

## Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK

المنظمة العربية لحقوق الإنسان في بريطانيا



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### **Webinar Report- Escalating Tragedy and the Role of Normalisation in Fuelling the Suffering**

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK recently organised a webinar titled "[Gaza Genocide: Escalating Tragedy and the Role of Normalisation in Fuelling the Suffering](#)," where prominent speakers addressed the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the various factors contributing to it. The panel included Dr. Noa Shandlinger, Assistant Professor of Middle East History at Worcester State University; Ken Roth, esteemed American attorney and human rights activist; Jim Moran, former Democratic member of the U.S. House of Representatives; Ahmed al-Nuaimi, UAE human rights advocate; Professor Stephen Zunes of the University of San Francisco; Dr. Lex Takkenberg, former Director of UNRWA Operations; and Sara Flounders, Co-Director of the International Action Center.

Each speaker provided a critical analysis of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, emphasising the complicity of international actors, particularly through the normalisation of relations with Israel and the role of the United States in supporting Israeli war crimes. The discussions underscored the urgent need

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for accountability and mobilisation to end the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Dr. Noa Shaindinger highlighted the troubling dynamics in the U.S. regarding the Palestinian cause, particularly within academic institutions. She observed an increasing backlash against those who support Palestine, especially on university campuses, where administrations have begun altering the rules of political engagement. As the academic year begins, she expects heightened repression of pro-Palestine activism, which she terms the "Palestine penalty," targeting both students and faculty who speak out. This repression is part of a broader, more organised response from political and academic elites aimed at silencing dissent on the issue.

She also addressed the mixed signals emanating from the Democratic Party, particularly in the context of the upcoming U.S. elections. While there has been a slight increase in visibility for Palestinian rights within the party, this has been accompanied by a strong pushback from the party's leadership. Dr. Shaindinger pointed out that despite some voices within the party advocating for Palestinian rights, the leadership, including figures like Kamala Harris, continues to reaffirm support for Israel, thus sidelining meaningful discourse on Palestinian freedom and dignity.

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In conclusion, Dr. Shaindinger warned of a dual trend: a rise in grassroots activism supporting Palestine, juxtaposed with intensified efforts by the U.S. political and academic elites to stifle this movement. This trend, she suggested, is indicative of the broader complicity of these elites in the ongoing genocide against the people of Gaza, as they continue to provide Israel with the necessary support to perpetuate its oppressive actions, all while suppressing voices that challenge the status quo.

Ken Roth centered his discussion on the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the U.S. role in obstructing justice for the Palestinian people. He criticised Vice President Kamala Harris for her lack of commitment to addressing the core issues of the genocide in Gaza, particularly the U.S.'s ongoing military support for Israel. Roth noted that while Harris might acknowledge the suffering of Palestinian civilians and call for a ceasefire, she, like the Biden administration, avoids tackling the critical question of restricting arms sales to Israel. This evasion effectively enables Israel to continue its genocidal campaign against Gaza without consequence.

Roth dissected the various legal arguments presented against the ICC's jurisdiction over Israel, particularly the notion that Palestine is not a state capable of conferring such jurisdiction. He argued that these objections are unfounded, especially given the precedent set by the ICC's handling of the Ukraine situation, where territorial jurisdiction was similarly contested. He

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anticipated that the ICC would ultimately reject these arguments and proceed with the prosecution of Israeli leaders for their war crimes, including the deliberate starvation and bombardment of Gaza, actions he described as integral to Israel's genocidal strategy.

In his analysis, Roth emphasised the broader implications of U.S. and international complicity in these crimes. He argued that the refusal to hold Israel accountable, despite clear evidence of genocide, reflects a deep-seated bias within the international legal system, one that prioritises geopolitical interests over justice. Roth concluded by stressing the importance of the ICC's role in challenging this impunity, even as he acknowledged the significant political obstacles that remain.

Jim Moran delivered a scathing critique of U.S. complicity in the genocide against the people of Gaza, focusing on the role of money, media, and political influence in shaping American foreign policy. He lamented that despite the daily war crimes being committed by Israel, the U.S. continues to supply Israel with billions of dollars in military aid, including some of the most lethal weapons in the American arsenal. Moran argued that this support not only facilitates the genocide but also provides political cover for a government he described as fascist and racist, intent on ethnically cleansing Gaza.

