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Middle East Conflict Guidance



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This is for internal use and should not be shared outside the ABC. It should be used in conjunction with the ABC Editorial Policies & Guidance Notes.

The Israel-Gaza war is an important and difficult story to cover.

Available on this page is editorial guidance on covering these unfolding events, which will be kept updated.

You can search for key terms using the Find function (Ctrl + F).

Please check this guidance if you have a question and also refer up where required.

You can also find the Editorial Policies and other resources on the new [Ed Pals Hub](#).



Introduction

This guidance is a living document. As with other major news coverage, where situations change and understanding develops we will inevitably make updates to this guidance, so please keep referring back if you're covering any issue dealing with Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which consist of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem ([see below](#) for more on terminology).

One thing that doesn't change is our commitment to accuracy, impartiality and fairness.

There are fundamental differences of perspective that affect almost every aspect of the conflict in Israel and the Occupied Territories. The ABC takes no position on these issues. Our role as journalists is to provide factual information, clearly attributed when necessary, with all the relevant perspectives on these events, so the audience can make up its own mind.

You should use this guidance in conjunction with the [ABC Editorial Policies & Guidance Notes](#).

It does not replace our usual processes. If you're in doubt you should refer up or seek advice.

Support resources for times of trauma

Traumatic news events such as the situation in the Middle East can cause stress, distress and vicarious trauma, whether you are working closely or tangentially on the coverage. Stories like this can also resurface issues from past similar events.

If you're finding it difficult it's understandable. Trauma can have a cumulative effect, so please don't wait to get the support you need, it's the resilient and brave thing to do. Something that may seem innocuous, such as a normal work demand, can create a tipping point and make everything suddenly feel overwhelming.

Early intervention is key. Our most experienced people readily share the importance of seeking help.

A range of resources is available to help all ABC staff and are listed here: [Your Wellbeing](#)

We need to ensure we do all we can to support and look out for each other. Also, be kind to yourselves.

General Coverage Advice

Summary of things to consider:

- Context
- False balance and impartiality
- Fog of war
- Framing
- Reporting casualties, injuries and death tolls
- Scrutinise all content

Context

This is a major story where context and material facts are extremely important. Because it is an ongoing story there will be plenty of new developments and issues as well as recurring themes.

When you're telling a story it's better to ensure you've got all relevant facts and context to properly cover the most important issue or event than to try and fit more issues and developments into it.

Linking to previously published explainers will help.

False balance and impartiality

The ABC Editorial Policies say that balance should follow the weight of evidence. This is an admonition against "false balance" that has been in the policies for more than a decade.

What it does not mean is that journalists can assess the evidence on contentious issues, decide what they believe and then argue that position as fact. Nor does it mean that in every argument we should give each side equal time or equal weight.

What it does mean is we should present all the evidence for and against a position in a way that reflects the strength of the evidence and the arguments.

The guidance on [differentiating between analysis and opinion](#) is a useful guide on how to analyse contentious issues objectively.

In relation to all the contentious issues listed in this guidance, the balance is different, and that will impact on how much time is appropriate to devote to each side of an argument and will vary according to the nature of the content.

The policies also say we shouldn't "unduly favour one perspective over another" and that balance can be achieved over time. In practice, we should include different perspectives in a single story wherever possible.

There will be occasions when presenting or favouring one perspective is appropriate, for instance, profiles of individuals; interviews with the families of victims; or short news stories that are effectively updates of new information. A one-on-one interview can be followed by a different perspective at another time and interviewers should generally be challenging the views of all guests.

The important point to note is that there are arguments on both sides of each of the issues in this war and it is not the ABC's role to make the final decision. Our role is to present across our coverage a fair representation of all the competing perspectives fairly and impartially.

Fog of war

It's a cliché but it's true. All parties in warfare see information war as a legitimate part of their struggle. Verification is very difficult, so caution and attribution are vitally important. It can sometimes simply be unclear who is responsible, or how something occurred.

For example, was the building hit by enemy fire, by shrapnel that fell from a mid-air intercept, or by "friendly" fire? Did combatants "target" a civilian location, were they firing at enemies "in" that location, or at enemies "nearby"? All of these scenarios have occurred in previous conflicts between Israel and Hamas.

Be precise about what is stated, maintain attribution, acknowledge what is unknown when it's relevant, acknowledge that the known facts of an incident can change and be committed to following the story and following up as new facts emerge.

Properly assessing information is essential – user generated content is not authorised for publication on ABC News platforms until it has been assessed as accurate and approved by an appropriately senior staff member. You can find detailed information on our standards here: [Minimum Standards for Assessing User Generated Content](#)

Framing

Strive for clear language and be careful to avoid adopting biased language promoted by any side in the debate or conflict. Don't forget that, while much debate and controversy is attached to words used to describe this conflict, the audience does not necessarily understand the nuance they convey.

Rather than relying on specific words you think convey a lot of meaning, it is better to spend the time to clearly describe people, events, their effects and the context in which they occur. This can take

more time but deliver a much clearer understanding to the audience.

The facts in a story are often unclear or contested. When this is the case, ensure this is made clear to our audience.

Reporting casualties, injuries and deaths

Importantly, when reporting on people who have been injured or killed put the human face on the story – what we know about those affected, the impact on others. These aren't just numbers but human tragedies.

The word "casualty" refers both to people killed and people injured. The number of fatalities is an objective indicator of the severity of the conflict and its impacts. The number of injuries gives an indication of the immediate and ongoing load on health systems. If you report the number of injuries and there's information about the severity of them, include it. Compare like for like – deaths to deaths, not deaths on one side to deaths and injuries on the other side, and ensure your language is consistent whoever you are reporting on.

In the context of war, verifying data on casualties that have come from those involved in the conflict, or third parties monitoring it, is extremely difficult. The main sources will of course be Israel for Israeli casualties and Gazan authorities for Gazan casualties. For guidance on language related to attribution see [Gazan health authorities](#) below. Be scrupulous about properly attributing and contextualising casualty data.

When reporting any figures always attribute them to their source. Most data are an estimate, some more reliable than others. In more detailed reporting that is focussed on casualties, include extra context about the source of the data and other relevant context.

Also, ensure you are using up-to-date estimates. For updates on the humanitarian situation, OCHA oPt is a good UN source:

<https://www.ochaopt.org/>

Scrutinise all content

Take your time, look at everything carefully. Accuracy and scrutiny of

content should be prioritised over speed.

The shorter the content, the harder it is to include context. Some stories may be complex and nuanced and not able to be presented adequately in short form.

