



into 

Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

Conference on the Rights of Palestinian Children

**18 JANUARY 2025
LIBERTY HALL THEATRE, DUBLIN**



Conference Report

Foreword

Since the Hamas-Israeli conflict escalated to catastrophic war in October 2023, the Palestinian Ministry of Health has reported that more than 15,000 children have been killed and thousands more have been injured. We know that the children of Palestine are living to survive in a nightmare scenario. Their homes have been destroyed, they have limited access to food, water and medicine, thousands have been injured or have experienced their families being torn apart and relations or neighbours being killed.

Furthermore, they are being denied a right to their education. Over 625,000 children have now experienced a second year without school resuming as educational and health institutions have been demolished and the genocide continues denying children their basic human rights.

Following the Conference on the Rights of Palestinian Children held in January 2025, this report captures the contributions made at the conference. National and international experts, unions and other stakeholders gathered to discuss the violation of Palestinian children's rights with emphasis on children's health – physical and psychosocial, education and access to shelter. More profoundly, the conference provided a unique opportunity for participants to hear and learn about the ongoing reality and personal experience of Palestinian children under occupation and apartheid.

I want to pay tribute to those speakers who spoke so openly and emotionally at the conference about their harrowing personal experiences of loss and displacement. I want to thank those who organised the conference and contributed to the events around the conference, and I also acknowledge the participation of all attendees at this conference, reinforcing the INTO's and the wider trade union movement's ongoing commitment to international solidarity.

This report highlights the steps we need to take to ensure the right action is used to enable children in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem access to their fundamental right to safe shelter, health services and education in their home country Palestine, free from occupation and apartheid.

As Nelson Mandela said, "Safety and security don't just happen; they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear."

We must strengthen our resolve and our determination to call to account the state of Israel for the atrocities perpetrated on the children of Palestine. We must continue to advocate for an end to the violence and oppression visited on them. We must sustain advocacy and international pressure, including reinforcing Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions measures against Israel. We must use our influence to increase education and awareness, and above all, we must work tirelessly towards ensuring the long-term support and protection of Palestinian children.

Le gach dea ghúí,



John Boyle, General Secretary,
Irish National Teachers' Organisation



Introduction

On Saturday, 18 January 2025, over 300 delegates gathered at Liberty Hall Theatre in Dublin for a landmark conference on the Rights of Palestinian Children. On the foot of an Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) Congress resolution and with the support of Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP) and other civil society organisations, the event brought together teachers, trade unionists and activists to discuss the devastating impact of the ongoing conflict on Palestinian children and education.

The conference took place just as a fragile ceasefire was set to take effect, bringing a sense of cautious optimism but also deep concern about the long-term future for Palestinian children.

Throughout the conference, video clips highlighted projects making a positive impact on education in Gaza, including HeART of Gaza, Hands Up Project, HEAL and UISCE for Gaza. Attendees were encouraged to donate to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). HeART of Gaza exhibited children's artwork from Gaza in the lobby outside the conference hall.

Palestine solidarity evening

Friday night's pre-conference event saw the hall in Club na Múinteoirí packed for an evening of Palestinian Solidarity.

The evening kicked off with a showing of *The Wanted 18*, a 2014 animated documentary. Through a clever mix of stop motion animation and interviews, *The Wanted 18* tells the almost unbelievable true story of the Israeli army's pursuit of 18 cows - cows which were declared "a threat to the national security of the state of Israel".

The story begins when a group of residents of the town of Beit Sahour decide to buy 18 cows and produce their own milk as a cooperative. Unwilling to allow the possibility that their success could become an inspiration to others, the Israeli army declares the farm illegal and a security threat. Undeterred, the community moves the cows into hiding where they continue to produce their "Intifada milk" with the Israeli army attempting to chase them down.

The film combines pathos with humour to deliver a story of resistance and resilience, telling the story of the "wanted 18" from several perspectives - the residents of Beit Sahour, the cows themselves and Israeli military personnel. Directed by Palestinian artist Amer Shomali and Canadian director Paul Cowan the movie is an inspirational tribute to the ingenuity and power of Palestinian communities and grassroots activism and was extremely well received by the audience.

Following the film, INTO Northern Secretary Mark McTaggart introduced the Dublin book launch of *Life of an Activist Eamon McMahan 1951-2022* - a book remembering the long-time Trade Union Friends of Palestine activist Eamon McMahan. Eamon was the prime mover in the setting up of TUFPP in 2006, and one of the key organisers of the ICTU/TUFPP-organised Palestine Children's Conference in November 2019. Eamon unfortunately passed away in 2022.

Mark noted the influence that Eamon's inspiration had on the development of ICTU policy on Palestine and its adoption of support for the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement. This in turn, along with the participation of INTO members on delegations to Palestine led by Eamon, led to resolutions at successive INTO Northern Conferences and Annual Congresses. As a result, the INTO has adopted a formal position of support for the Palestinian people and the BDS movement.

This theme of Eamon's influence on the development of INTO policy, and his expert and good-humoured guidance of TUFPP delegations to Palestine was continued by Dorothy McGinley, Ex-INTO President. Dorothy talked of Eamon's deep knowledge of and complete empathy with the plight of the Palestinian people and his passion and commitment which she had witnessed as part of a TUFPP delegation to Palestine.

Finally, Patricia McKeown, Regional Secretary UNISON, spoke of her deep and lasting friendship with Eamon. She recalled memories of trade union delegations to Palestine as far back as 2007 when, as then ICTU president, she was part of a high-level fact-finding mission to Palestine and Israel ably guided by Eamon. She recalled many happy memories of someone deeply committed to the cause of the Palestinian people and spoke of the huge influence Eamon had on shaping ICTU policy and commitment to freedom for Palestine. Without Eamon's influence, she noted, it is unlikely that the ICTU would have become one of the most pro-Palestine trade union congresses in the world.

Next up the audience was treated to a fabulous musical presentation from Palestinian doctor and musician, Abdallah, who played several tunes on the oud and shared Palestinian folk songs. Folk Edge, a wonderful group of Irish traditional and folk musicians and singers, ably co-ordinated by former INTO Standing Orders Committee member Joe Duffy, ended the evening with a traditional/folk seisiún.

All in all, a tremendous night of entertainment and solidarity. €655 raised on the night was donated to the UNRWA.

Conference opening



**Carmel Browne, INTO President
opening the conference**

Photo credits: Moya Nolan

Opening the Saturday Conference, INTO President, Carmel Browne described the urgent need for collective action, "Schools, which should be sanctuaries of safety and learning, have instead become sites of destruction and despair in Gaza. This is not only a humanitarian tragedy but also a direct assault on the future of Palestine".

Carmel began by emphasising the importance of the conference's focus on children, acknowledging that, as teachers and members of the INTO, our commitment is deeply tied to the welfare and future of children. She highlighted the suffering of children amidst a horrific genocide and stated that Gaza was widely recognised as the most dangerous place on earth for children. She questioned what the global community was doing in response to the crisis, citing the appalling death toll, mass displacement, and impending famine that threatened millions of Palestinians, stressing that these realities should compel the world to act immediately.

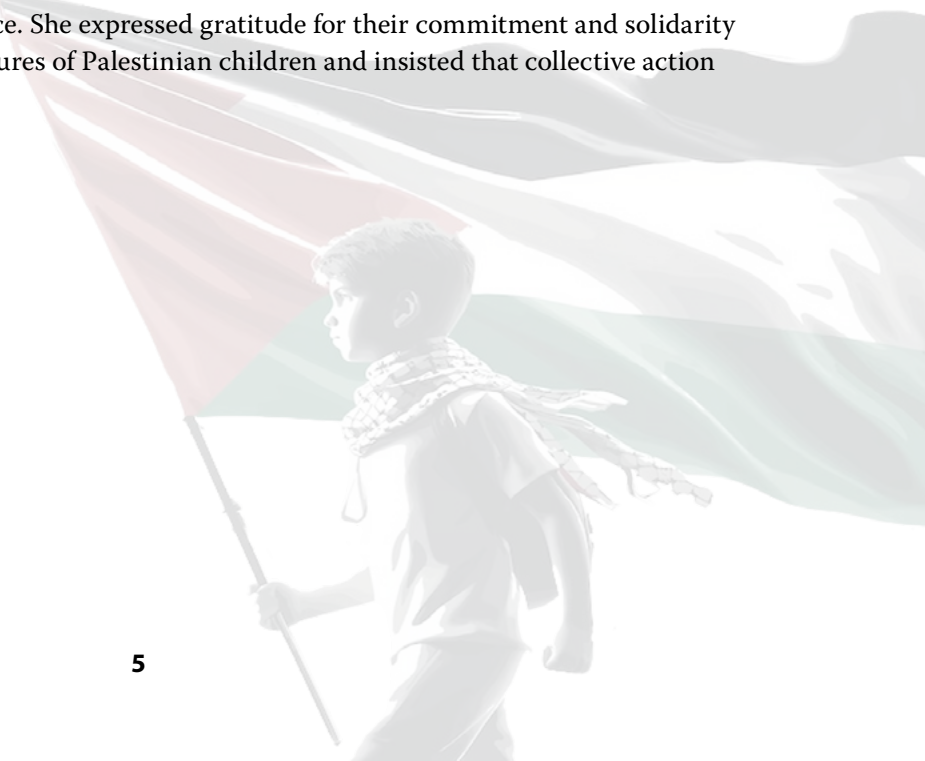
While Carmel noted that NATO had condemned the ongoing military actions in Gaza and welcomed the adoption of a ceasefire in the previous 24 hours, the first step toward ending the conflict, she asserted that lasting peace is the only way to truly resolve the situation. On behalf of the INTO and its members, she expressed hope that the ceasefire would hold and serve as the foundation for a permanent peace that would allow the unrestricted flow of international and humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Focusing on the education sector, she reminded delegates of the devastating impact of the conflict. She reported that hundreds of schools had been bombed and destroyed, turning places of safety and learning into sites of despair. She described how infants had died from hypothermia, children were orphaned and left malnourished, and many young children have had to take on caregiving responsibilities for their siblings while teachers and students had been killed or maimed, and critical infrastructure had been obliterated. Carmel stressed that this is an attack on the future of Palestine itself.