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Moran expressed his disillusionment with the current U.S. administration, noting that while the Biden-Harris ticket may express sympathy for Palestinians, their actions have been complicit in the genocide. He warned that a Trump administration would be even worse, as it would likely encourage more aggressive tactics by Israel. He criticised the broader international community, particularly Europe, for its failure to act against these atrocities, suggesting that their inaction is due in part to their reliance on American military and economic power.

Moran also addressed the role of the Muslim community in the U.S. and the broader Arab world, emphasising the need for greater political mobilization. He pointed out that there are "as many Muslim Americans as there are Jewish Americans," yet the Muslim community has been less engaged in the political process. He questioned, "Where are the Muslim Americans?" suggesting that their lack of political activism contrasts sharply with that of Jewish Americans. Moran noted that "a handful are engaged," but criticised the lack of broader involvement, observing that "there are more Jewish students protesting what's happening in Gaza than there are Muslim students."

He called for stronger leadership and greater organisation among Muslim Americans and Arab communities, arguing that their current level of political engagement is insufficient to effect change.

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In his conclusion, Moran highlighted the moral and political bankruptcy of the U.S. and its allies, arguing that their failure to leverage real power—such as Saudi Arabia and the Emirates withholding oil—demonstrates a lack of commitment to justice. He pointed out the hypocrisy of the Arab world, particularly the leadership in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who prioritise economic ties with Israel over the lives of Palestinians, stating that "the only real leverage is held by the Arab world," yet it remains unexerted.

Ahmed al-Nuaimi began by expressing his deep concern and shame over the role that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) plays in supporting Israeli war crimes in Gaza. He highlighted the stark contrast between the global calls for a ceasefire and the UAE's actions, which include facilitating trade and infrastructure projects that ultimately benefit Israel. Al-Nuaimi emphasised that while the world demands justice for the Palestinian people, the UAE's government has chosen to support Israel, even during a time when Gaza is under severe attack. He pointed out that 80% of the trade exchange between Israel and normalised Arab countries is controlled by the UAE, a fact he finds deeply troubling as an Emirati citizen.

Al-Nuaimi connected the UAE's repression of its own citizens to its broader support for Israeli actions. He recounted how, since 2011, the UAE

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government has systematically silenced activists and human rights defenders who opposed normalisation with Israel. He shared personal anecdotes, including the arrest of his brother and other activists, who were labelled as terrorists by the government without any evidence, merely because they stood against the normalisation process and supported Palestinian rights. This repression, he argued, is part of a deliberate strategy by the UAE government to ensure that no opposition to its policies towards Israel is allowed to flourish.

Furthermore, al-Nuaimi criticised the UAE's financial involvement in Gaza's future governance as part of a covert deal with Israel and the United States. He described how the UAE has positioned itself to take control of Gaza's administration post-war, a move he sees as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. According to al-Nuaimi, this is not just a matter of economic transactions but a clear indication of the UAE's complicity in the ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people. He concluded by condemning the UAE's government for using the wealth of the Emirati people to support Israeli crimes, rather than standing with their Arab and Muslim brothers and sisters in Gaza.

Professor Stephen Zunes provided a critical analysis of the United States' role in perpetuating the genocide in Gaza, particularly through its unwavering support for Israel. He highlighted the pattern in which the U.S. ostensibly supports ceasefire proposals but ultimately alters them to align with Israeli

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demands, only to blame Hamas when Israel rejects these proposals. Zunes pointed out that while there has been significant public pressure for a ceasefire, the U.S. government continues to provide military aid to Israel, thus enabling the ongoing war and humanitarian crisis in Gaza. He compared this situation to past U.S. foreign policy actions, such as the support for oppressive regimes in Central America, illustrating a long-standing pattern of prioritising strategic interests over human rights.

Zunes also addressed the Democratic Party's complicity in this issue, noting that while there has been some rhetorical support for Palestinian rights, in practice, the party has endorsed policies that undermine any meaningful progress toward peace. He criticised the Democratic platform for endorsing the Abraham Accords, a series of normalisation agreements between Israel and several Arab states, which he argued have further diminished the prospects for Palestinian statehood. According to Zunes, the party's stance reflects a broader trend in U.S. foreign policy, where real change is stymied by entrenched interests, including the Zionist lobby, which makes it difficult for more progressive voices to influence policy.