Guidance on Language

Assassination, targeted assassination

Assassination means: To kill by sudden or secret, premeditated assault, especially for political or religious motives. It is often used as a form of jargon. When others use this term, it should be attributed and not corrected. However, “kill” or “killing” is the preferred usage, as the political or religious status of the target would usually be obvious.

Barrier/West Bank Barrier

In 2002 Israel commenced construction of a more than 700km long barrier. While much of it follows the “green line” of the 1949 Armistice, in parts it extends deep into the Palestinian territory Israel occupied in 1967, especially where Israeli settlements have been established.

In 2004 in an [advisory opinion](#) requested by the UN General Assembly, the International Court of Justice found the construction of the barrier, where it is in the occupied territory, was against international law.

Appropriate generic terms to use include “barrier”, “separation barrier” or “West Bank barrier” – but not “security fence” (preferred by Israel) or “apartheid wall” (preferred by Palestinians).

Blockade

In current circumstances, where Israel has severely restricted supplies to Gaza, refer to “Israel’s blockade of Gaza” or say “Israel is blockading Gaza”. “Israeli siege” is also appropriate given Israel’s defence minister

declared a "complete siege" on 9 October.

Ensure you report all material facts, which may differ depending on the state of the conflict and agreements about the entry of goods.

The Israeli-controlled crossing points are most relevant because the movement of most of the goods and fuel that usually enter Gaza, and of people travelling between Gaza and Israel or the West Bank, is usually handled through special crossing points controlled by the Israeli military.

The extent of that traffic fluctuates a great deal. For example, when Hamas violently seized control of Gaza in 2007, Israel clamped down dramatically.

However, Egypt also plays a role through its control of the Rafah border crossing, which is being used to ship-in emergency relief supplies and to allow foreign nationals and medical evacuees out. It is equipped mainly for the movement of people and is usually used by Gazans travelling abroad, with Egyptian authorities strictly controlling visas. Some goods also usually move through it, but Rafah is not equipped in the same way as the Israeli-controlled crossings and the volume of goods that usually move through it is much lower.

If the blockade and its effects are the subject of your reporting ensure that you include the role the Egyptian-controlled Rafah crossing is playing.

The future arrangements for the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza will be a major, ongoing part of this story (see "Occupied Territory" below), so ensure your description reflects the circumstances on the day.

Civilians and combatants

Distinguish between civilians and combatants wherever possible. Civilians play no role in armed conflict.

Famine

When reporting on the issue of famine, attribute to the source. Most reports will likely refer to a specific, recent update, for example by the

head of the World Food Program, which should be attributed as usual.

The classification of famine is made by experts who are part of the [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#) (IPC) initiative, which warned in March 2024 of imminent famine in north Gaza.

In radio news, appropriate attributions would be 'international aid experts have warned...', 'UN agencies and experts on food security have warned...' or similar.

Longer pieces dealing with the issue, like ACAFF or digital, should spell out what the IPC is, or provide a description along the lines of it being, 'part of an international process advising the UN and governments around the world on hunger and famine/food security.'

Be Specific and Precise

The IPC's assessment of famine involves three factors: at least 20% of households facing an extreme lack of food; at least 30% of children suffering from acute malnutrition; and 2 adults - or 4 children - out of every 10,000 dying each day due to outright starvation or to the interaction of malnutrition and disease.

The assessment also involves indications of the likelihood and strength of the evidence.

The IPC usually only issues assessment every three months so check what it has said most recently.

When reliable sources like international aid agencies provide updates, be clear about how their information does or does not shed light on those factors.

If you are speaking about a specific, *limited* area, for example 'northern Gaza' or '*all* of Gaza', make that clear.

If you are reporting on a *projection*, or *current* conditions, make that clear.

The extent and nature of the Israeli military's control over food

entering Gaza is often a part of the story.

Where it is, include their comments and ensure you provide audiences with the details most relevant to your story, for example: the number of trucks entering each day compared to the assessed need, or how many missions are planned to distribute the aid within Gaza or how many are approved or denied and why.

Further information can be found in the [Resources](#) section below.

Invasion/Incursion

Gaza is not Israeli territory, so what the Israeli military is doing is an invasion or an incursion. Both are accurate.

Palestinian Health Ministry & Gazan health authorities

The Palestinian Health Ministry is the health ministry of the Palestinian Authority, based in Ramallah, in the West Bank. It operates throughout the entire Occupied Palestinian Territory. When reporting on health information from the West Bank, use “Palestinian Health Ministry”.

It has a Gaza branch, the Palestinian Health Ministry – Gaza, or Gaza Health Ministry.

This has been controlled by the governing body in Gaza, Hamas, since Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007. However, historically it has had some degree of operational independence, and its data on casualties have been considered reliable by UN agencies.

If we are quoting the Palestinian Health Ministry on data from Gaza then we should say the information is from the “Gaza Health Ministry”.

But, as noted above, be scrupulous about properly attributing and contextualising any data on casualties. For example, in the current circumstances Gazan health ministry says it cannot reliably count all casualties, which would be a material fact in a story focussed on the death toll.

If the ministry makes claims that go beyond the health of people in Gaza or the medical effects of an attack – for example, providing details about how an event occurred – it is appropriate to add that the ministry is “Hamas controlled” or similar.

Gaza Media Office

This is controlled and run by Hamas.

We should avoid the term and say "Hamas".

There may be rare occasions where it is necessary to say "Gaza Media Office", in these cases we should ensure the audience understands that it is "Hamas controlled".

Gaza and "Occupied Territory"

Gaza is considered by the UN to be a part of a single "Occupied Palestinian Territory" that consists of Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank. In addition, because of the tight control exercised by the blockade before the incursion, Gaza has been considered by many organisations as 'occupied' despite Israel withdrawing ground forces in 2005. Most of the international community, including the UN holds Israel responsible for the wellbeing of its residents, as the occupying power.

As an occupying power, Israel is entitled to take measures of control and security (Art. 27 GC IV) towards protected persons. In this regard, while Israel is entitled to impose restrictions on the flow of certain goods into Gaza for legitimate security reasons, its unconditional obligation of humane treatment towards the population of Gaza requires that it respects the principle of proportionality in all circumstances. The nature and extent of the restrictions must be justifiable based on security considerations, and the consequences for the population must be proportionate to the legitimate aim of ensuring Israel's security.

Israel contested describing Gaza as "occupied" during the period from 2005 – October 2023.

Gaza's status as occupied territory from 2005 – October 2023 should be attributed and explained wherever possible. Interviewees using the descriptor should not be corrected or edited. There is no requirement to include Israel's disagreement with the descriptor unless Gaza's status during that period is the subject of the story.