Carmel reaffirmed that INTO stood in solidarity with other trade unions in condemning the massive loss of life. She characterised the bombardment of Gaza as inhumane and indiscriminate, noting that starvation and disease were now widespread among the 2.4 million residents, with children facing severe malnutrition, injury, and death. She warned that those who survived would bear lifelong psychological scars.

Recognising that INTO is committed to taking action alongside other European trade unions, Carmel urged the European Union and European governments to impose sanctions on Israel and review all bilateral treaties in light of ongoing human rights violations. She expressed strong support for the *Occupied Territories Bill* and the BDS campaign and welcomed that many schools in Ireland have declared themselves apartheid-free zones (AFZ) as symbols of solidarity and justice.

Concluding her speech, she emphasised that today's event could not be about words alone. She challenged all attendees to take action and use the knowledge gained during the conference as a catalyst for change. She urged them to consider how their roles as educators, advocates, or allies could contribute to making a tangible difference. She expressed gratitude for their commitment and solidarity in the effort to protect the rights and futures of Palestinian children and insisted that collective action is essential to do this.



Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders

The UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor reported that nearly 17,000 children have been killed and thousands more have been injured, burned, and traumatised by war. Around 1.9 million Gazans have been internally displaced, half of them children, many forced to move multiple times. They face severe shortages of water, food, fuel, medicine, and healthcare. Meanwhile, Palestinian human rights defenders not only endure the physical onslaught but also battle misinformation, false accusations, and attempts to silence their reports on the brutality unfolding.



Mary Lawlor, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders

Mary Lawlor began by acknowledging the significance of gatherings like this, emphasising that, in her decades of human rights work, she had observed that when issues gained attention beyond human rights-focused groups, those in power began to take notice. She noted that this collective movement is evident in Ireland.

Mary clarified that the focus of her remit as a UN Special Rapporteur is on human rights defenders – those who promote and protect the rights of others explaining that she is appointed by the UN Human Rights Council as an independent expert to monitor the situation of human rights defenders globally, raise concerns with governments, and report back to the UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. She emphasised that she does not represent the UN and has no legally binding power. She shared the frustration, anger, and sadness of many regarding the UN's inability to protect Palestinian civilians. However, she praised the work of the UNRWA, recalling her firsthand experience



in Gaza and expressing horror over the many staff members killed by Israeli bombings. She warned that UNRWA's work would become even more challenging due to new Israeli laws restricting its operations in occupied East Jerusalem and its interactions with Israeli authorities.

Mary stressed that the situation of human rights defenders in Palestine had always been a priority concern due to the continuous targeting of peaceful activists in Gaza and the West Bank. She recounted her own observations in Gaza, where human rights defenders worked to uphold justice and accountability. She pointed out that while the occupation affected all Palestinians before 7 October 2023, the targeting had intensified over the past 16 months. She welcomed the ceasefire agreement but criticised it as too little, too late, and lamented the vast number of lives already lost, hoping that the silence following the ceasefire would allow enablers of the conflict to reflect on the depths of destruction they had facilitated.

Mary underlined that children have suffered the most, citing figures of nearly 17,000 children killed, with thousands more injured, traumatised, or displaced. She stated that around 1.9 million Gazans – 90% of the population – had been internally displaced, and half of these were children. They face severe shortages of water, food, fuel, healthcare, and medicine, and many have been displaced multiple times.

She further noted that Palestinian human rights defenders had not only documented the physical destruction but had also to fight against misinformation and accusations of terrorism. She highlighted the work of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), which had been repeatedly accused of having terrorist links by Israeli authorities, despite no credible evidence being presented. Donors had halted funding due to these allegations, yet independent investigations consistently failed to substantiate them. Despite this, the PCHR continued its work at great risk, even after one of its staff members and his family were killed in an attack.

Mary referenced PCHR's report, *The Deliberate Killing of Children in Gaza*, which detailed the impact of the conflict on students, teachers, and the education system. She stated that, since 9 November 2023, 12,700 students and 750 teachers had been killed, and that 85% of Gaza's schools required reconstruction. She warned that many six-year-olds had missed their first year of school and that education for all Palestinian children had been severely disrupted. She recalled that UN experts had raised concerns that Israel was executing a policy of "scholasticide"—the systematic destruction of Palestinian education.

She remarked on the "legal and moral gaslighting" faced by Palestinians when appealing to international law, as many governments professed support for human rights but found ways to justify Israeli actions. She condemned the US government's recent approval of \$8 billion in weapons sales to Israel, pointing out that children were disproportionately affected by blast injuries. She argued that calling such weapons "precision-guided" was misleading and that the continued provision of arms would lead to more child casualties.

Mary also criticised the inaction of states that claimed to prioritise women's rights, noting the dire situation of pregnant women in Gaza. She cited testimonies from a midwife who had treated women suffering miscarriages, premature births, and malnutrition due to the conditions of war. She stressed that fear played a significant role in these cases, as mothers endured constant terror from explosions and violence.

She urged continued vigilance in Ireland, especially following the announcement of a ceasefire, emphasising that political leaders must be held accountable for their expressed solidarity with Palestine. She warned that as global political dynamics shifted, Ireland's support for Palestine might come under pressure. She called on INTO members to advocate for Ireland's continued push for humanitarian access to Gaza, an arms embargo on Israel, and accountability for war crimes. She underlined the importance of recognising international rulings that called for an end to the occupation, reparations for victims, and the facilitation of displaced Palestinians' return.

Mary Lawlor concluded by stressing the importance of holding all parties accountable under the same standards and ensuring that the horrors witnessed in Gaza were never repeated. She ended with a reading of the poem *O Rascal Children of Gaza* by Khaled Juma, reflecting on the tragic loss of innocent lives.

Iman Al-Shayeb, General Union of Palestinian Teachers



Iman Al-Shayeb of the General Union of Palestinian Teachers addressing the conference from Palestine

Iman Al-Shayeb, from the General Union of Palestinian Teachers (GUPT), joined online to describe what she called “scholasticide” – the deliberate targeting of Gaza’s education system, “90% of schools in Gaza have been completely or partially destroyed,”

Iman Al-Shayeb expressed her gratitude for the invitation to the conference and for the opportunity to participate. She also conveyed her appreciation for the solidarity shown towards Palestinian children and people who had been severely affected by Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip, specifically thanking the Irish government and people for their unwavering support of the Palestinian cause and the rights of the Palestinian people.

Iman highlighted the significance of the Irish stance, stating that Ireland’s voice during the Israeli war on Gaza had helped mobilise international support for the Palestinian cause. She expressed her deep appreciation for this.

In her speech, Iman focused on the impact of Israeli actions on Palestinian children and their rights, particularly in relation to education. She described how children are suffering unimaginable hardships. Thousands of families have been forced to live in inhumane conditions, lacking food, clean water, and healthcare. Children in Gaza are enduring hunger, fear, cold, and the absence of electricity and internet, while many had been injured or had lost family members due to forced displacement policies.

She further stated that children are being denied their right to education, as the educational system in Gaza has come to a complete halt. The Israeli attacks had targeted schools and universities, assassinating children and educators, and destroying educational infrastructure. She described these actions as a systematic genocide aimed at erasing the Palestinian education system and depriving generations of their fundamental right to education.

According to Iman, approximately 700,000 students have been deprived of access to education for two consecutive academic years due to the devastation of the education system. She cited that, since 7 October 2023, over 12,000 students and 241 teachers have been killed, while more than 19,619 students have been injured. Additionally, more than 503 educational staff members had been killed, and 2,603 had been injured. She emphasised that 90% of schools in Gaza have been completely or partially destroyed, with 133 schools rendered entirely inoperable. Many surviving schools had been repurposed as shelters for displaced families.

Iman described Gaza as the most dangerous place in the world and stressed that one of the biggest challenges to come would be preparing students psychologically, emotionally, and physically for education as children are suffering from trauma, psychological disorders, and severe health issues, having lost their families, homes, and friends.

She noted that the situation in the West Bank was equally dire, as Israeli settlers and soldiers have deliberately targeted schools and educational institutions. With the backing of the far-right Israeli government, these attacks aim to implement a broader strategy of ethnic cleansing. As a result, 190 schools in the West Bank had been attacked and damaged, and 5,080 schools had been forced to transition to online learning due to violence. In Area C, where Israel exercises full control, 32 schools face the threat of demolition, as their existence symbolises Palestinian resilience on the land.

She reported that Palestinian students and educators in the West Bank had been subjected to violent assaults by both Israeli soldiers and settlers. She cited figures of 88 students killed, 541 injured, and 289 arrested. Additionally, 156 teachers and administrative staff had been arrested, three of whom had been killed, while many more had been injured. She stated that Israeli checkpoints and movement restrictions frequently prevented teachers and students from reaching their schools, causing significant psychological distress and insecurity among children.

Iman also discussed the financial crisis faced by the Palestinian National Authority, which had severely impacted the education sector. She attributed this crisis to Israel's seizure of Palestinian tax revenues and deductions under various pretexts. She explained that the financial constraints had forced teachers to strike due to unpaid salaries, further disrupting the education system.