Despite his scepticism, Zunes did acknowledge some positive developments, particularly the role of Vice President Kamala Harris, who has shown a greater willingness to criticize Israeli actions than President Biden. He noted that Harris was the first high-ranking Biden administration official to speak out



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against the high civilian death toll in Gaza and to call for a ceasefire. However, Zunes cautioned that without significant grassroots pressure, even Harris's efforts are likely to fall short of the dramatic changes needed to end the genocide in Gaza. He concluded by urging continued activism and political mobilization to hold U.S. leaders accountable for their role in enabling Israel's war crimes.

Sara Flounders delivered a powerful critique of the normalisation of genocide, emphasising that it is not merely a matter of ignoring the atrocities committed against the Palestinian people but a deliberate erasure of their suffering from public discourse. She highlighted the systematic censorship and repression carried out by Zionist-owned social media platforms, which have silenced voices speaking out against the genocide in Gaza. Flounders pointed out that this censorship extends to mainstream political events, such as the Republican and Democratic Party conventions, where any mention of Palestine was conspicuously absent. She criticised Kamala Harris's acceptance speech at the DNC as one of the most hawkish ever, underscoring the U.S. government's unwavering support for Israel's genocidal campaign.

Flounders argued that true change will not come from the political elites or through the legal rulings of international bodies like the International Criminal Court, which she noted are often ignored by the U.S. media. Instead, she called for continued grassroots mobilization, drawing parallels to the anti-Vietnam

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War movement, which succeeded in ending U.S. involvement through mass protests and civil disobedience. Flounders emphasised that the ongoing resistance in Gaza, as well as the internal collapse of the Zionist state, are signs that change is possible if the global movement against genocide continues to grow and intensify.

In her conclusion, Flounders criticised the Arab regimes that have normalized relations with Israel, accusing them of betraying the Palestinian cause and their own populations for the sake of maintaining power and privilege. She argued that these regimes are out of touch with the new geopolitical realities and warned that they should fear the rising resistance from below. Flounders urged continued support for the Palestinian resistance and emphasised that the true power lies with the people, not the elites who perpetuate and normalize the genocide.

Dr. Lex Takkenberg offered a detailed analysis of the current situation in Gaza, focusing on the broader implications of the ongoing war that began on October 7th. He noted that the conflict has transitioned into a war of attrition, driven largely by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's personal and political interests. This war, which has extended its reach to Lebanon, involving Hezbollah, and even affecting the broader region with ties to the Houthis, Iran, and Syria, shows no signs of a quick resolution. Takkenberg emphasised that

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the events since October 7th have dramatically and irrevocably altered the status quo regarding the broader question of Palestine. He highlighted the internal disintegration within Israeli society, where deep rifts between different factions have only widened since the war began, bringing the prospect of civil war in Israel closer by the day.

Takkenberg also discussed the significant strides being made towards holding Israel accountable for its crimes, particularly through international legal mechanisms. He pointed to the likely authorisation of arrest warrants for Israeli leaders such as Netanyahu and Gallant as a crucial step in this process. Additionally, he noted the importance of the recent International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion, which strengthens the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement and the broader global solidarity with Palestine. Takkenberg argued that these legal proceedings will have profound effects not only on Israel but also on states in the Arab world and the West that support Israel, as they will be forced to reconcile with the ICJ's findings, which include the illegality of the occupation and the ongoing genocide.

When asked about the potential legal responsibility of Arab countries like the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, which are normalising relations with Israel, Takkenberg explained that there are multiple levels of accountability: moral, political, and legal. He referenced Nicaragua's ongoing legal case against Germany for its complicity in war crimes as an example of how such issues

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could be pursued. While these cases take years to mature, Takkenberg expressed confidence that the unprecedented intensity of the genocide in Gaza will eventually lead to accountability for complicit states. He also pointed out that the ICJ's findings are already causing discomfort among politicians in various countries, signalling that the political impact of these legal determinations is being felt even before final rulings are made.

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