

To:

Ursula Von Der Leyen
President of the European Commission
European Commission
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels, Belgium

Brussels, 4 February 2025

Subject: Ban EU Trade and Business with Israel's Illegal Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Dear President von der Leyen,

We, the undersigned human rights organizations, trade unions and civil society groups, urge the European Commission to take action to ban all trade and business between the EU and Israel's illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), including East Jerusalem. Such action is essential for the EU and its member states to comply with their obligations under international law.

On July 19, 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a landmark advisory opinion¹ affirming that states must not recognize, aid, or assist the unlawful situation arising from Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory. The Court made clear that all states have "*the obligation ... to abstain from entering into economic or trade dealings with Israel concerning the [OPT] or parts thereof which may entrench its unlawful presence in the territory*", and to "*take steps to prevent trade or investment relations that assist in the maintenance of the illegal situation created by Israel in the OPT*".

The EU's current policy of distinguishing between goods produced in Israel and those produced in settlements falls short of these obligations. While this differentiation denies preferential trade terms for settlement goods, it still allows such goods to enter the EU market. This contravenes the obligations under international humanitarian law and as laid out by the ICJ, which **require a complete ban on trade and business with Israel's illegal settlements**.

By trading with Israel's illegal settlements, the EU, its member states and EU companies are not only breaching their own legal obligations but also contributing to the serious and systemic human rights and other international law abuses underpinning the settlement enterprise. The ICJ ruling laid those out in detail, concluding that Israel's legislation and policies constitute a breach of article 3 of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which prohibits racial segregation and apartheid.

The EU member states have repeatedly issued statements unanimously condemning Israel's settlements as illegal under international law and as a significant obstacle to achieving a two-

¹ ICJ Advisory Opinion, *Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*, 19 July 2024, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/186/186-20240719-adv-01-00-en.pdf>.

state solution.² Those statements have often noted that the settlement enterprise drives severe abuses, including forced evictions, demolitions of civilian infrastructures (often targeting EU-funded projects), land confiscations, forced transfers, and widespread violence by state-backed settlers and Israeli forces. These abuses have been deemed so serious by EU member states that they overcame their sharp divisions and imposed targeted sanctions on limited number of settlers and settler-affiliated entities.

Yet, despite EU consensus about the settlements' illegality and their link to serious abuses, the EU continues to trade and allow business with them, helping to sustain the serious human rights and international law violations inexorably intertwined with settlements' maintenance and expansion.

In light of the urgent need for compliance with international law and to halt EU, member states' and businesses' contribution to Israel's serious abuses, we call on the Commission to immediately take the following actions:

1. **Introduce Legislation to Ban Trade with and Investments in Settlements:** Propose legal acts banning all imports and exports of goods and services from and to Israel's illegal settlements in the OPT as well as investments therein; we note, in that regard, that the Commission has the authority to propose a ban on trade with settlements under the Common Commercial Policy, as it has acknowledged³; and
2. **Issue a Strengthened Business Advisory:** Pending the adoption of such legislation, publish a reinforced advisory document discouraging European businesses from activities benefitting the Israeli settlements. This should go significantly further than the existing EU advisory document⁴ in order to discourage all trade with settlements (as Norway has done⁵) and engagement with Israeli banks and enterprises operating in illegal settlements due to the significant risk of contributing to serious human rights violations and breaches of international law and ensure that the entire value chain falls under the scope of the legislation.

We look forward to a prompt reply, and hope the European Commission will swiftly take the measures necessary to comply with international law and to end complicity in abuses.

Yours sincerely,

1. 11.11.11
2. A Plataforma Unitária de Solidariedade com a Palestina (PUSP)
3. Academics for Palestine - Ireland
4. ACT Alliance EU
5. Act Church of Sweden

² Latest, among many: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc57-item-4-general-debate-human-rights-situations-require-council%E2%80%99s-attention_en?s=62.

³ Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1484, 8 September 2021, recital 11), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32021D1484&from=EN>.

⁴ *Common messages aimed at raising awareness among EU citizens and businesses regarding involvement in financial and economic activities in the settlements*, 30 June 2013, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/common-messages-aimed-raising-awareness-among-eu-citizens-and-businesses-regarding-involvement_en.

⁵ Press release, *Do not engage in trade and business cooperation that serves to perpetuate Israel's occupation of Palestine*, 22 October 2024, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/do-not-engage-in-trade-and-business-cooperation-that-serves-to-perpetuate-israels-occupation-of-palestine/id3061358/>.

6. ActionAid Denmark
7. ActionAid France
8. ActionAid International
9. ActionAid Italy
10. ACV-CSC Belgium
11. Anti-Zionst Jewish Alliance in Belgium (AJAB)
12. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
13. Al-Haq
14. Al-Haq Europe
15. Amis de Sabeel France
16. Amnesty International
17. Anti-Racist Forum ry
18. AOI ETS
19. ARCI
20. Association Belgo-Palestinienne WB
21. Association Culture et Paix (ACP)
22. Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine (AURDIP)
23. Association France Palestine Solidarité
24. Assopace Palestina
25. Belgian Academics and Artists for Palestine/Belgian Campaign for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (BA4P/BACBI)
26. BePax
27. Broederlijk Delen
28. Business and Human Rights Resource Centre
29. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
30. Campagna Ponti e Non Muri - Pax Christi Italia
31. Caritas Europa
32. CCFD-Terre Solidaire
33. CEDETIM
34. Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO)
35. Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses - Intersindical Nacional (CGTP-IN)
36. Child Rights International Network (CRIN)
37. Chrétiens de la Méditerranée
38. Christian Aid Ireland
39. CIDSE
40. CNCD-11.11.11
41. CNE CSC Belgium
42. Comité de Solidaridad con la Causa Árabe
43. Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras (CCOO)
44. Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT)
45. Confédération générale du travail (CGT)
46. Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL)
47. Conselho Português para a Paz e Cooperação
48. COSTRUTTORI DI PACE

49. CRID
50. CULTURE DE PALESTINE
51. Danish Muslim Aid
52. De-Colonizer
53. Defence for Children International
54. DIAKONIA (Sweden)
55. Društvo OV-CA
56. Dutch Scholars for Palestine
57. Een Andere Joodse Stem (Another Jewish Voice, Belgium)
58. EinStaat – Konfliktzonen Kunst & Denkkollektive - OneState Embassy Art collective
59. Ekō
60. Entraide et Fraternité
61. Eurocadres
62. EuroMed Rights
63. European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine - ECCP
64. European Legal Support Center
65. European Middle East Project (EuMEP)
66. European Trade Union Network for Justice in Palestine
67. Fackförbundet ST
68. Fédération Artisans du Monde
69. Fem-R ry
70. FGTB-ABVV
71. Finnish Development NGOs - Fingo
72. Finnish Refugee Advice Centre
73. Finnish Women´s Association Unioni (Naisasialiitto Unioni ry)
74. Finnwatch ry
75. FLC CGIL
76. Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst e.V.
77. France Amérique latine FAL
78. GLAN | Global Legal Action Network
79. GREI 250
80. Helsinki Pride Community
81. Human Rights Watch
82. Humanitas - Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation
83. HuSoMe
84. INTAL
85. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
86. International Media Support
87. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
88. Intersindical Valenciana
89. Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign
90. ISCOD SINDICALISTAS SIN FRONTERAS
91. Istituto Italiano di Ricerca per la Pace – Corpi Civili di Pace
92. Jeunes FGTB
93. Judeus pela Paz e Justiça

94. Kommunal, Swedish Municipal Worker's Union
95. La Cimade
96. medico international
97. Mladí zelení, z.s.
98. Mondiaal FNV
99. Movimento pelos Direitos do Povo Palestino e pela Paz no Médio Oriente - MPPM
100. MUNDUBAT
101. Ne naším jménem! - Za spravedlivý mír na Blízkém východě
102. Netzwerk Ökumenisches Begleitprogramm in Palästina und Israel in Deutschland e.V
103. No Name Kitchen
104. Nuorten mielenterveysseura - Yeesi ry
105. Olof Palmes Internationella Center
106. Organizacija za participatorno družbo
107. Oxfam
108. OZ Prirodzene
109. Palestina Solidariteit vzw
110. Palestina.lt
111. PAX
112. Pax Christi Diözesanverband München und Freising
113. Pax Christi Dt. Sektion e.V.
114. Pax Christi Flanders
115. Pax Christi International
116. Pax Christi Italia
117. Paz con Dignidad
118. Peace Institute, Ljubljana
119. PIC - Legal Center for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment
120. Plan International
121. Plateforme des ONG françaises pour la Palestine
122. PROJA Institut
123. Proti dehumanizaci
124. Red Universitaria por Palestina (RUxP), ES.
125. REF- Réseau Euromed France
126. Réseau Euromed France
127. RESEAU FEMINISTE "RUPTURES" FRANCE
128. ResQ - People Saving People
129. Rete Italiana Pace e Disarmo
130. Rete Ricerca e Università per la Palestina, Italy
131. Sadaka-the Ireland Palestine Alliance
132. Saplinq, o.z.
133. Seta LGBTQI+ Rights Finland
134. Sindicato Andaluz de Trabajadores (SAT)
135. Sindikat Mladi plus (Trade Union Youth Plus)
136. Slovene Philanthropy
137. SOLIDAR

138. SOUTIEN BELGE OUTRE-FRONTIERES - SB OVERSEAS
139. Stichting Kifaia
140. Sumud - the Finnish Palestine Network
141. Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society
142. The Finnish League for Human Rights
143. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
144. The National Council of Women of Finland
145. The Rights Forum
146. Trans ry / Trans Association
147. UGT
148. Umanotera
149. Un Ponte Per (NGO)
150. Union des Progressistes Juifs de Belgique (UPJB)
151. Union syndicale Solidaires (France)
152. United Against Inhumanity (UAI)
153. UnPontePer
154. Vida Justa
155. Viva Salud
156. Vrede vzw (Belgium)
157. Vredesactie
158. VSS FF UL (Visokošolski sindikat Slovenije) - sindikalna celica Filozofske fakultete v Ljubljani
159. Weltfriedensdienst e.V.
160. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
161. ZASUK - sindikat za ustvarjalnost in kulturo
162. Zavod Tri / Three Institute
163. Zavod za podporo civilnodružbenih iniciativ in multikulturno sodelovanje Pekarna Magdalenske mreže Maribor