Iman emphasised that restoring the education system in Gaza would take a long time due to the extensive damage. However, she urged the immediate resumption of education through temporary solutions. She proposed several measures, including supporting e-learning initiatives by enabling teachers in the West Bank to teach students in Gaza, provided that electricity and internet access were restored. She also suggested using shelters and tents as temporary classrooms, once they were equipped with essential educational materials. Additionally, she called for psychological support programs to help children and teachers cope with trauma and for specialised training for educators to address learning difficulties caused by prolonged school closures.

Iman appealed for international support to help rebuild Gaza's education system and protect Palestinian children's right to education. She called for a just and lasting resolution to the Palestinian issue, sufficient funding for rebuilding schools and educational infrastructure, and accountability for Israel's violations of international law regarding attacks on schools. She urged the global community to highlight the educational crisis in Gaza and advocate for a safe learning environment for Palestinian children.

Despite the overwhelming challenges, Iman asserted that the Palestinian people remained determined to pursue education and a better future. She concluded by expressing hope that Palestine would one day be free and that its people would live in peace.

Talha Al-Ali, Psychotherapist and Human Rights Activist



Talha Al-Ali, Psychotherapist
and Human Rights Activist

Talha Al-Ali, a psychotherapist and human rights activist, emphasised the ongoing suffering of Palestinian children. He shared personal experiences of trauma and injustice, describing how Palestinian children are subjected to military courts, night arrests, and even used as human shields. Talha called for action, noting Desmond Tutu's words that in a situation of oppression, if you are neutral, then you are taking the side of the oppressor.

Talha Al-Ali explained that to understand the current realities faced by adults in Palestine, including himself and others injured while growing up there, one must consider the trauma passed down through generations from parents and grandparents to their children.

Addressing child fatalities, Talha cited reports from Defence for Children International in Palestine, stating that by July 2024, 2,427 children had been killed by Israeli forces. He noted that these fatalities had not generated significant international condemnation, in contrast to fake reports of 40 beheaded children, which, despite being debunked within a week, had initially gained widespread media attention. He asserted that such disparities in response reinforced the perception among Palestinians that their lives were not regarded as equal to those of children elsewhere, particularly in Europe.

Talha further referenced the United Nations Secretary-General's 2023 report, which included Israeli armed and security forces on the annual global list of violators of children's rights in conflict zones, attributing 5,698 violations to them. Additionally, he cited United Nations data verifying 32,990 grave violations affecting 22,557 children in 2023, excluding Israeli actions in Gaza, alarming figures within the context of child rights violations. He expressed frustration that such actions were carried out by a country often associated with upholding European values and questioned whether European values permit the killing of Palestinian children.

Talha highlighted the plight of children with disabilities, referencing Human Rights Watch reports on Israeli actions that had destroyed Palestinian infrastructure, severely limiting access to education, water, sanitation, and mobility. He urged organisations advocating for the rights of disabled children to focus more on children in Palestine, where systematic destruction of infrastructure has horrendously exacerbated their challenges.

Discussing the blockade and restrictions in both the West Bank and Gaza before 7 October Talha described the conditions as dire. He referred to Amnesty International's 2022 report, on Israel's apartheid policies and documented their impact on Palestinian children's access to education and healthcare. He reiterated that education and healthcare are fundamental to child development and that their disruption has long-term consequences, including adverse effects on brain development. He noted that Israeli checkpoints not only prevent children from reaching schools but also expose them to further dangers, as Israeli soldiers and settlers frequently enter school premises, subjecting students and teachers to abuse and violence.

Recalling his personal experiences, Talha shared memories of being a student in 2002-2004, when Israeli soldiers would fire tear gas into classrooms or schoolyards, making attendance difficult and often forcing students to flee. He described deliberate attempts to humiliate teachers and principals in front of students, which he believed was intended to instil a sense of powerlessness and inferiority in Palestinian children.

Regarding the blockade's impact on healthcare, Talha cited the Save the Children's report, which found that nearly 400 children were prevented from seeking medical care outside Gaza in the first half of 2023. He provided examples of children who died while waiting for permission to travel for treatment, including Fatima al-Masri, a 19-month-old child who died after a five-month delay. These Israeli restrictions are not widely acknowledged or reported on.

Talha also addressed the use of Palestinian children as human shields, citing reports from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the UN. He shared a personal account of being forced at gunpoint to walk ahead of Israeli soldiers at the age of 14 while stones were being thrown at them. He recounted similar experiences at 17 and 19, describing the long-lasting trauma they caused. He questioned whether Israeli children ever faced such experiences.

Discussing the Israeli military court system, Talha noted that Israel was the only country in the world to systematically prosecute Palestinian children in military courts, treating them as adults. According to Defence for Children International, 500-700 Palestinian children are prosecuted annually. He highlighted the disparity in treatment between Palestinian children and Israeli settlers in the West Bank, with the latter rarely facing similar legal consequences. He criticised the lack of basic legal protections, stating that Palestinian children were assumed guilty until proven innocent, often subjected to night arrests, and forced to sign confessions in Hebrew, a language they did not understand.

Talha referenced the case of Salah Hammouri, a lawyer defending Palestinian children, who was deported to France despite holding dual Palestinian and French citizenship. He emphasised that Palestinian lawyers seeking justice face severe repercussions.

In conclusion, Talha called for tangible action from the Irish government beyond the symbolic recognition of the State of Palestine. He noted that while Ireland's recognition was welcomed, it had not directly alleviated any suffering in Gaza or the West Bank. He urged attendees to challenge those who viewed the situation as "complicated" or remained neutral, emphasising that it was fundamentally a human rights issue reminding delegates that neutrality in situations of oppression equates to siding with the oppressor.

Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories



Francesca Albanese, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories addressing the conference online.

Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, introduced the concept of “unchildering” – the systematic stripping away of Palestinian children’s rights, freedoms, and futures. She also called on delegates to press the Irish government not to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, as it is a “tool to advance an anti-Palestinian logic and narrative”.

Francesca Albanese began her address by expressing her gratitude to the INTO for inviting her to participate. She regretted that she could only be present in spirit but emphasised that it was still an honour to share her remarks.

Francesca explained that she devoted an entire report during her tenure to the issue of children, including education. She noted that understanding the extent to which children could enjoy the right to education required an examination of the environment in which they lived and developed. She referred to the situation of Palestinian children as one of “unchildering,” a concept introduced by scholar Nadra Shalhoub-Kevorkian, noting that her third report was dedicated to this theme. She stressed that even before the current bombardment of Gaza, Palestinian children faced a worsening reality.

Reflecting on her tenure as Special Rapporteur since 2022, Francesca stated that she had never anticipated witnessing the level of depravity and degeneration that had characterised the past 15 months. She described international law as one of the victims of this period, during which tens of thousands of innocents had been killed, injured, or traumatised on both sides of the Green Line. She acknowledged that while Palestinian children in Gaza had faced extreme violence, the situation in the West Bank was equally severe, and Israeli children had also suffered. She extended her sympathies and condolences to all affected.



Albanese argued that the current crisis is a symptom of the international community's failure to address Israel's longstanding impunity and illegality, leading to a "forever occupation." She pointed out that Palestinian children constituted half of the population under Israeli occupation. She referenced the International Court of Justice's ruling in July 2024, which deemed the Israeli occupation unlawful and called for its unconditional termination as rapidly as possible. She stated that the UN General Assembly had given Israel until September 13, 2025, to dismantle its military presence and settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. She asserted that individuals who had committed crimes should not be granted impunity and insisted that Israel must withdraw all forms of control, including exploitation of natural resources and aerial oversight over Gaza.

Francesca described life for Palestinian children as a traumatic experience even before the events of 7 October 2023. She highlighted the struggles of Palestinian parents facing legal battles to reclaim confiscated land and the separation of families by an eight-metre-high wall. She illustrated the impact of home demolitions, the destruction of schools, and the constant fear of death among children, recounting a particularly distressing memory from her time collecting testimony in 2023, where children she spoke to expressed their fears of dying and leaving their families behind.

Francesca emphasised that as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Israel was obliged to protect the rights of all children under its jurisdiction. However, she argued that Israel did not have legitimate jurisdiction over the occupied Palestinian territories. She urged against making recommendations for Israel to adhere to international conventions, asserting that Israel should not be involved in the governance of Palestinian lands, which should be under Palestinian self-determination.

Citing statistics from 2008 to 2023, Francesca reported that 1,434 Palestinian children had been killed, with 33,000 injured, compared to 25 Israeli children killed in the same period. She acknowledged the loss of all lives but maintained that the situation had never been a war but rather an ongoing system of extreme violence and anti-Palestinian racism, even before October 2023, an average of 600 Palestinian children were arrested annually by Israeli forces, often during night raids, and subjected to violent interrogations.

Francesca contended that the oppressive environment had severely restricted Palestinian children's access to education, with schools intentionally underdeveloped and frequently targeted during military incursions. She warned that efforts were underway to manipulate Palestinian curricula and remove the UNRWA from the occupied territories. She argued that these actions reduced Palestinian life to its bare minimum and violated the right to a safe and dignified upbringing. She reiterated the concept of "unchildling," describing it as the deprivation of a child's right to normal development and the systematic obstruction of generational growth.

Francesca urged the international community to focus on rebuilding Gaza and supporting Palestinian academics in maintaining education within the region. She cautioned against efforts that might encourage Palestinian students to leave Gaza permanently, warning that the effects of the genocide would persist for years to come.

In concluding her remarks, Francesca expressed her surprise upon learning that the Irish government was considering endorsing the IHRA definition of antisemitism. She argued that this definition conflated criticism of Israel with antisemitism and had been used as a tool to suppress debate. She urged those in the education sector, particularly the INTO, to familiarise themselves with the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism's assessment of the IHRA definition, which she described as advancing an anti-Palestinian narrative. She warned that adopting this definition would have significant consequences for education and discourse on Palestine in Ireland.

Voices of Palestinian youth

A key focus of the conference was listening to the voices of Palestinian youth. Sandra Corrigan, INTO Global Solidarity Officer, chaired a session featuring testimony from young Palestinians, both in-person, online and through recordings.

A RECORDED MESSAGE FROM KHAN YOUNIS GAZA

A recorded message from Khan Younis in Gaza was shown to attendees. Tragically, Ramadan, a student from the American School in Gaza who recorded this video, was reported to have been killed along with his entire family the previous Wednesday.

In the messages presented, it was highlighted that the people of Gaza were living in dire conditions, with food shortages, and financial struggles. The children pleaded for peace and called attention to the health crisis caused by the ongoing conflict, including a lack of medicine and the destruction of schools.

The destruction in Gaza was described as extensive, with entire blocks destroyed and numerous casualties and injuries reported. One young man said that his dream of becoming a doctor lay shattered and all of the participants emphasised their desire for survival, a return home, and the continuation of their education.

The testimony conveyed the suffering of children in Gaza, highlighting the spread of diseases, the loss of lives, and the devastating impact on aspirations. One child had wished to become a teacher but was now uncertain about their future. Fear and sadness were prevalent, with mentions of the pervasive smell of death and the psychological toll of the ongoing violence.

The Irish people were thanked for their continued support, but it was stressed that aid alone is not enough; sustainable solutions, job opportunities, and educational scholarships are necessary to transform lives. The need for a global movement to amplify the voices of those affected was reiterated.

M IN EXILE FROM GAZA

This video was immediately followed by a message from M, an active participant in drama and English language activities organised by Hands Up, M had visited Belfast in 2022. In her address, she recounted her experiences over the last 15 months, speaking in exile from Gaza.

M, a 16-year-old from northern Gaza, shared her harrowing experiences. She recounted the moment she realised the darkness that covered the sky was symbolic of the despair that would soon engulf their lives. Forced to flee multiple times, she described living in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions, with scarce access to food and essential resources. Her younger siblings suffer due to malnutrition, and many children are affected by diseases like hepatitis and scabies due to a lack of clean water and medical supplies.

Fear is a constant in her life, as she witnessed destruction around her and fears losing her loved ones. The violence has robbed her and countless others of their childhood, safety, and dignity. She described waking up to explosions, experiencing anxiety, and enduring unimaginable loss. Her father, a surgeon, continues working in field hospitals despite the dangers, reflecting the resilience and selflessness of many in Gaza.

M's video showed that life in Gaza is not only a struggle for physical survival but also a fight to maintain mental well-being and dignity. She called for international support, not only through humanitarian aid but also by advocating for an end to the violence and siege. She acknowledged the significance of the global protests and global solidarity as a source of hope.



TWO BROTHERS FROM PALESTINE

Two young men from Palestine spoke directly to those attending.

N, a 12-year-old child from Gaza shared a poem written by his mother, encapsulating the dreams of many Palestinian children. The poem, titled “The Dream,” reflected on the longing to return to Palestine as rightful owners of the land, a dream passed down through generations since the Nakba of 1948. He poignantly described carrying two bags—one belonging to his grandfather and the other his own—symbolising the continued displacement and struggle faced by Palestinians across generations.

His older brother spoke of his experience as a 20-year-old student and survivor of the genocide. He noted that despite global awareness, no intervention was made by world powers. The devastation included mass killings, particularly of children. However, resistance and protests continue, with students playing a significant role in standing against the atrocities.

Before the genocide he had completed secondary education at the age of 18 and was pursuing a degree in computer engineering and had successfully progressed to the second year of university. However, on 7 October, a significant turning point occurred, within a week, universities and schools were bombed, triggering widespread fear and displacement. As a result, many residents, including his family, were forced to flee from the north to the south in search of safety.

Following the attacks, the boys endured multiple displacements, moving between different homes and areas within Gaza City before eventually seeking refuge in the south. Throughout this time his desire to continue education remained strong despite ongoing attacks on educational institutions. He noted that the deliberate targeting of universities, schools, and educators is aimed at suppressing knowledge and hindering future generations.

Despite these hardships, young students persist in their pursuit of education. Groups were formed to facilitate learning and teachers, despite being targeted, continued to educate in any way possible. They know that education is the weapon that can transform generations, despite the loss of professors, university presidents, close friends and their families, survivors remain determined to pursue their dreams.

He emphasised the importance of education as a means of resistance, and the belief that knowledge is a powerful weapon against oppression. This fuels the determination to continue learning. Even in the face of destruction, students sought resources, collaborated, and remained committed to their studies. This resilience serves as a form of resistance against attempts to eradicate education and intellectual growth.

Despite immense challenges, he and many other students continue to fight for their right to education and a future free from oppression with the ultimate goal of the realisation of a free Palestine, as envisioned by his grandfather and ancestors. The two brothers' testimony served as a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle and the unyielding spirit of those who continue to resist against all odds.

R FROM GAZA AND LIVING IN IRELAND

R shared her experiences of growing up in Gaza and the challenges she faced over the years. She explained that life in Gaza was punctuated by wars occurring every two to three years, with major conflicts breaking out in 2004, 2005, 2008, 2012, and most recently, in 2021, when she was still living in Gaza. During the 2021 conflict, R was preparing for her 'Tawjihi' exams, equivalent to the Leaving Certificate in Ireland. However, the outbreak of war just weeks before the exams forced their family to evacuate from northern Gaza to the south for safety. The uncertainty surrounding the exams, combined with the ongoing bombings, created immense stress for her and her family.

Describing everyday life in Gaza before October 2023, R highlighted the severe electricity shortages, with a maximum of eight hours of power per day. Families relied on small batteries to charge devices and provide minimal lighting at night for studying or moving around the house. Water shortages were also a frequent issue, along with difficulties in obtaining gas and other essential supplies. The hardships of daily life made it incredibly challenging to maintain normality, and R expressed the difficulty of explaining these struggles to those who had not experienced them firsthand.

Reflecting on the impact of conflict on children, R spoke about the heartbreaking reality that many Palestinian children grow up focused solely on surviving wars rather than enjoying a typical childhood. She described the deep sadness of witnessing young children, as young as six or eight years old, hoping only for survival rather than dreaming of a future.

R also recounted their personal experience with the Rafah border crossing, the primary exit point from Gaza into Egypt. She explained the extreme difficulty of leaving Gaza, as travel required registering months in advance and waiting for a name to appear on the exit list. During a visit to Gaza in 2023, R was scheduled to leave after one week but was denied exit at the border due to overcrowding, resulting in an extended stay of nearly a month. She also spoke of childhood experiences, where summer trips to Egypt involved long waits in cars under extreme heat, with little freedom to move.

R also shared that, despite being from Gaza, she had never been able to visit other parts of Palestine due to travel restrictions. Additionally, as her father had been imprisoned in an Israeli jail for 12 years before she was born, this could prevent her from visiting certain areas in the future, even if she were to obtain an Irish passport.

Concluding, R reiterated that life in Gaza remains extremely difficult, not only for those who live there permanently but also for those attempting to visit or leave. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their story and shed light on the ongoing struggles faced by Palestinians.

J ONLINE

J, an 18-year-old Palestinian from the village of Nabi Salah in the occupied West Bank, addressed the audience to share her experiences and advocate for Palestinian children's rights. She introduced herself as a student of biochemistry and political science, as well as a journalist and activist. She emphasised the urgent reality that while she was speaking, her people were being bombed, murdered, and exploited, with lives being lost every minute. She urged everyone to keep this in mind while she spoke.

J recounted her upbringing in an activist family, where from an early age she was exposed to stories of displacement, imprisonment, and the struggles of her relatives due to their resistance against oppression. She described how her grandmother had to raise children alone after her grandfather was imprisoned for standing up for his rights. She recognised early on that her childhood was vastly different from what she saw on television, as she grew up under occupation, systemic violence, and oppression.

She provided an account of a typical day in her life, which often began not with an alarm clock but with the sound of gas canisters being fired or Israeli forces raiding her home. These raids, she explained, were intended to terrorise the community and served as a form of collective punishment. The near-daily occurrence of such raids meant that many, including herself, struggled to get sufficient sleep before school.

Attending school was also fraught with difficulties. Although her high school was in Ramallah, just 30 minutes from Nabi Salah, Israeli checkpoints and blockades frequently extended her commute to several hours. On some days, she was unable to attend school at all. She described how her school's proximity to an illegal Israeli settlement resulted in regular protests and violent suppression. Tear gas and bullets were common occurrences near the school, often forcing students to remain inside during lunch breaks for safety. Similar disruptions awaited her return home, with road blockades preventing normal travel.

J detailed the restrictions placed on her social life, stating that she was often unable to play outside, celebrate birthdays, or engage in ordinary childhood activities due to the constant threat of violence. She highlighted the psychological toll of living under occupation, expressing the fear of being shot or killed at any moment. She stressed that this was not just her reality, but the reality of millions of Palestinian children, and that the struggles were unending.

She placed the current situation within a historical context, stating that the oppression had persisted for 75 years since the establishment of Israel. She described the occupation as an ongoing Nakba (catastrophe), arguing that Palestinians were criminalised simply for their identity. J contrasted her experience in the West Bank with the even more dire conditions in Gaza, where residents had been under siege for over 17 years with severely restricted access to resources.

She urged the audience to not only listen but take tangible action, asserting that raising awareness was necessary but insufficient. She encouraged people to organise in their communities, protest, boycott Israeli products, and advocate for Palestinian liberation. She stressed that fighting oppression in any form was part of a broader struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and poverty.

J concluded by addressing discussions of a ceasefire, stating that while a ceasefire was essential, it was merely the starting point. She called for full Palestinian liberation, arguing that the fight for justice was not just for Palestine but for humanity as a whole. She urged the audience to take action as a duty, not as a favour, in the interest of preserving human rights and global peace.

ANONYMISED – READ BY REBECCA HESLIN



Rebecca Heslin, Irish Psychologists for Palestine reading an anonymised contribution

When the organisers began to plan this conference back in June, they approached a young Palestinian person with an innate ability to advocate for their own rights and the rights of all Palestinian students and invited them to travel from Palestine to attend and speak accompanied by their parents. However, shortly after this invitation, a close family member's mother was placed in administrative detention by Israeli forces and was held indefinitely. As a result, they could not travel to Ireland. Rebecca Heslin, a member of the conference working group and Irish Psychologists for Palestine read their anonymised contribution on the day.

“I want you to imagine not being able to go to work you can't send your kid to school, there is no medicine and at any time you might get kicked out of your home without coming back, how sad is that? But let me tell you, it's not things that happened in the imaginary world; it's actually how we in Palestine live under the Israeli occupation. While I was preparing for this presentation, I was wondering whose story to tell you, mine? Khaled's? Ahmad's? Abod's? Each Palestinian has their own story, but we all share the same pain.

In Gaza (sorry I wasn't able to get a specific number of martyrs because the number continuously increasing, and many people believe that there are more martyrs we haven't heard about yet) I have cousins there, when I was talking to the one my age, she told me something and I quote “I should be studying at this school but now I live here, and I'm so happy the school already got bombed and it was nothing like the massacre that happened in Ossama's school”

Ossama Bani Zaid is a school in Gaza affiliated with the UNRWA that should be a safe place according to Humanitarian International Law, the massacre was on the 3 November 2023, and the Israelis killed 20 Palestinians that morning.



Many thinkers believe that what is happening in Gaza right now is also deliberate educational genocide, not only a human genocide because the Israelis have already bombed 80% of the schools and universities in the Gaza Strip and killed teachers, students and university professors and have been bombing archaeological places and libraries. People in Gaza being as strong and as challenging as they are, teachers started teaching kids inside the camps and making their own classrooms with boards and the supplies they could get to keep the students educated and try to reduce the effect of the war on their education as much as possible especially that we are in the second year of education without our classmates from Gaza, like an initiative that called 'school in tent' made by volunteer teachers who made their tents a classroom to hundreds of kids, that initiative aims to educate the children and do psychological discharge activities to help kids with traumas to get through it.

In the last few months, there is huge pressure on hospitals, especially after the current genocide, the lack of medicine and medical tools, the bombing of the hospitals, and the killing of doctors and nurses but the Israeli soldiers are harassing the hospital since day one. They have been destroying the hospitals and forbidding the main medical supplies (which are used to treat bone breaks and deep cuts) from entering Gaza and turning hospitals into war zones and sieging them, breaking into them and arresting the doctors and patients and killing them, all that reasons lead doctors to patient comparison, and treat the cases that could be treated with the supplies they have with also targeting paramedics and ambulances.

Within the pressure the hospitals are facing right now, the Israelis are aiming at the hospitals to bomb like the Al-Madani hospital, which the Israelis bombed on 17 October 2023 that led to a massacre, at that massacre, the Israelis killed 300 Palestinians

By the end of 2023, many hospitals were out of service, including Al-Shifa Hospital which contained a specific section for premature babies, before it went out of service, to keep the babies warm, the doctors used to cover them in tin and put them next to hot water. During the hospital sieging, the Israelis cut off the electricity and the gasoline that led that specific section to stop working and get out of service before the rest of the hospital, and the doctors had to move the premature babies from the section that was specified for them into a normal room at the hospital which led to tens of them to be killed due to lack of electricity and gasoline.

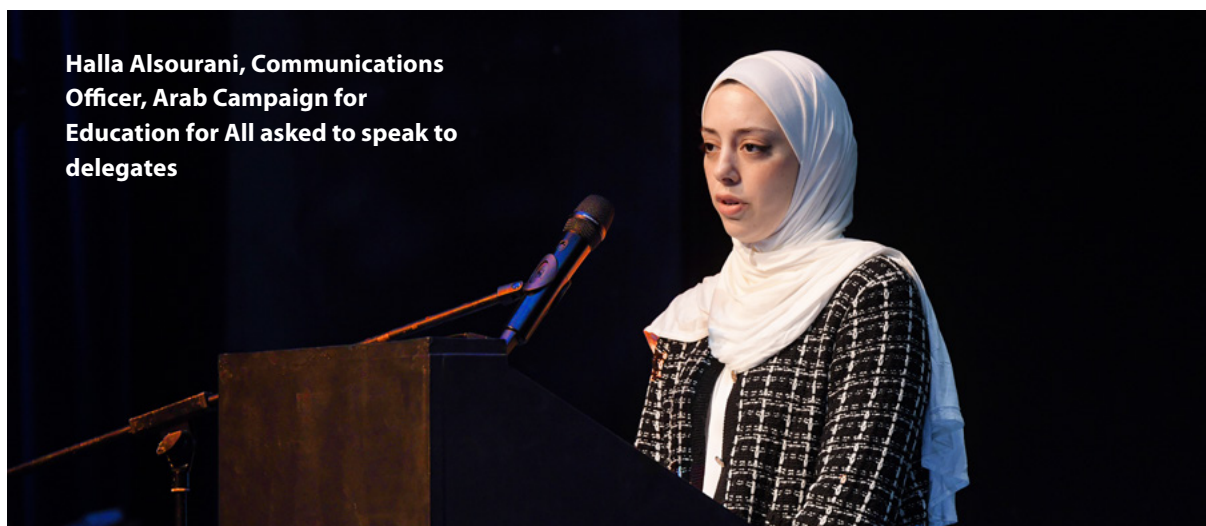
The last time my cousin was forced to be displaced, she called me crying she was so tired because that was their sixth time being forced to leave the camp or the school they were staying in.

My cousin in Jenin is also living the same pain but in a different situation, the kids can go to school, but they can't go back home, and people can go to hospitals, but the Israelis might break into the hospital and kill them."

HALLA ALSOURANI, COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER ARAB CAMPAIGN FOR EDUCATION FOR ALL

A deeply emotional contribution was made by Halla Sourani, who shared her personal tragedy, the murder of her daughter and husband in a rocket attack as they left northern Gaza. Her testimony underscored the devastating toll the conflict has taken on all Palestinian families. Halla was attending the conference and asked to speak on the day.

Halla Sourani, a mother from Gaza, addressed the conference to share her personal tragedy and express her gratitude for the support shown towards Palestine and Palestinian children, particularly in education. She had recently arrived in Ireland in February after losing her husband and daughter in a direct rocket attack that targeted their car in Gaza.



Halla Alsourani, Communications Officer, Arab Campaign for Education for All asked to speak to delegates

Halla explained that her family had been forced to flee from the north of Gaza to the south in search of safety. The Israeli authorities had announced a safe passage for civilians, and she, her husband, and their two daughters decided to follow it. However, despite taking this route, they were attacked. Her five-year-old daughter, Rahaf, was shot in the head, and as her husband attempted to help her, he was also shot and killed. Halla and her other daughter, who was six years old at the time, survived without injuries. She recounted how ambulances were prevented from reaching them, with multiple humanitarian organisations, including the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders, stating that any attempt to assist would result in further Israeli attacks despite this being a “safe route”. Her daughter remained alive for two hours, bleeding without medical assistance, before succumbing to her injuries.

After losing her husband and daughter, Halla felt she could no longer remain in Gaza. Her primary concern was to protect her surviving daughter, and she sought every possible way to leave. Eventually, she succeeded in reaching safety, but despite escaping the immediate dangers of war, she expressed a deep longing to return home. With the announcement of a ceasefire, she, like many others, wishes to return to Gaza to reunite with loved ones. However, she struggles to accept the reality that her family is no longer there.

She described the complete devastation she had left behind: her house, her daughter’s school, and her office at the Teachers Creativity Centre Association—an organisation supporting education in Gaza—have all been destroyed. Her car, her livelihood, and everything she once had were gone. She emphasised that she was just one mother among many who had lost everything in the war.

Halla concluded her speech by reiterating her deep desire to return to Gaza, despite knowing that she would find nothing left. She thanked the audience once again for their support and solidarity, leaving them with the reminder that her story is just one of many.

Panel discussion

At the end of session two, there was an opportunity for a panel discussion. Delegates had the opportunity to send questions for the discussion through Menti.com for the panel to answer.

Talha Al-Ali, Psychotherapist and Human Rights Activist, Iman Al-Shayeb, General Union of Palestinian Teachers and J (youth participant) participated in the discussion, which was chaired by Sandra Corrigan, Global Solidarity Officer, INTO. From the outset, it was acknowledged that while there were plenty of questions from delegates, there were also many messages of support, several of the questions were directed to Irish educators and trade unions rather than the panellists. It was emphasised that speakers could choose whether they wished to answer a question and that they could stop or leave at any time if they needed to.

What can I do as a teacher when the principals have said they don't want to talk to the children in our schools about Palestine and Gaza, And I think there's a fear maybe there as well.

It was acknowledged that this is a question for Irish educators to answer.

Talha noted his experiences working with Amnesty International.

I used to do human rights workshops in schools, and one of the schools rejected it, even though they requested they go and do a workshop, they rejected the workshop theme because it was about human rights and in relation to the situation in Gaza. They said we have two Israeli students here and we're very sensitive about how they feel. We spoke about this, and I felt like these two Israeli children, that school valued them more than all the children that have been killed in Gaza. It's something I've realised living here: people are so terrified of being called anti-Semitic to the degree that they will dehumanise Palestinians. And that's, that's the reality I'm facing here in Ireland. And it's something Francesca Albanese referred to this morning as well in the programme for government about the new IHRA definition of anti-Semitism.

I was shocked because all the protests are about passing the *Occupied Territories Bill* and then the government saying actually I will put this on hold and I will proceed with bringing the anti-Semitism definition that has been used by people who are using that to silence any debates. So actually, I don't know how I can speak to that. It should be an Irish person. I would speak to that because in the end, I'm in the country as a visitor or as a guest or however you would call me. So, I'm not an Irish citizen who can speak to the government as much as people who voted for this government to remain who are here.



How can specific practical psychological support be provided to traumatised children? How can the trade union movement help to have them provided?

Iman Al-Shayeb

About the psychological programs that we can give our students, we worked with this before with our union. So, first of all, we can contact our teachers in Gaza and provide them with financial support and give them the training session, the program of the training session, so our teachers in Gaza can meet other students in Gaza, in a tent or school.

You know, there is no safe place there, but they can collect them and they can give leisure activities, psychological programs and even they can play with them some they draw, play even to make them get out of the pressure they feel these days and the sense of fear, you know, they are there, they are worried, they are, they are afraid. So, these leisure activities are symbological programs that help them a lot to go out of this situation.

Talha Al Ali

I just want to translate a proverb we say in Palestine. We say the one who's drowning wouldn't be worried about drying their clothes. Which means we've seen one of the events that have been live streamed from the genocide, children doing psychosocial activities, playing football and they've been bombed in the school worried they're playing.

So, I believe it's great to have all these activities. It's actually only temporary, like for a few minutes where you feel safe and then when the next air strike comes in, that's it. So, we need the ceasefire, and we need the ceasefire to be respected in order to start with the healing process because you can't start really healing without having the conditions to heal.

So, the psychosocial activities that Iman spoke about they're amazing and keeping resilience so far, but I would like to bring back a quote from an interview with Malcolm X who said recovery is not when you stab someone with a nine-inch knife and pull out three inches and keep some in, not even pulling out the whole knife. The recovery starts when you pull out the whole knife and start treating the wound. But keeping the knife in and wanting to heal, it's just a magical thinking.

How can we practically support Palestine on a local, national and international level to ensure that justice is served, and Israel is held accountable?

J (Youth Speaker)

The main three words of the theme are Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. I mean, in a sense, that's what we've been calling for decades.

And, I feel like the Palestinian community has lost faith in the government, has lost faith in the United Nations, has lost faith in all of these organisations that claim to actually protect human rights while none of our human rights are protected. And I mean, how long does it need to hold Israel accountable? I mean, they have not even recognised that this is a genocide.

How are we asking them to hold the perpetrators of these crimes, the perpetrators of this violence accountable? So, my personal view on this and also the view of a big portion of the Palestinian community is that we believe in the nations, we believe in the people, we believe in the working-class people, the workers of the entire world because we recognise that we all share some forms of struggles, we all have shared struggles. We all are oppressed in one form or another.

So, the only way that Israel can be held accountable, the only way that justice can be served is for the people to rise up, for the people to unite, and for the people to take tangible action that can be actually seen in Palestine. We really do appreciate your guys's work, and we actually expect so much more from everyone.

So yeah, just hopefully organising each other, organising ourselves in a way where we all stand up unanimously against all these forms of injustices is the only way that justice can be held because these systems need to be reformed?

These governments need, you know, someone to hold them accountable for them to be even able to hold any other forms of, I guess, injustices or any other criminals accountable. Thank you.

How can we best advocate for the Gazan people post ceasefire?

Talha Al Ali

I believe advocacy alone is not enough to just keep advocating. We've been advocating for a long time. But I believe there is great expertise in Ireland and medical and psychological and political and all other aspects to be able to safely go to Gaza during the ceasefire because I believe all people in Gaza need a good few years break from everything just to recover and then to have expertise who want to support the Palestinian people in Gaza to go there and to help rebuilding infrastructure to build water and sanitation.



The water treatment units, water and sanitation systems and to help with re-establishing or rebuilding the hospitals, the school system and all aspects of life that have been shattered and destroyed by Israel.

Because I believe as a psychotherapist, I believe people after the ceasefire starts, they might collapse because they're they've been on flight and fight for 16 months and they're nervous system is unable to hold that much, and a lot of people collapsed already because their nervous system haven't healed. So, advocating only for them to fix themselves. And start rebuilding along without going physically to help, it wouldn't really be as helpful.

So, we might need to move from advocacy to even helping hand in hand. Thank you.

Iman Al Shayeb

Yes, as I said before, we want a just solution to the Palestinian issue, without a lasting and just solution to the Palestinian issue, the ceasefire may stop anytime. You don't know the world didn't end yet so.

What in history, what we know about the Jews, that they are, that they don't commit to any agreements between us and them, between the Jews and the Palestinian side.

Because anytime they will break the commitment, they will again start a war on our people.

So, we want a lasting solution to our issue, to our cause. We want to free Palestine. We want you to support us to free Palestine. That is what we want to do.

Talha Al Ali

To reiterate on that point, I mean, right after I guess Joe Biden came out and said that there's an agreement, there's a ceasefire agreement, literally a couple minutes. Right after that was broadcast, Jenin, a city in Palestine was bombed with multiple bombs and air strikes killing multiple people, killing I believe, six people including two children that day.

And Gaza even still the ceasefire is not applied. People are still getting killed, people are still getting murdered, houses are still getting demolished, and it is crucial again to recognise that a ceasefire is just one step out of so many other steps that need to be taken for many of us to heal because this is something that is very repetitive.

I mean, we're seeing attacks and this onslaught on Gaza is not something that has just happened once It's been happening every couple of years, and we keep seeing that.

So, the only solution is to put an end to this apartheid system it's just to put an end to the settler colonial system and holding them accountable for this not to be repeated.

Because history just keeps repeating itself and we only see the urgency to speak up when there's an attack, when people are getting mass murdered.

And we need to, I guess just recognise that this is wrong. This is, it's not, you know, reasonable for us to only recognise the severity of the issue when there are tens of thousands of people getting mass murdered.

It is important to note that we're talking here, when we say Jew, I suppose we are not talking about the Jewish people. We're talking about the Israeli government and, the genocide and apartheid that the Israeli government is inflicting, because we know that so many Jewish people stand against that as well.

Talha Al Ali

Yeah, in Palestine, usually we use this word in Arabic, and we translate it because the Israeli system, they say we want to create a land for Jews, and they're always pushing on the narrative with the Jews.

So, for us, it automatically comes, and instead of saying Israeli, we say Jews in Arabic, we mean the Israelis in that land because even within Israel, there are Muslims and Christians who are suffering from the other side, and they are Israeli citizens.

And in our towns in the West Bank, you would have big signs from Israel saying that this country, is for the Jews only. And they would say before you come to T, where I'm from as well, they would have a big sign saying you should go back, it's not a safe place for you to move in or within these words.

So, when we say a Jew in Palestine, we mean the Israeli Jew. We don't mean the Jewish people around the world.

And just to give each of our panellists the opportunity, if there is anything more you would like to add, to say to our delegates here today

Iman Al Shayeb

Thank you, thank you very much for listening to us and for holding such a conference for our teachers, for our students and I hope that we can see as my colleague said before some steps for the future, to take actions that can help our students in Gaza to start their education immediately, because as we said before the education system in Gaza was destroyed, so we want to save the generation and not wait until another generation will lose another academic year, so I hope that you can help us in Palestine, by supporting our schools, our ministry of education, our union to start to do initiatives as soon as possible to enable our children in Gaza to start their education and as we said, the students in the West Bank also suffers a lot because of the occupation and because of the settlers' attacks. So all we want is to support our schools to support us, save our schools and to be safe places for our children we don't want to lose other children as J said before, every moment, every second, we lose someone in Palestine, even the truce will come tomorrow, but tonight we are very afraid in Palestine because we will hear in the morning, large families, large numbers of families in Gaza are dying or have died, so every morning we get up from our sleep to read the bad news about our loss in Gaza. We hope as we said before to support us to free Palestine because if we are under occupation, we will not be free, we will be always tortured, and exposed to the Israeli soldiers' practices against us, or the settlers' practices, so this is what we want, want you to support us, to help for Palestine to be a safe place for its people and thank you very much for hearing us and we wish to see you very soon

J (Youth Speaker)

I can go ahead next. Yeah, I mean I could just start off and just end I guess with saying that as educators, you guys do hold a lot of the responsibility and I do believe that that's a huge responsibility and at the same time it is something beautiful, but it is very important for you to educate yourself. For you to actually use the right terms with your students, tell them what is going on, be able to actually encourage them to speak up, to resist, to rise within their own communities, within their own I guess, in their own countries and also for other countries, for you to actually make these connections and educate them about all these forms of injustice that are being practised in the world. So yeah, thank you so much for hosting this beautiful conference and I really do feel honoured to have been part of this and yeah, hopefully, we can see you soon in a liberated Palestine where there is no occupation, where we are all able to gain an amazing education, be able to go to our schools and have our children be able to literally just practice their childhood in safety, dignity and in peace, so yeah, thank you so much.

Talha Al-Ali

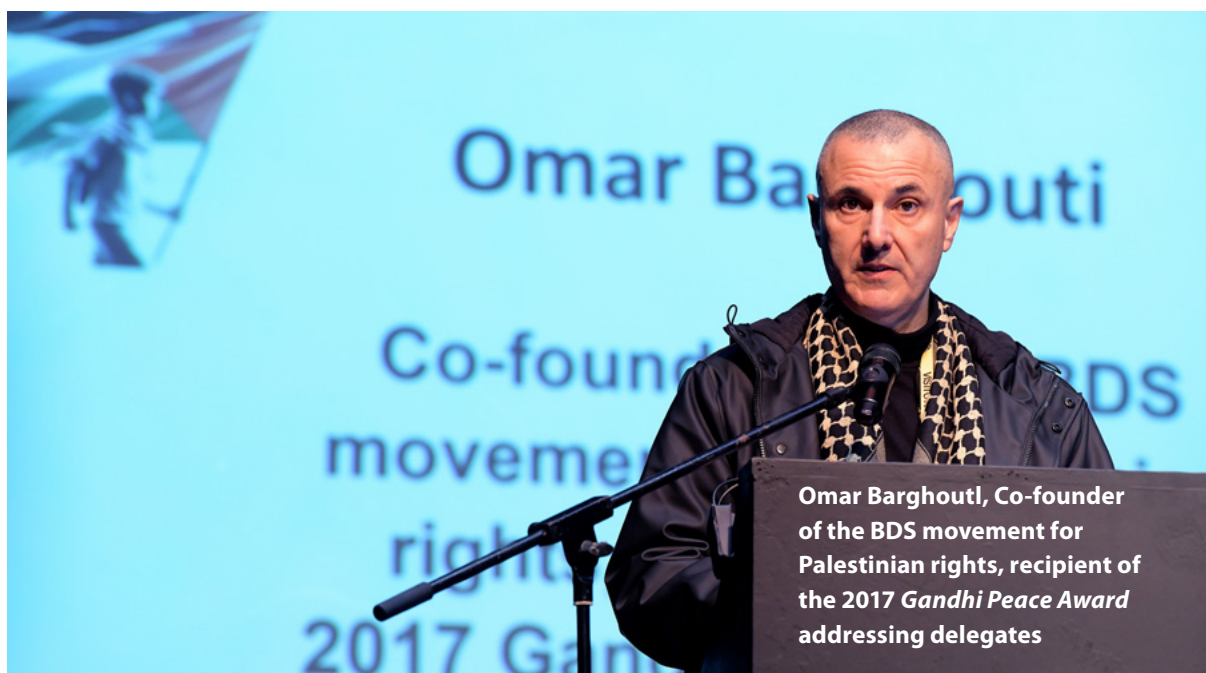
Speaking to teachers and educators, I would like to come from the point of calling Israel what it is, it is a Western, settler, colonial project and I can't say this without mentioning the great Palestinian thinker Edward Said, and Edward Said spoke about how the western colonial projects created binary narratives, whether it is western or primitive, and the first thing for educators in Ireland is to decolonise the minds that runs with these two binary narratives, it is either you are western or you are primitive and that's

the first step to see people who are not western as equal and as valid and to value their culture, their habits and then you'd start seeing them as a human. And yes, I believe that's the message, that if I would send only one message to educators that's to decolonise educator's minds and then to know how to tailor your classes to be really abiding to all international instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human rights to be respected. Thank you so much.

Next steps

The final session, chaired by the INTO Northern Secretary, Mark McTaggart, focused on practical actions. Omar Barghouti, co-founder of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement and winner of the *Ghandi Peace Award*, urged attendees to continue advocating for justice and ensure that they are not complicit by engaging in BDS stating, "A ceasefire will only lead to a loss of visible genocide".

OMAR BARGHOUTI, CO-FOUNDER OF THE BDS MOVEMENT FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS AND RECIPIENT OF THE 2017 GANDHI PEACE AWARD



Omar Barghouti began by citing the Arab-American poet Gibran Kahlil Gibran, emphasising the sacredness of children's lives and the injustice of the mass killing and starvation of Palestinian children in Gaza. He described the Israeli attacks as crimes against humanity and urged the global community to recognise the severity of the situation.

Referencing historical instances of Israeli aggression, including the 2014 massacre in Gaza, where 526 children were killed, and the chants of Israeli extremists celebrating the destruction. He noted that Israel's policies have consistently aimed to suppress and eliminate the Palestinian people, highlighting what historian Ilan Pappé termed "incremental genocide."

Barghouti addressed the ongoing ceasefire agreement, acknowledging its importance while cautioning that it could lead to a more concealed form of genocide. He emphasised the necessity of sustained international pressure through the BDS movement to ensure accountability and justice for Palestinians, pointing out that Israel's actions have been enabled by Western support and impunity, leading to severe violations of international law and human rights.

Barghouti connected Israel's systematic efforts to expel Palestinians, citing David Ben Gurion's orders to destroy Palestinian villages during the Nakba of 1948 and atrocities committed by Israeli forces at the time to Israel's present policies, showing that they reflect a continued strategy of ethnic cleansing and settler-colonialism.

Barghouti also highlighted the impact of the conflict on Gaza's infrastructure, particularly its educational and medical institutions. He described the destruction of schools and universities, the targeting of educators and students, and the blockade of medical supplies, which has led to dire conditions in hospitals. He warned that the destruction of education in Gaza is part of a larger effort to erase Palestinian identity and culture.

He called for increased support for the BDS movement, a nonviolent resistance strategy inspired by the South African anti-apartheid struggle and outlined the movement's primary goals: ending Israel's occupation and apartheid, ensuring the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and securing equal rights for all Palestinians. Barghouti emphasised that BDS opposes all forms of racism, including antisemitism, and is focused on holding institutions accountable rather than targeting individuals.

Omar urged action in several areas, including disrupting business with complicit entities, expanding boycotts, establishing Apartheid-Free Zones, and pressuring governments and financial institutions to divest from companies that support Israel's actions. He specifically called on Ireland to implement a military embargo on Israel, enforce the *Occupied Territories Bill*, and prevent financial institutions from facilitating Israeli bond sales in the EU.

Concluding his speech, Barghouti reiterated the need for global solidarity and action to dismantle Israel's apartheid system. He reminded the audience of their ethical responsibility to oppose oppression and support Palestinian freedom, urging them to mobilise pressure against state and corporate complicity in the occupation. He called on people of conscience to honour the memory of those killed and to work towards a just and equitable future for Palestinians.

PATRICIA McKEOWN, REGIONAL ORGANISER FOR UNISON AND CHAIR OF TRADE UNION FRIENDS OF PALESTINE

Patricia McKeown, Regional Organiser for Unison and Chair of TUFFP continued Omar's call, urging everyone to collectively make a difference by boycotting Israeli goods and services, such as TEVA pharmaceutical products, and to put pressure on governments to end procurements of Israeli goods and services that support genocide.

Patricia McKeown commended the INTO for its efforts in putting into action the motion carried by the ICTU in 2007 and demonstrating consistent commitment over the past 20 years. She highlighted the importance of addressing the challenge posed earlier by Francesca Albanese, particularly in light of the recent government decisions.

McKeown raised concerns about the Irish government's endorsement of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, despite warnings from over 100 NGOs and 120 international scholars, including many Jewish experts. She noted that the definition has been misused to suppress Palestinian solidarity activism and questioned why this government decision was made when the international community is aware of Israel's continued violations of international law, including genocide, war crimes, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing. She questioned the legitimacy of the caretaker government's decision, particularly given the recent elections and urged that every TD, regardless of political affiliation, be contacted immediately to oppose this decision. Additionally, she emphasised that the trade union movement must act collectively, as the decision risks breaching the *Good Friday Agreement*, which mandates human



**Patricia McKeown, Regional
Organiser for Unison and Chair of
Trade Union Friends of Palestine**

rights equality across the island. McKeown discussed the potential for the IHRA definition to facilitate discrimination, citing examples of repression against Palestinian solidarity activists across Europe. She made it clear that this would not be tolerated in Ireland.

Outlining the historical role of TUFPP and tracing its development from 2007 and the adoption of a BDS policy, making the ICTU one of the first to do so in the Western Hemisphere Patricia noted the persistent attempts by Israel to undermine this position but affirmed that the ICTU core policy remains firmly aligned with the BDS National Committee.

Patricia highlighted several successful BDS campaigns, including the removal of Veolia contracts from Belfast hospitals and the campaign against Puma, which led to its withdrawal of sponsorship from the Israeli football teams in the occupied territories. She drew attention to the ongoing campaign against Teva, an Israeli pharmaceutical company, which is being targeted due to its complicity in genocide. A new app allows individuals to request alternative pharmaceutical products, and these requests are automatically forwarded to the relevant health authorities, increasing pressure on governments to take action.

McKeown discussed the success of the University and College Union in divesting from Israeli bonds, demonstrating the potential for further pension fund divestment campaigns. She encouraged the trade union movement to examine its pension schemes to identify and eliminate investments that support Israel's apartheid regime.

Patricia spoke of the implementation of a new training programme designed to educate union members on how to engage in the BDS movement effectively. Omar Barghouti has offered to support these training sessions, ensuring strategic implementation. The programme has been piloted in several unions and is now available for widespread adoption.

She emphasised the necessity of declaring trade union offices and other public spaces as apartheid-free zones, with a call for action across Ireland to prevent the purchase of Israeli goods and services. She acknowledged the Irish people's long-standing support for Palestine and stressed that their governments must now follow suit. McKeown asserted that the Irish, Northern Irish, and UK governments continue to engage with Israeli goods and services and that this must be stopped through coordinated action.

She concluded, by noting that collective small actions by tens of thousands of people would make a significant impact, contributing to the economic and political pressure needed to dismantle Israel's apartheid system.

DELEGATE ACTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Delegates to the conference were asked to provide information on the next steps that they will take personally, within their union and that they will lobby the government to take. This information was collected using the menti.com platform.

The proposals submitted emphasise boycotts, lobbying and education as key strategies to support Palestine. Unions are urged to take stronger action, including procurement boycotts, and legislative pressure, to push for an end to the oppression of Israeli policies.

Union action and advocacy

- * Continue discussing and supporting Palestine at INTO meetings and in schools.
- * Unions should explicitly use the term genocide instead of war.
- * Advocate for government opposition to the IHRA definition of antisemitism, as it may suppress union members' freedom to protest.
- * Unions should take more direct action, similar to past anti-apartheid efforts (e.g., the Dunnes Stores' boycott of South African goods).

Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions

- * Create BDS training and materials (videos, guidance, and branch-level workshops).
- * Push for schools and government institutions to adhere to BDS policies and avoid procurement from companies complicit in Israeli actions.
- * Encourage public awareness and individual action (e.g., checking purchases for Israeli links, removing Israeli products from workplaces, and notifying friends and family).
- * Target government procurement policies to exclude Israeli-linked companies.
- * Promote and enforce BDS in education, healthcare (e.g., Teva products), and public services.
- * Pressure financial institutions (e.g. Central Bank) to divest from Israeli bonds.

Political and legislative lobbying

- * Lobby government and TDs to:
 - Reject the IHRA definition of antisemitism and remove it from government policies.
 - Pass the *Occupied Territories Bill* to cut economic and diplomatic ties with Israel.
 - Stop US military planes refuelling in Shannon and campaign against Irish complicity in arms transportation.
 - Enforce sanctions on Israel and prevent any trade or engagement with Israeli-linked businesses.

Education and awareness

- * Teach about the situation of Palestinian learners and teachers.
- * Provide guidance for teachers on discussing BDS, Gaza, and Israeli occupation.
- * Encourage teachers to share Palestinian literature, poetry, and stories in classrooms.
- * Promote decolonisation in educational materials and teaching approaches.

Support and solidarity

- * Fundraising and donations for the UNRWA and medical aid organisations.
- * Encourage unions to financially support members who travel to Palestine to assist in rebuilding efforts.
- * Push for workplaces and universities to declare themselves as AFZs.
- * Encourage mass mobilisation and union-led campaigns against Israeli policies.

Owen Reidy, General Secretary, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Owen Reidy, ICTU General Secretary urged the Irish government to enact the Occupied Territories Bill with urgency and called for the Central Bank of Ireland to stop facilitating the sale of Israeli Bonds, which fund the violence in Gaza. Highlighting the need for solidarity over charity, he called on institutions, trade unions, and governments to cut all ties that support Israel's occupation and apartheid, emphasising that "doing no harm" is a fundamental moral obligation.



Owen Reidy addressed the conference, reflecting on the progress made since the conference organised by TUFU in November 2019. Titled *Palestinian Children: Their Right to a Safe and Just Future*, the 2019 conference highlighted the systemic mistreatment of Palestinian children under Israeli occupation, particularly in relation to detention, violence, and psychological trauma.

Reidy noted that the 2019 conference had successfully raised awareness about these issues, advocated for solidarity, and promoted the BDS campaign. Contributions from Palestinian and international experts provided insight into the widespread abuse of Palestinian children, including physical violence during detentions, the denial of legal rights, and the health and psychological impacts of trauma. The conference also offered recommendations for global solidarity, particularly through trade unions, grassroots movements, and international legal frameworks.

Reflecting on the developments since 2019, Reidy highlighted the ongoing and intensifying violence against Palestinians. He referenced a recent article by journalist Ahmed Shihab-Eldin, which described the relentless dual assault on Palestinians - bulldozing homes in the West Bank while bombing entire neighbourhoods in Gaza. Reidy stressed that these atrocities were happening openly, with Israeli leaders declaring their intent to erase Palestinian existence. He condemned the silence of the international community, stating that this inaction effectively endorsed the genocide.

He cited multiple reports, including one from the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, which detailed the direct targeting of children in Gaza. The report described instances of premature infants suffocating due to bombings, children digging through rubble to bury their families, and survivors suffering from famine and amputations. Another report by the UN Human Rights Office documented at least 136 attacks on 27 hospitals in Gaza, leading to mass casualties and the collapse of healthcare services.

Reidy drew attention to the destruction of the Kamal Adwan Hospital on 27 December 2024, which left the population of North Gaza with almost no healthcare access. He highlighted the case of Dr Hussam Abu Safiyah, who was arrested after refusing to abandon his patients - an arrest that followed the targeted killing of his eight-year-old son. Reidy also referenced statistics from Save the Children, which reported that between October 2023 and August 2024, Israeli forces had killed approximately 11,300 Palestinian children, including 710 infants under 12 months old.

Reidy called for an urgent and effective response, quoting UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese, who stated that millions worldwide have been outraged by Israel's actions, but that mere condemnation is not enough. He pointed to Ireland's then Taoiseach Simon Harris, who had expressed solidarity with Palestine, but insisted that strong words must now translate into strong action.

He outlined several necessary steps, including the immediate enactment of the *Occupied Territories Bill*. He also called for an end to the Central Bank of Ireland's regulation of Israeli Bonds, which directly fund the genocide in Gaza. Additionally, he advocated for the reintroduction of legislation granting Irish workers the right to refuse to assist regimes engaged in genocide.

Reidy condemned the European Union's complicity, stating that the ICTU fully supports the campaign to suspend the *EU-Israel Association Agreement*, which grants trade privileges to Israel despite the inclusion of human rights clauses. He referenced Omar Barghouti's speech at a previous conference, in which Barghouti called for action rather than charity, reminding trade unions of their moral obligation to "do no harm".

Reidy concluded by emphasising that BDS remains the most effective form of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice, and equality. He called on trade unions, universities, and public institutions to cut all ties with Israeli apartheid and to divest from companies complicit in the oppression of Palestinians reaffirming that the ICTU would continue to play its role in ensuring that Ireland stands firmly against Israel's occupation, apartheid, and genocide.

Concluding remarks

INTO General Secretary John Boyle concluded the conference by declaring, "We must guarantee the surviving children of Palestine and the generations coming after them that we will support and cherish them in every way possible", with a call for sustained advocacy and international pressure to restore education and human rights in the region, noting the critical role of education as a lifeline for Palestinian children and the responsibility of all to protect their future.

John Boyle, General Secretary of the INTO, delivered the concluding remarks at the Conference on the Rights of Palestinian Children. He opened his address by reflecting on the historic actions of the Irish trade union movement, particularly the courage of the Dunnes Store workers in Dublin who refused to handle goods from apartheid South Africa. He noted that their steadfast commitment to justice remains a source of inspiration for today's trade union leaders.

Boyle reaffirmed the INTO's unwavering support for ending apartheid in Israel and holding those responsible for the ongoing genocide accountable. He expressed deep gratitude to all attendees for their participation in the conference, highlighting the INTO's long-standing commitment to international solidarity, especially with education unions impacted by injustice and oppression. He reminded the audience that the INTO has actively supported the Palestinian people for many years.



Addressing the events of 7 October 2023, Boyle acknowledged the Hamas attack on Israeli civilians and affirmed that the INTO condemned their actions. However, he emphasised that what has since unfolded over the past 15 months has been profoundly shocking. He described the bombardment of Gaza and the escalating violence in the West Bank as acts of extreme brutality and noted that the INTO listened closely to the call of Palestinian trade unions urging global solidarity against oppression. He reiterated that the struggle for Palestinian justice is intrinsically linked to the broader struggle for the liberation of all dispossessed and exploited people worldwide.

Boyle detailed the INTO's steadfast calls for a ceasefire and its repeated condemnations of Israel's actions, particularly the killing of Palestinian children. He highlighted the INTO's financial contributions to aid agencies and trade unions assisting the Palestinian people, particularly the 650,000+ children and young people in Gaza who have been deprived of education and who are enduring severe trauma and famine conditions.

The INTO General Secretary noted that the union has continuously shown solidarity with the Palestinian people, both in Ireland and internationally. He praised INTO members for their efforts in raising awareness within their branches and school communities. Recognising the urgent need to rebuild Palestine's education infrastructure, he committed to lobbying the Irish government to ensure EU funding is allocated to this cause while maintaining Palestinian control over their education system. He also pledged to seek the support of the ICTU and international education trade unions for this campaign. Furthermore, he acknowledged the significant intervention by Irish unions at the request of Ambassador Wahba Abdalmajid, which has enabled severely injured Palestinian children to receive medical treatment in Ireland.

Boyle expressed profound gratitude to all speakers, organisers, and SIPTU for providing the historic venue free of charge.

As the conference concluded, Boyle called on attendees to strengthen their resolve and expand their efforts. He urged continued participation in demonstrations, starting the following Saturday, and insisted on the urgent passage of the *Occupied Territories Bill* by the new government. He emphasised the necessity of reinforcing BDS measures against Israel and, above all, ensuring the long-term support and protection of Palestinian children.

He concluded with a powerful reminder from Martin Luther King Jr.: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

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We thank all those who chaired the different sessions of the conference and our Global Solidarity Officer Sandra Corrigan for her tireless work. Most of all we appreciate the contributions of all our speakers, especially those who travelled - or who attempted to travel – or are in exile – from occupied Palestine.



John Boyle, INTO General Secretary; Baker Hijazi, First Counsellor, Deputy Head of Mission for the State of Palestine and H.E. Ambassador for the State of Palestine Dr Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid listening to conference speakers