The ICJ on the legality of the occupation

The UN General Assembly asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's occupation and control of Palestinian territory. The ICJ responded on 19 July 2024.

[Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in \(icj-cij.org\)](https://www.icj-cij.org)

The Court found that the Occupation is illegal:

"The sustained abuse by Israel of its position as an occupying Power, through annexation and an assertion of permanent control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory and continued frustration of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, violates fundamental principles of international law and renders Israel's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory unlawful."

The Court emphasizes that the conclusion that Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is illegal does not release it from its obligations and responsibilities under international law"

The findings should be attributed to the ICJ. For instance:

The ICJ found that Israel's occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory is illegal under international law.

The ICJ found that Israel's annexation of Palestinian land and control of Palestinian people is illegal.

Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah

The governments of Australia, the UK, US, and Canada classify Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah as terrorist organisations and reference to this official terrorist designation should be included regularly in our coverage on all platforms.

Due to limited space this will not always be possible when providing brief updates on the conflict in radio and TV news, RVOs, individual blog posts or short digital copy.

However, it must routinely be included in reporting on individual acts of terrorism directed at civilians and stories focussed on the nature of those groups and their history.

It must also be noted when reporting events directly relevant to Australians, including the Australian government's approach to those groups, alleged breaches of Australian law, protests referencing those groups or expressions of support for them in Australia.

Notably, the attack perpetrated in Israel by Hamas on 7 October 2023 was a terrorist attack and in coverage where 7 October is the principal focus of the story describing it is as a terror attack is appropriate.

When the ABC refers to each group without attribution, we use the terms "Islamist militant group" or simply, "militant group". This does not preclude their involvement in terrorist attacks, it is simply a broader description, encompassing a wide scope of activity.

The ICJ on the legality of settlements

Jewish settlements on the West Bank, both those sanctioned by the Israeli government and unofficial settlements (sometimes referred to as "outposts"), are illegal under international law according to the [Security Council of the United Nations](#) and the [ICJ](#). We can say that the settlements are "considered illegal under international law".

There is no requirement to correct interviewees who describe the settlements as 'illegal'.

Israel v Jewish & Hamas v Palestinian

To avoid encouraging racism do not conflate Jews with Israel or Palestinians with Hamas. Jewish and Palestinian identity is central to many aspects of Israeli and Palestinian life, law and politics. Do not shy away from reporting extremism and the role of identity in these communities but ensure it is factual and in context.

Nakba

The Nakba, which means "catastrophe" in Arabic, refers to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-

Israeli war. Every year on 15 May, millions of Palestinians around the world commemorate the Nakba.

Before the Nakba, Palestine was a multi-faith and multi-cultural society under British and Ottoman rule.

In November 1947, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution partitioning Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, with Jerusalem under a UN administration.

The Arab world rejected the plan, resulting in a full-blown war in 1948 after the departure of British forces and the declaration of independence of the State of Israel. The result of the war was the permanent displacement of more than half of the Palestinian population.

An estimated 750,000 refugees from historic Palestine either fled or were expelled from their homes. Most went to refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and neighbouring countries – Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Many of those people and their descendants remain stateless. The refugee camps have consolidated into permanent towns and cities such as Jenin in the West Bank. In Gaza there are eight camps, Jabalia, Rafah, Khan Younis, Deir al-Balah, Maghazi, Bureij, Nuseirat and Shati.

The 'right of return' of those refugees to what is now Israel is a core demand of most Palestinian groups and has been one of the most intractable issues in negotiations between Israel and Palestinian representatives.

Jerusalem

Journalists should not refer to Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. While West Jerusalem is the seat of the Israeli government, and Israel claims to have annexed the whole city and declared it capital of Israel, most countries – including Australia – do not recognise either the annexation of East Jerusalem or the declaration of Jerusalem as the capital.

The status of Jerusalem is contested and dependent on a final

agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. The city was divided in 1949 into Israeli-controlled West Jerusalem and East Jerusalem, then controlled by Jordan. Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the future capital of a Palestinian state.

Palestine/Palestinian

Palestine is a geographical and historical entity but not a state. The Palestinians remain engaged in a decades-long struggle for an independent state, so don't use "Palestine" or "Palestinian" in any way that might mislead audiences into thinking such a state already exists.

However, Palestinians exist as a people and as an identity. You can refer to people who identify as Palestinian whether in the occupied territories or elsewhere as "Palestinians".

ABC usage is to refer to Gaza and the West Bank as the "Occupied Palestinian Territory" or "Occupied Territories". We do not refer to them as "Palestine". The governing authority in Palestinian towns in the West Bank is the "Palestinian Authority" (PA), headed by President Mahmoud Abbas. In Gaza, it is Hamas.

In 2011 the Palestinian Authority applied to the UN Security Council for the State of Palestine to be admitted to the UN. The US declared it would veto the move and it was not pursued. Subsequently, the UN General Assembly granted Palestine non-member observer state status. Palestine has also acceded to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

"Palestine" is increasingly used by members of the community and there is no need to correct interviewees who refer to "Palestine", or otherwise mediate use of the word by people featured in our stories.

Refugee Camps

See Nakba

Right of Return

See Nakba

Territory or Territories

The United Nations refers to Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem as the "Occupied Palestinian Territory", indicating that it is a single political entity, but "Occupied Palestinian Territories" is widely used including by the Australian government, the US government and the Red Cross. The Golan Heights is still considered occupied and is Syrian territory, not Palestinian territory, which is one reason why the plural, 'occupied territories' is still in use.

"Occupied Palestinian Territory" is preferred when referring to Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, particularly if the UN is referenced but "Occupied Palestinian Territories" or "occupied territories" are also acceptable.

Terrorism/terrorist

When referring to the events of 7 October in southern Israel it is appropriate to call them acts of "terrorism" and the people who conducted them "terrorists". This relies on the most commonly accepted definition of terrorism as violence committed by non-State actors on civilians in the pursuit of a political aim.

In the context of the battles being fought within Gaza, it is not terrorism, and it is appropriate to refer to Hamas combatants and operatives as "militants".

Controversial Allegations

Israel has been accused of a range of crimes including war crimes, genocide, apartheid and ethnic cleansing.

These are all crimes and Israel denies it is guilty of any of them. As with any crimes, it is not the ABC's role to decide guilt or innocence. If there are credible allegations we should lay out what facts are known and allow others to argue about how to interpret them.

All these issues can be discussed on the ABC, but we must recognise that both sides deserve to be heard and given fair treatment.

It's also important to present the wider legal context to these allegations.

Apartheid

Apartheid was a declared policy of the racist South African government between 1948 and the early 1990s.

However, while international condemnation of the practice initially focused on South Africa, the international community has increasingly defined apartheid as a crime regardless of location. The [Apartheid Convention of 1973](#) made it a crime and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998 defines it as a crime against humanity.

It is also outlawed in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) which states: *States Parties particularly condemn racial segregation and apartheid and undertake to prevent, prohibit and eradicate all practices of this nature in territories under their jurisdiction."*

The advisory opinion of the ICJ on 19 July 2024 concluded that Israel was in breach of [Article 3 of CERD](#).

'Israel's legislation and measures impose and serve to maintain a near-complete separation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between the settler and Palestinian communities. For this reason, the Court considers that Israel's legislation and measures constitute a breach of Article 3 of CERD'

This is an opinion and not a legally binding ruling and should be attributed to the ICJ. Suggested wording:

The ICJ found that the restrictions placed on Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem amounted to apartheid and are in breach of human rights law

The ICJ concluded that the restrictions placed on Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem violate an international ban on racial segregation and apartheid.

The ICJ did not find that Israel is an 'Apartheid State'. The opinion is restricted to Israel's governance in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Remember, asking interviewees to describe the effect of a given policy or practice may be more informative than simply quoting sources who apply the apartheid label, which many in our audience may not fully understand.

Israel strenuously rejects this characterisation, which should be included in any story or discussion that focusses on allegations of apartheid.

Colonialism/settler colonialism

The allegation of colonialism is a highly contentious allegation made against Israel. As with the other allegations, the ABC should avoid making any judgement on this issue.

Relevant context includes that both Jews and Palestinians have lived and co-existed in Israel/Palestine since Biblical times.

It is also relevant that there was significant Jewish immigration both before and after the Second World War from Europe, the Middle East and in the 1970s and 1980s from Ethiopia. Many of those immigrants were refugees from persecution, including from the Holocaust.

Genocide

Allegations of genocide have become an increasingly significant feature of discussion over the Israel-Gaza war. It is an allegation of the gravest of crimes. Coverage demands the highest standards of accuracy and impartiality.

"Genocide" has a clear legal meaning in the Genocide Convention, which includes the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" (more on the ICJ case below).

[South Africa launched a case](#) in the International Court of Justice on the 29 December 2023, accusing Israel of committing genocide in the Gaza Strip.

The allegation has been strenuously [denied by Israel, which also argued that Hamas demonstrated its genocidal intent in its attacks on 7 October](#).

Discussing genocide as an issue

The ICJ genocide case has crystalised international debate about Israel's conduct of the war and its intent and it is a legitimate issue to analyse, report and discuss both in the context of the court case and more generally.

Decisions about coverage should be informed by the fact that a final judgement by the ICJ will likely take years and our reporting should acknowledge the allegation is highly contentious.

News and factual coverage must include or refer to both the principal perspectives and include factual and fair reporting of the evidence to support or rebut the allegation.

There may be unusual occasions, for example in live content or if the story's focus is principally on the personal experience of a person whose family has been killed, by an Israeli airstrike in Gaza, or in attacks by Hamas, where a discussion of the rights and wrongs of the allegation of genocide is impractical or jarring.

In those situations, refer the content to your immediate manager.

Generally, across all coverage, it is the responsibility of editorial managers to ensure there is an adequate diversity of perspectives that includes all material context. Consider consulting an editorial policy advisor and refer to the editorial policies guidance on [Impartiality for further guidance](#).

While opinion-based content may present a single perspective, editorial leaders must have a plan to provide all relevant principal perspectives over a reasonable time, including links to other perspectives or pointers to forthcoming content.

Our job is to report the facts on the ground and present other people's judgements on the rights and wrongs of the actions of the participants.

The ICJ genocide case

On the 26 January 2024 the International Court of Justice issued interim orders, having found there was a 'real and imminent' risk of genocide and agreed to some of the provisional measures requested by South Africa, ordering Israel to take a range of actions, "to ensure Israel's compliance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention not to engage in genocide, and to prevent and to punish genocide".

The orders were not a judgement on the merits of the case and not a 'finding that Israel is committing genocide'. A final decision on the allegations will likely take years.

The Court did not agree to South Africa's request to order Israel to halt its military operation, which Israel argued would have left it powerless to defend itself against Hamas.

As the case is ongoing, staff must check for [updates at the ICJ](#) when it is the subject of their reporting.

This is a dispute between South Africa and Israel over whether Israel is in breach of the Genocide Convention. It is not a dispute over whether war crimes are being committed in Gaza.

War crimes Vs Genocide

War crimes are breaches of the Geneva Conventions and other rules which govern behaviour in armed conflict and they do not automatically amount to genocide. They include acts like shooting a soldier who has surrendered, or targeting civilians, and they are prosecuted against individuals in the International Criminal Court.

Genocide is marked by the "*intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group*". So, while South Africa's case at the ICJ cites alleged war crimes by Israel, it is also arguing that those acts "are genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent (*dolus specialis*) to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group."

International Court of Justice – binding or not binding?

When the ICJ rules on a dispute between two states, its decisions, including provisional measures, are considered binding. This is a result of specific provisions in the UN Charter, the Statute of the ICJ and, in this case, the Genocide Convention.

However, if one side does not comply, the other would need to ask the UN Security Council to take action. In this case, the US would likely veto a move against Israel.

The Genocide Convention states in part:

Article I

The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.

Article II

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;*
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;*
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;*
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.*

Article III

The following acts shall be punishable:

- (a) Genocide;*

- (b) *Conspiracy to commit genocide;*
- (c) *Direct and public incitement to commit genocide;*
- (d) *Attempt to commit genocide;*
- (e) *Complicity in genocide*

References

ICJ – How it works <https://www.icj-cij.org/how-the-court-works>

Submissions and statements of South Africa and Israel [here](#).

South Africa submissions:

[Application instituting proceedings and Request for the indication of provisional measures \(icj-cij.org\)](#)

[CR 2024/1 \(icj-cij.org\)](#)

Israel response: <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240112-ora-01-00-bi.pdf>

The [Genocide Convention](#) is [here](#) (IX)

Allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Israel-Gaza war

"In November 2024 the [International Criminal Court](#) issued [warrants](#) for the arrest of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the then Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, and a Hamas leader, Mohamed Deif. The Israeli government denied the allegations against its officials. While Hamas welcomed them, it did not immediately comment on the allegations against Deif.

The ICC's actions and relevant reactions are material facts in relation to claims or denials of war crimes or crimes against humanity in the Israel-Gaza war and must be included in content that focusses

primarily on those claims.

