formulate effective strategies for advocacy and support. Among the distinguished speakers were Chris Gunness- Former Chief Spokesperson for UNRWA, Dr. Lola Bañon – Professor of Journalism in the Department of Philology and Communication at Valencia University, Prof. S. Michael Lynk – Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Dyab Abou Jahjah – President of the March 30 Movement.

In his contribution , Chris Gunness, the former Chief Spokesman for UNRWA, delivered a stirring speech that underscored the profound discrepancies and perceived injustices within UK governmental policies, particularly in the wake of Israeli attacks



on foreign aid workers in Gaza, including a tragic incident involving three Britons as part of the World Central Kitchen convoy. Guinness criticised the UK government for its apparent shift in approach—motivated, he suggests, by the deaths of its nationals—while overlooking the larger-scale tragedy of Palestinian casualties, a criticism laced with disappointment at his own government's reaction.

Guinness detailed the coordination between aid organisations and the Israeli military, asserting that the Israeli forces were well-informed of the convoy's specifics down to the precise GPS coordinates, making the triple strike on the convoy appear far from accidental. This incident, he argued, exemplifies a broader issue of accountability and justice, which has not only triggered a media frenzy in the UK but has also sparked a debate on arms embargoes, military supplies, and the broader UK-Israel relationship.

The response within the UK was significant, with notable figures and media outlets calling for a reevaluation of the UK's military support to Israel. Guinness pointed to an explosive interview by a Tory figure, Alan Duncan, who criticised the influence of pro-Israel factions within the government, urging for a suspension of military assistance and sales to Israel. This was amid revelations that the UK's own legal advisors acknowledged potential violations of international humanitarian law by Israel, an admission that added urgency to calls for policy reevaluation.

Guinness also highlighted a divide within the British Labour Party over its stance on Palestine, suggesting a broader reflection on UK foreign policy and its implications for international law and justice. He criticised the swift dismissal by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu of officers involved in the convoy attack as insufficient for true accountability, reflecting on the broader implications for international justice, ceasefire negotiations, and the legality of military actions.

Concluding his address, Guinness lamented the drastic reduction in UK aid to UNRWA and called for a steadfast commitment to accountability for all, not just British nationals. He emphasised the importance of remembering the sacrifices of aid workers and



pressed for an unbiased investigation into every death, underscoring the UK's historic responsibility and its role in fostering justice and accountability on the international stage.

Dr. Lola Baon concentrated on the dire situation in Gaza in her speech, which was characterised by the systematic targeting and killing of Palestinian civilians and aid workers by Israeli strikes. She pointed to the unbearable level of destruction brought about by these actions and highlighted the incident involving World Central Kitchen employees as part of a wider pattern of violence against humanitarian efforts in the region.

Highlighting the grim reality faced by UNRWA staff, with 196 colleagues killed since the onset of the war, Bañon revealed the deeply personal toll this violence has taken on the community of aid workers, composed of doctors, teachers, engineers, and other essential personnel. She criticised the significant disparity in media attention and political response to the deaths of Western versus Palestinian victims, suggesting a dehumanising bias in the portrayal of Palestinians within Western media narratives.

Bañon pointed to the harrowing casualty figures, with tens of thousands of children, journalists, and medical workers among those killed, to emphasise the indiscriminate nature of the violence and the urgent need for accountability. She criticised the international community's and media's differential treatment of victims based on their nationality, advocating for a universal recognition of the humanity and suffering of all individuals caught in the war.

The speech also touched on the need for accountability for the numerous lives lost and the targeting of aid distribution centres, emphasising the psychological impact of targeting healthcare workers and facilities. Bañon criticised the lack of protection for those delivering aid and civilians, deeming it unacceptable that the Israeli Forces would not be aware of the identities of those in targeted vehicles, given the coordination of movements through the United Nations.



Bañon proposed that addressing the cultural problem and perception that normalise double standards in Western media's view of Palestinians is crucial. She advocated for quality journalism that adheres to concrete standards, including giving a voice to primary sources—particularly Palestinians, whose perspectives and voices are often marginalised in media coverage.

She argued for the sovereignty of Palestinians in determining their destiny and stressed that recognising the humanity of victims is essential for fair action. Bañon concluded her address by calling for a cut in the commerce of arm trades to Israel and emphasised the role of journalism in fostering a more equitable and just representation of the war.

Prof. S. Michael Lynk, the Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, gave a powerful speech emphasising the critical intersection of halting arms trade with Israel and protecting humanitarian aid workers in Gaza. Lynk highlighted the stark irony seen in a photograph of U.S. humanitarian aid being dropped into Gaza against the backdrop of destruction from the Israeli strikes, underscoring the contradiction of the U.S. supplying both humanitarian aid and the weapons fuelling Israel's military assault.

Lynk condemned the billions of dollars funnelled into Israel for military aid by global north countries, which he argued supports a genocidal war against Gaza. He criticised the inefficiency and danger of parachute aid drops compared to utilising existing land routes for aid delivery, blocked due to lack of pressure on Israel to accept a ceasefire or allow sufficient aid into Gaza as demanded by international bodies.

The focus of Lynk's remarks was on the international human rights community's growing demand for an immediate and complete stop to weapons transfers to Israel. He cited statements from over 40 UN special rapporteurs and human rights experts,



and rulings from the International Court of Justice and the Dutch Court of Appeal, all pointing to the legal and moral obligations to cease arms exports to Israel due to the plausible risk of genocide and violations of international humanitarian law.

Lynk noted recent actions, including Canada's freeze on new arms export permits to Israel and a UN Human Rights Council resolution urging countries to halt military equipment sales to Israel. Despite these developments, he expressed scepticism about the willingness of major arms suppliers like the United States to comply, given their historical reluctance to apply human rights standards to Israel.

Concluding his speech, Lynk invoked the words of Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesse Jackson to inspire action towards justice, stressing that history's arc does not bend towards justice on its own but requires concerted effort and determination. He called this moment an important hinge of history, urging for a push towards further justice.

Dyab Abou Jahjah, President of the March 30 Movement, focused on a novel legal strategy in the Netherlands and Belgium, and soon in France, aiming at binational soldiers who are citizens of these countries and at the same time are serving in the Israeli army, committing crimes in Gaza. This approach seeks to circumvent the complexities of international jurisdiction and immunity by holding these individuals accountable at a national level for their involvement in atrocities and genocide in Gaza.

He pointed out the inefficiency of international litigation avenues like the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), emphasising the strategic importance of pursuing legal action within national jurisdictions. By targeting citizens of European countries involved in the Israeli army's crimes in Gaza, Jahjah highlighted a method that bypasses geopolitical constraints and focuses on direct accountability.



Jahjah explained the legal mechanisms in Belgium that allow for immediate investigation by the public prosecutor once charges are pressed against these individuals, contrasting it with other jurisdictions where the process might be less straightforward. This initiative is rooted in the principle of leveraging national laws against their own citizens who participate in military actions in Gaza, thereby facilitating a path to accountability that avoids the pitfalls of international legal proceedings.

The movement has prepared several cases involving direct victims from Gaza now residing in Belgium, aiming to press charges against Belgian citizens fighting with the Israeli army. This legal route, Jahjah argued, offers a pragmatic and impactful way to bring the debate into national courts, where geopolitical influences are minimised, and the focus is squarely on the crimes committed.

In closing, Jahjah's speech underscored the movement's commitment to utilising national legal systems as a viable avenue for achieving justice for victims of genocide in Gaza by holding European nationals accountable for their participation in crimes committed by the Israeli army, thus contributing to the broader effort of seeking justice and accountability.

**Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK**