

# Assessing the Efforts of International Community to Protect Human Rights in Palestine: **Interventions and Challenges**



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**Abstract:**

This paper examines international interventions aimed at protecting Palestinian human rights amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza and escalating tensions in the West Bank. It highlights international humanitarian law as the key legal framework designed to protect civilians during armed conflicts. The paper identifies significant challenges hindering these efforts, notably the overlap between international politics and law, and global polarization, which obstructed decisive measures to safeguard Palestinians—especially given the frequent use of veto power by countries such as the United States at the UN Security Council, allowing Israel to continue its operations without substantial restraint.

The study focuses on international efforts, including UN General Assembly resolutions calling for ceasefires, though these remained non-binding due to weak enforcement mechanisms. Additionally, it discusses significant legal initiatives, including South Africa's lawsuit against Israel at the International Court of Justice, and the International Criminal Court's issuance of arrest warrants against Israeli leaders for war crimes.

The paper further outlines humanitarian and medical interventions by organizations like UNRWA, the International Red Cross, and the World Health Organization, all of which faced substantial obstacles, particularly Israeli restrictions on humanitarian aid access—a tactic identified by the paper as part of a deliberate starvation policy. It emphasizes the necessity of a unified Palestinian political system capable of enhancing diplomatic efforts and confronting these challenges effectively.

Finally, the paper calls for re-evaluating current international mechanisms and more stringent enforcement of international law. It underscores the importance of unified Palestinian efforts to overcome international political polarization, thus ensuring more effective protection of Palestinian civilians in the face of ongoing, severe human rights violations.

## **International Organizations: Interventions and Roles**

International humanitarian law (IHL) emerged from ethical principles that reject war and violence and promote peaceful conflict resolution. While IHL aims to protect civilians during conflict, the gap between legal norms and actual political practices often results in mass suffering. Warring parties frequently claim to uphold international law while accusing their opponents of violations, but civilians remain the primary victims.

In Gaza, the scale of violence has prompted global institutions to describe Israel's actions as genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese characterized the Gaza genocide as a “declared tragedy” with colonial dimensions, warning of the broader threat to Palestinians under Israeli control as part of a project of “Greater Israel.”

Despite IHL's purpose to limit unnecessary suffering and protect non-combatants, Gaza has witnessed catastrophic losses. As of the paper's writing, over 51,000 Palestinians were killed and more than 117,000 injured. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, infrastructure, economic sectors, and public services in Gaza have been virtually destroyed, with material damages estimated by the World Bank at over \$53.2 billion.

Meanwhile, the West Bank has faced systematic violence. More than 12,000 Palestinians have been arrested, major roadways have been closed, and refugee camps have been repeatedly raided. The Israeli military launched a large-scale operation called “Iron Wall,” beginning in Jenin and extending across northern West Bank camps. These raids included home demolitions and mass displacement, echoing Gaza's crisis.

These developments underscore severe violations of IHL and raise urgent questions about the international community's response. The paper seeks to assess the extent of these interventions—legal, political, and humanitarian—since October 7, 2023, and to explore the limitations that continue to obstruct protection efforts for Palestinians under siege.

## **Legal and Political Interventions by UN Bodies**

Following the outbreak of the war on Gaza in October 2023, various UN institutions intensified efforts to stop the violence. However, Israel's military operations—marked by indiscriminate bombings, forced displacement, and targeting of civilian infrastructure—exceeded all boundaries of international law. These included violations of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, particularly the prohibition of collective punishment, targeting civilians, and use of starvation as

a method of warfare. Many experts and institutions identified the situation as a case of classic genocide.

Despite global outrage, the UN's actions have been constrained by political divisions. The UN General Assembly passed several resolutions demanding a ceasefire and humanitarian access, while the Security Council remained largely ineffective due to repeated U.S. vetoes. This exposed the fragility of the international legal system and its inability to act decisively when major powers prioritize political alliances over humanitarian imperatives.

Western governments, instead of pressuring Israel, provided political cover and military support. The joint statement of October 23, 2023, framed Israel's actions as self-defense, legitimizing its campaign in Gaza. This narrative prolonged the war, allowing Israel to act with impunity until a ceasefire was brokered in mid-January 2025 after prolonged mediation.

However, the ceasefire lasted only 42 days. Israel resumed military operations, intensified blockades, and denied entry of humanitarian aid. This led UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini to declare that Israel was "intentionally starving civilians," a policy that constitutes a war crime under international law.

In response, the State of Palestine and UN representatives brought the case before the International Court of Justice on April 28, 2025, accusing Israel of weaponizing aid denial. As famine spread, mass protests erupted across Gaza, calling for international action and demanding Egypt and Europe intervene more assertively.

Despite resolutions and condemnation, most UN measures remained non-binding. Their failure to impose consequences on Israel has raised serious doubts about the credibility of the international system, and whether it can fulfill its legal and moral duty to protect civilians in times of war.

### **Interventions by Specialized International Organizations**

Beyond the UN framework, several specialized international bodies have taken legal and advocacy-based actions in response to the escalating crisis in Gaza.

A major legal milestone occurred when South Africa filed a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on December 29, 2023, accusing it of committing genocide in Gaza. The ICJ accepted the case and ruled that Israel must take all necessary measures to prevent acts of genocide and ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid. The court's decision carried significant symbolic weight, especially given South Africa's historical experience with apartheid.

Simultaneously, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants in November 2024 for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas military commander Mohammed Deif, on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Although enforcement remains unlikely, the move restricted international travel for Israeli leaders and deepened Israel's diplomatic isolation.

Other bodies like the UN Human Rights Council took firm positions, including passing a resolution to halt arms sales to Israel. During the deliberations, the Palestinian representative to the UN called on the global community to “wake up” and stop the genocide.

Leading human rights organizations echoed these calls. Amnesty International explicitly accused Israel of committing acts prohibited under the Genocide Convention, and in a report titled *“It Feels Like You're Not Human”*, detailed how Israel's campaign in Gaza aimed at deliberately destroying the Palestinian population. Human Rights Watch (HRW) focused specifically on the crime of forced displacement, reporting that over 90% of Gaza's population had been uprooted.

These legal and moral efforts, although limited in their enforcement capabilities, have played a crucial role in documenting the atrocities and keeping international attention on Gaza. They have also increased pressure on governments complicit through silence or support, challenging them to align their actions with international law.

## **Medical and Humanitarian Interventions**

As the humanitarian crisis in Gaza deepened, various international organizations launched emergency responses, though often under extreme constraints due to Israeli blockades and targeted destruction.

The World Health Organization (WHO) responded by issuing urgent appeals and organizing vaccination campaigns. With the collapse of Gaza's health system, the WHO supported a mass polio vaccination campaign from February 22–26, 2025, in partnership with UNICEF, UNRWA, and the Palestinian Ministry of Health. WHO also documented the destruction of hospitals, warning of the unchecked spread of infectious diseases in overcrowded displacement camps.

In parallel, several countries—Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Italy, the UAE, and others—established field hospitals near shelters and along Gaza's borders. These mobile units became vital after over 26 out of 35 hospitals and more than 60 ambulances were destroyed by Israeli airstrikes. Field hospitals offered basic

emergency care, filling gaps left by the collapse of the public health infrastructure.

UNRWA, despite facing unprecedented attacks from Israeli officials and legislative attempts in the Knesset to expel it from Palestinian territories, continued its operations. It managed 115 shelters housing over a million displaced Palestinians and distributed food, medical supplies, and psychological support. However, many of its schools and clinics were bombed, and access to humanitarian aid remained heavily restricted. UNRWA's Situation Report No. 167 described March 2025 as the longest uninterrupted blockade in the history of the Gaza conflict.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) played a key role in identifying detainees, facilitating communication with families, and advocating for humanitarian corridors. It also acted as a neutral intermediary during attempts at prisoner exchange and issued repeated warnings about the “catastrophic consequences” of failing to protect civilians.

Local Palestinian NGOs, though severely under-resourced and affected by bombing and displacement, coordinated with international partners to provide urgent food relief and mental health support, reflecting the resilience of grassroots humanitarian networks even in near-total devastation.

### **Challenges to International Action and Political Divisions: Toward a Way Forward**

The genocide in Gaza exposed profound limitations in the international humanitarian system. Despite multiple declarations, resolutions, and emergency appeals, international organizations faced unprecedented obstacles in carrying out their mandates—primarily due to geopolitical polarization and Israeli-imposed restrictions.

One core challenge is the dominance of political interests over international legal obligations. Powerful states, particularly those aligned with Israel, have undermined efforts to enforce ceasefires or ensure aid delivery. The double standards between the West's swift response to Ukraine and its hesitancy toward Gaza highlight the selective application of humanitarian principles.

Internally, Palestinian political divisions have further complicated international engagement. Many agencies cite the rift between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas as a pretext to avoid stronger interventions. While most international discourse calls for the release of Israeli captives, it often ignores the thousands of Palestinians detained or displaced. Hamas's classification as a terrorist

organization by much of the international community also limits diplomatic channels and the scope of humanitarian operations.

The paper stresses that despite frustration with the international community's failures, its presence—however limited—has slowed the pace of Israel's actions. Without international scrutiny and documentation, the complete ethnic cleansing of Gaza might have proceeded even more rapidly.

Spontaneous civilian protests in Gaza—such as the March 27, 2025, demonstrations in Beit Lahia—reflect growing pressure on both local actors and international bodies to act. Protesters called on Hamas to act responsibly, step down from governance, and agree to prisoner swaps to halt the bloodshed.

**Policy Recommendations:**

1. Establish a unified Palestinian political system that can represent the people effectively and engage the international system with one voice.
2. Build stronger diplomatic ties between Palestine and the European Union based on international law to counterbalance U.S.-Israeli alignment.
3. Mobilize Palestinian academics, legal experts, and media to use international law strategically—exposing violations, influencing public opinion, and pressuring institutions to act.

Ultimately, the future of Gaza and Palestinian dignity depends not only on external support but on internal political coherence and strategic engagement with global legal norms.