Staff preparing coverage of the issue should ensure they are up to date with the latest developments.

As with the issue of genocide, there may be unusual occasions, for example in live content or if the story's focus is principally on the personal experience of a person whose family has been killed, by an Israeli airstrike in Gaza, or in attacks by Hamas, where a discussion of the ICC's actions is impractical or jarring.

In those situations, refer the content to your immediate manager.

Generally, across all coverage, it is the responsibility of editorial managers to ensure there is an adequate diversity of perspectives that includes all material context. Consider consulting an editorial policy advisor and refer to the editorial policies guidance on [Impartiality for further guidance](#).

Note, the ICC Prosecutor initially also requested a warrant to arrest Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, however he was confirmed dead during the conflict. While Deif was reportedly killed, the warrant for his arrest was issued as his death was not considered confirmed. Hamas announced Deif's death in January 2025.

It is not the ABC's job to label a particular act a war crime. However, understanding the rules can allow us to sharpen our questions and look for particular facts or evidence.

The Geneva Conventions and their Additional protocols are the principal source of law that regulates warfare. They are sometimes called International Humanitarian Law or the Laws of Armed Conflict. Other sources include customary international law.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is the custodian of the Conventions and has produced a lot of useful material on them, some of which can be found here: [ICRC: War and Law](#)

The Conventions cover a range of issues, including the protection of sick and wounded combatants, the treatment of prisoners of war and the protection of civilians.

Taking hostages is prohibited, as is deliberately attacking civilians. So, there is little debate that the 7 October attacks constituted war crimes.

The debate on whether Israel's response in Gaza to the killings of 7 October are war crimes turns on whether they are proportionate or excessive.

Combatants are required to distinguish between civilians and enemy forces and when they launch attacks they are required to ensure any risk to civilians is in proportion to the direct military advantage.

Civilian objects, such as schools and hospitals, must not be used for military purposes and are protected from attack. If one side uses a civilian object, such as a hospital, for a military purpose it may lose that protection, but any attack on it must still weigh the damage that would be caused to civilians.

The ICRC has a useful Q and A about many of these scenarios [here](#). The UN has a simple guide [here](#).

In the current context the 1949 Geneva convention's definition is useful: "Intentionally launching an attack in the knowledge that such attack will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects or widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment which would be clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated."

Resources

This is a list of some useful sources of background information and analysis. It is not a list of approved sources for ABC content. All sources should be read critically. They all, at some point, have a slant, omit key context, or make minor errors.

Primary sources

- [ICRC – War and Law](#)
- [ICRC – Direct Participation in Hostilities](#) Clarifies the meaning

and consequences of direct participation in hostilities under international humanitarian law

- [International Committee of the Red Cross – Israel and the occupied territories](#)
- [UN Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#) (OCHA OPT) UN source for daily humanitarian updates
- [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees](#)
The largest UN agency in Gaza. News releases and updates
- [World Bank](#) Good stats and analysis
- The [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#) (IPC)
- The UN [World Food Program](#)
- [UNICEF](#)
- The Israeli military [Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories](#) (especially their updates on humanitarian efforts and the [X account](#))
- The Israeli military's [updates](#) on military activity

Analysis

- [European Council on Foreign Relations](#)
- [US Council on Foreign Relations](#)
- [International Crisis Group](#)
- [Chatham House](#)

This page was last updated 17/03/2025

- Update to Allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Israel-Gaza war

Updated 03/10/2024

- Title changed to Middle East Conflict Guidance
- Update to Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah
- Update to Allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Israel-Gaza war

Updated 29/08/2024

- Update to Gazan health authorities
- Addition of Gaza Media Office

Updated 30/7/2024

- Update relating to the advisory finding of the ICJ of 19/7/2024 on the legality of Occupation and Apartheid
- Revision to Genocide

Updated 14/6/2024

- Addition of Famine
- Additional links added to Resources

Updated 27/2/2024

- Update to Genocide

Updated 18/1/2024

- Update to Genocide

Updated 4/12/2023

- Update to Gaza and "Occupied Territory"
- Addition of Nakba, Refugee Camps, Right of Return, Territory or Territories

Minimising impact of exposure to distressing content
which can lead to vicarious trauma

MANAGE EXPOSURE & ENVIRONMENT

IMAGES, FOOTAGE & SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

TAKE STEPS TO MINIMISE UNNECESSARY EXPOSURE

- **DON'T LOOK IF YOU DON'T HAVE TO**
- **ENSURE EFFECTIVE SORTING &
LABELLING PROCEDURES**
- **TAKE NOTE OF DISTINCTIVE FEATURES
TO REDUCE RECHECKING**
- **DON'T SHOW, OPEN OR PASS
DISTRESSING IMAGES TO COLLEAGUES
WITHOUT WARNING**

BUILD DISTANCE IN VIEWING CONTENT

- **PIXILATE DISTRESSING FEATURES**
- **CONCENTRATE ON CLOTHES NOT FACES**
- **REDUCE BRIGHTNESS- LESSONS
PERCEIVED IMPACT**
- **TURN OFF SOUND- FEATURE WITH MOST
IMPACT**

TAKE FREQUENT SCREEN BREAKS

DAMPENS THE BODY'S DISTRESS RESPONSE

- **GO FOR A WALK- GET OUTSIDE**
- **TALK TO A COLLEAGUE**
- **VIEW SOMETHING PLEASANT/UPLIFTING
AT THE END OF SHIFT**

AVOID VIEWING CONTENT BEFORE BED & AVOID ALCOHOL

**VIEWING IMAGES &/OR CONSUMING
ALCOHOL BEFORE BED CAN RESULT IN:**

1. **EMBEDDING IMAGERY IN THE MIND**
2. **NIGHTMARES**
3. **INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS**

Possible Symptoms resulting from exposure

PHYSICAL

- Sleeplessness/nightmares
- Muscle tension/headaches
- Digestive issues: reduced appetite, stomach upset
- "Rundown"- cold/flu, mouth ulcers, cold sores, skin conditions
- Lack of energy

EMOTIONAL

- Irritable, agitated
- Feeling overwhelmed - sadness, anger, fear, despair
- Teary
- Depersonalisation/emotional, detached
- Difficulties switching off at the end of the day - ruminating

COGNITIVE

- Skewed world view
- Cynical
- Distrustful of people
- Increased sensitivity to violence & perceived injustice
- Need to control events

BEHAVIOURAL

- Avoidance of situations perceived as potentially dangerous
- Withdrawn
- Aggressive
- Increased substance use

EAP: Employee Assistance Program

**Short-term confidential counselling
service for a broad range of personal
or work-related matters:**

- **available to all ABC staff &
immediate family**
- **Available (24/7)**



Minimising impact of exposure to distressing content

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Middle East Conflict Guidance

→ Introduction

→ Support resources

→ General Coverage Advice

→ Guidance on Language

→ Controversial Allegations

→ Resources

This is for internal use and should not be shared outside the ABC. It should be used in conjunction with the ABC Editorial Policies & Guidance Notes.

The Israel-Gaza war is an important and difficult story to cover.

Available on this page is editorial guidance on covering these unfolding events, which will be kept updated.

You can search for key terms using the Find function (Ctrl + F).

Please check this guidance if you have a question and also refer up where required.

You can also find the Editorial Policies and other resources on the new [Ed Pols Hub](#).



Introduction

This guidance is a living document. As with other major news coverage, where situations change and understanding develops we will inevitably make updates to this guidance, so please keep referring back if you're covering any issue dealing with Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which consist of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem ([see below](#) for more on terminology).

One thing that doesn't change is our commitment to accuracy, impartiality and fairness.

There are fundamental differences of perspective that affect almost every aspect of the conflict in Israel and the Occupied Territories. The ABC takes no position on these issues. Our role as journalists is to provide factual information, clearly attributed when necessary, with all the relevant perspectives on these events, so the audience can make up its own mind.

You should use this guidance in conjunction with the [ABC Editorial Policies & Guidance Notes](#).

It does not replace our usual processes. If you're in doubt you should refer up or seek advice.

Support resources for times of trauma

Traumatic news events such as the situation in the Middle East can cause stress, distress and vicarious trauma, whether you are working closely or tangentially on the coverage. Stories like this can also resurface issues from past similar events.

If you're finding it difficult it's understandable. Trauma can have a cumulative effect, so please don't wait to get the support you need, it's the resilient and brave thing to do. Something that may seem innocuous, such as a normal work demand, can create a tipping point and make everything suddenly feel overwhelming.

Early intervention is key. Our most experienced people readily share the importance of seeking help.

A range of resources is available to help all ABC staff and are listed here: [Your Wellbeing](#)

We need to ensure we do all we can to support and look out for each other. Also, be kind to yourselves.

General Coverage Advice

Summary of things to consider:

- Context
- False balance and impartiality
- Fog of war
- Framing
- Reporting casualties, injuries and death tolls
- Scrutinise all content

Context

This is a major story where context and material facts are extremely important. Because it is an ongoing story there will be plenty of new developments and issues as well as recurring themes.

When you're telling a story it's better to ensure you've got all relevant facts and context to properly cover the most important issue or event than to try and fit more issues and developments into it.

Linking to previously published explainers will help.

False balance and impartiality

The ABC Editorial Policies say that balance should follow the weight of evidence. This is an admonition against “false balance” that has been in the policies for more than a decade.

What it does not mean is that journalists can assess the evidence on contentious issues, decide what they believe and then argue that position as fact. Nor does it mean that in every argument we should give each side equal time or equal weight.

What it does mean is we should present all the evidence for and against a position in a way that reflects the strength of the evidence and the arguments.

The guidance on [differentiating between analysis and opinion](#) is a useful guide on how to analyse contentious issues objectively.

In relation to all the contentious issues listed in this guidance, the balance is different, and that will impact on how much time is appropriate to devote to each side of an argument and will vary according to the nature of the content.

The policies also say we shouldn’t “unduly favour one perspective over another” and that balance can be achieved over time. In practice, we should include different perspectives in a single story wherever possible.

There will be occasions when presenting or favouring one perspective is appropriate, for instance, profiles of individuals; interviews with the families of victims; or short news stories that are effectively updates of new information. A one-on-one interview can be followed by a different perspective at another time and interviewers should generally be challenging the views of all guests.

The important point to note is that there are arguments on both sides of each of the issues in this war and it is not the ABC’s role to make the final decision. Our role is to present across our coverage a fair representation of all the competing perspectives fairly and impartially.

Fog of war

It’s a cliché but it’s true. All parties in warfare see information war as a legitimate part of their struggle. Verification is very difficult, so caution and attribution are vitally important. It can sometimes simply be unclear who is responsible, or how something occurred.

For example, was the building hit by enemy fire, by shrapnel that fell from a mid-air intercept, or by “friendly” fire? Did combatants “target” a civilian location, were they

firing at enemies “in” that location, or at enemies “nearby”? All of these scenarios have occurred in previous conflicts between Israel and Hamas.

Be precise about what is stated, maintain attribution, acknowledge what is unknown when it’s relevant, acknowledge that the known facts of an incident can change and be committed to following the story and following up as new facts emerge.

Properly assessing information is essential – user generated content is not authorised for publication on ABC News platforms until it has been assessed as accurate and approved by an appropriately senior staff member. You can find detailed information on our standards here: [Minimum Standards for Assessing User Generated Content](#)

Framing

Strive for clear language and be careful to avoid adopting biased language promoted by any side in the debate or conflict. Don’t forget that, while much debate and controversy is attached to words used to describe this conflict, the audience does not necessarily understand the nuance they convey.

Rather than relying on specific words you think convey a lot of meaning, it is better to spend the time to clearly describe people, events, their effects and the context in which they occur. This can take more time but deliver a much clearer understanding to the audience.

The facts in a story are often unclear or contested. When this is the case, ensure this is made clear to our audience.

Reporting casualties, injuries and deaths

Importantly, when reporting on people who have been injured or killed put the human face on the story – what we know about those affected, the impact on others. These aren’t just numbers but human tragedies.

The word “casualty” refers both to people killed and people injured. The number of fatalities is an objective indicator of the severity of the conflict and its impacts. The number of injuries gives an indication of the immediate and ongoing load on health systems. If you report the number of injuries and there’s information about the severity of them, include it. Compare like for like – deaths to deaths, not deaths on one side to deaths and injuries on the other side, and ensure your language is consistent whoever you are reporting on.

In the context of war, verifying data on casualties that have come from those involved in the conflict, or third parties monitoring it, is extremely difficult. The main sources will of course be Israel for Israeli casualties and Gazan authorities for Gazan casualties. For guidance on language related to attribution see [Gazan health authorities](#) below. Be scrupulous about properly attributing and contextualising casualty data.

When reporting any figures always attribute them to their source. Most data are an estimate, some more reliable than others. In more detailed reporting that is focussed on casualties, include extra context about the source of the data and other relevant context.

Also, ensure you are using up-to-date estimates. For updates on the humanitarian situation, OCHA oPt is a good UN source: <https://www.ochaopt.org/>

Scrutinise all content

Take your time, look at everything carefully. Accuracy and scrutiny of content should be prioritised over speed.

The shorter the content, the harder it is to include context. Some stories may be complex and nuanced and not able to be presented adequately in short form.

Guidance on Language

Assassination, targeted assassination

Assassination means: To kill by sudden or secret, premeditated assault, especially for political or religious motives. It is often used as a form of jargon. When others use this term, it should be attributed and not corrected. However, "kill" or "killing" is the preferred usage, as the political or religious status of the target would usually be obvious.

Barrier/West Bank Barrier

In 2002 Israel commenced construction of a more than 700km long barrier. While much of it follows the "green line" of the 1949 Armistice, in parts it extends deep

into the Palestinian territory Israel occupied in 1967, especially where Israeli settlements have been established.

In 2004 in an [advisory opinion](#) requested by the UN General Assembly, the International Court of Justice found the construction of the barrier, where it is in the occupied territory, was against international law.

Appropriate generic terms to use include “barrier”, “separation barrier” or “West Bank barrier” – but not “security fence” (preferred by Israel) or “apartheid wall” (preferred by Palestinians).

Blockade

In current circumstances, where Israel has severely restricted supplies to Gaza, refer to “Israel’s blockade of Gaza” or say “Israel is blockading Gaza”. “Israeli siege” is also appropriate given Israel’s defence minister declared a “complete siege” on 9 October.

Ensure you report all material facts, which may differ depending on the state of the conflict and agreements about the entry of goods.

The Israeli-controlled crossing points are most relevant because the movement of most of the goods and fuel that usually enter Gaza, and of people travelling between Gaza and Israel or the West Bank, is usually handled through special crossing points controlled by the Israeli military.

The extent of that traffic fluctuates a great deal. For example, when Hamas violently seized control of Gaza in 2007, Israel clamped down dramatically.

However, Egypt also plays a role through its control of the Rafah border crossing, which is being used to ship-in emergency relief supplies and to allow foreign nationals and medical evacuees out. It is equipped mainly for the movement of people and is usually used by Gazans travelling abroad, with Egyptian authorities strictly controlling visas. Some goods also usually move through it, but Rafah is not equipped in the same way as the Israeli-controlled crossings and the volume of goods that usually move through it is much lower.

If the blockade and its effects are the subject of your reporting ensure that you include the role the Egyptian-controlled Rafah crossing is playing.

The future arrangements for the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza will be a major, ongoing part of this story (see “Occupied Territory” below), so ensure your description reflects the circumstances on the day.

Civilians and combatants

Distinguish between civilians and combatants wherever possible. Civilians play no role in armed conflict.

Famine

When reporting on the issue of famine, attribute to the source. Most reports will likely refer to a specific, recent update, for example by the head of the World Food Program, which should be attributed as usual.

The classification of famine is made by experts who are part of the [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#) (IPC) initiative, which warned in March 2024 of imminent famine in north Gaza.

In radio news, appropriate attributions would be 'international aid experts have warned...', 'UN agencies and experts on food security have warned...' or similar.

Longer pieces dealing with the issue, like ACAFF or digital, should spell out what the IPC is, or provide a description along the lines of it being, 'part of an international process advising the UN and governments around the world on hunger and famine/food security.'

Be Specific and Precise

The IPC's assessment of famine involves three factors: at least 20% of households facing an extreme lack of food; at least 30% of children suffering from acute malnutrition; and 2 adults - or 4 children - out of every 10,000 dying each day due to outright starvation or to the interaction of malnutrition and disease.

The assessment also involves indications of the likelihood and strength of the evidence.

The IPC usually only issues assessment every three months so check what it has said most recently.

When reliable sources like international aid agencies provide updates, be clear about how their information does or does not shed light on those factors.

If you are speaking about a specific, *limited* area, for example 'northern Gaza' or '*all* of Gaza', make that clear.

If you are reporting on a *projection*, or *current* conditions, make that clear.

The extent and nature of the Israeli military's control over food entering Gaza is often a part of the story.

Where it is, include their comments and ensure you provide audiences with the details most relevant to your story, for example: the number of trucks entering each day compared to the assessed need, or how many missions are planned to distribute the aid within Gaza or how many are approved or denied and why.

Further information can be found in the [Resources](#) section below.

Invasion/Incursion

Gaza is not Israeli territory, so what the Israeli military is doing is an invasion or an incursion. Both are accurate.

Palestinian Health Ministry & Gazan health authorities

The Palestinian Health Ministry is the health ministry of the Palestinian Authority, based in Ramallah, in the West Bank. It operates throughout the entire Occupied Palestinian Territory. When reporting on health information from the West Bank, use "Palestinian Health Ministry".

It has a Gaza branch, the Palestinian Health Ministry – Gaza, or Gaza Health Ministry.

This has been controlled by the governing body in Gaza, Hamas, since Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007. However, historically it has had some degree of operational independence, and its data on casualties have been considered reliable by UN agencies.

If we are quoting the Palestinian Health Ministry on data from Gaza then we should say the information is from the "Gaza Health Ministry".

But, as noted above, be scrupulous about properly attributing and contextualising any data on casualties. For example, in the current circumstances Gazan health ministry says it cannot reliably count all casualties, which would be a material fact in a story focussed on the death toll.

If the ministry makes claims that go beyond the health of people in Gaza or the medical effects of an attack – for example, providing details about how an event occurred – it is appropriate to add that the ministry is "Hamas controlled" or similar.

Gaza Media Office

This is controlled and run by Hamas.

We should avoid the term and say "Hamas".

There may be rare occasions where it is necessary to say "Gaza Media Office", in these cases we should ensure the audience understands that it is "Hamas controlled".

Gaza and "Occupied Territory"

Gaza is considered by the UN to be a part of a single "Occupied Palestinian Territory" that consists of Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank. In addition, because of the tight control exercised by the blockade before the incursion, Gaza has been considered by many organisations as 'occupied' despite Israel withdrawing ground forces in 2005. Most of the international community, including the UN holds Israel responsible for the wellbeing of its residents, as the occupying power.

As an occupying power, Israel is entitled to take measures of control and security (Art. 27 GC IV) towards protected persons. In this regard, while Israel is entitled to impose restrictions on the flow of certain goods into Gaza for legitimate security reasons, its unconditional obligation of humane treatment towards the population of Gaza requires that it respects the principle of proportionality in all circumstances. The nature and extent of the restrictions must be justifiable based on security considerations, and the consequences for the population must be proportionate to the legitimate aim of ensuring Israel's security.

Israel contested describing Gaza as "occupied" during the period from 2005 – October 2023.

Gaza's status as occupied territory from 2005 – October 2023 should be attributed and explained wherever possible. Interviewees using the descriptor should not be corrected or edited. There is no requirement to include Israel's disagreement with the descriptor unless Gaza's status during that period is the subject of the story.

The ICJ on the legality of the occupation

The UN General Assembly asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's occupation and control of Palestinian territory. The ICJ responded on 19 July 2024.

[Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in \(icj-cij.org\)](https://www.icj-cij.org/en/publications-and-documents/2024-07-19-opinion-on-the-legal-consequences-of-the-occupation-of-palestine)

The Court found that the Occupation is illegal:

"The sustained abuse by Israel of its position as an occupying Power, through annexation and an assertion of permanent control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory and continued frustration of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, violates fundamental principles of international law and renders Israel's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory unlawful."

*The Court emphasizes that the conclusion that **Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is illegal** does not release it from its obligations and responsibilities under international law"*

The findings should be attributed to the ICJ. For instance:

The ICJ found that Israel's occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory is illegal under international law.

The ICJ found that Israel's annexation of Palestinian land and control of Palestinian people is illegal.

Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah

The governments of Australia, the UK, US, and Canada classify Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah as terrorist organisations and reference to this official terrorist designation should be included regularly in our coverage on all platforms.

Due to limited space this will not always be possible when providing brief updates on the conflict in radio and TV news, RVOs, individual blog posts or short digital copy.

However, it must routinely be included in reporting on individual acts of terrorism directed at civilians and stories focussed on the nature of those groups and their history.

It must also be noted when reporting events directly relevant to Australians, including the Australian government's approach to those groups, alleged breaches of Australian law, protests referencing those groups or expressions of support for them in Australia.

Notably, the attack perpetrated in Israel by Hamas on 7 October 2023 was a terrorist attack and in coverage where 7 October is the principal focus of the story describing it as a terror attack is appropriate.

When the ABC refers to each group without attribution, we use the terms "Islamist militant group" or simply, "militant group". This does not preclude their

involvement in terrorist attacks, it is simply a broader description, encompassing a wide scope of activity.

The ICJ on the legality of settlements

Jewish settlements on the West Bank, both those sanctioned by the Israeli government and unofficial settlements (sometimes referred to as "outposts"), are illegal under international law according to the [Security Council of the United Nations](#) and the [ICJ](#). We can say that the settlements are "considered illegal under international law".

There is no requirement to correct interviewees who describe the settlements as 'illegal'.

Israel v Jewish & Hamas v Palestinian

To avoid encouraging racism do not conflate Jews with Israel or Palestinians with Hamas. Jewish and Palestinian identity is central to many aspects of Israeli and Palestinian life, law and politics. Do not shy away from reporting extremism and the role of identity in these communities but ensure it is factual and in context.

Nakba

The Nakba, which means "catastrophe" in Arabic, refers to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Every year on 15 May, millions of Palestinians around the world commemorate the Nakba.

Before the Nakba, Palestine was a multi-faith and multi-cultural society under British and Ottoman rule.

In November 1947, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution partitioning Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, with Jerusalem under a UN administration.

The Arab world rejected the plan, resulting in a full-blown war in 1948 after the departure of British forces and the declaration of independence of the State of Israel. The result of the war was the permanent displacement of more than half of the Palestinian population.

An estimated 750,000 refugees from historic Palestine either fled or were expelled from their homes. Most went to refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and neighbouring countries – Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Many of those people and their descendants remain stateless. The refugee camps have consolidated into permanent towns and cities such as Jenin in the West Bank. In Gaza there are eight camps, Jabalia, Rafah, Khan Younis, Deir al-Balah, Maghazi, Bureij, Nuseirat and Shati.

The 'right of return' of those refugees to what is now Israel is a core demand of most Palestinian groups and has been one of the most intractable issues in negotiations between Israel and Palestinian representatives.

Jerusalem

Journalists should not refer to Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. While West Jerusalem is the seat of the Israeli government, and Israel claims to have annexed the whole city and declared it capital of Israel, most countries – including Australia – do not recognise either the annexation of East Jerusalem or the declaration of Jerusalem as the capital.

The status of Jerusalem is contested and dependent on a final agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. The city was divided in 1949 into Israeli-controlled West Jerusalem and East Jerusalem, then controlled by Jordan. Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the future capital of a Palestinian state.

Palestine/Palestinian

Palestine is a geographical and historical entity but not a state. The Palestinians remain engaged in a decades-long struggle for an independent state, so don't use "Palestine" or "Palestinian" in any way that might mislead audiences into thinking such a state already exists.

However, Palestinians exist as a people and as an identity. You can refer to people who identify as Palestinian whether in the occupied territories or elsewhere as "Palestinians".

ABC usage is to refer to Gaza and the West Bank as the "Occupied Palestinian Territory" or "Occupied Territories". We do not refer to them as "Palestine". The governing authority in Palestinian towns in the West Bank is the "Palestinian Authority" (PA), headed by President Mahmoud Abbas. In Gaza, it is Hamas.

In 2011 the Palestinian Authority applied to the UN Security Council for the State of Palestine to be admitted to the UN. The US declared it would veto the move and it was not pursued. Subsequently, the UN General Assembly granted Palestine non-member observer state status. Palestine has also acceded to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

"Palestine" is increasingly used by members of the community and there is no need to correct interviewees who refer to "Palestine", or otherwise mediate use of the word by people featured in our stories.

Refugee Camps

See Nakba

Right of Return

See Nakba

Territory or Territories

The United Nations refers to Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem as the "Occupied Palestinian Territory", indicating that it is a single political entity, but "Occupied Palestinian Territories" is widely used including by the Australian government, the US government and the Red Cross. The Golan Heights is still considered occupied and is Syrian territory, not Palestinian territory, which is one reason why the plural, 'occupied territories' is still in use.

"Occupied Palestinian Territory" is preferred when referring to Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, particularly if the UN is referenced but "Occupied Palestinian Territories" or "occupied territories" are also acceptable.

Terrorism/terrorist

When referring to the events of 7 October in southern Israel it is appropriate to call them acts of "terrorism" and the people who conducted them "terrorists". This relies on the most commonly accepted definition of terrorism as violence committed by non-State actors on civilians in the pursuit of a political aim.

In the context of the battles being fought within Gaza, it is not terrorism, and it is appropriate to refer to Hamas combatants and operatives as "militants".

Controversial Allegations

Israel has been accused of a range of crimes including **war crimes, genocide, apartheid and ethnic cleansing**.

These are all crimes and Israel denies it is guilty of any of them. As with any crimes, it is not the ABC's role to decide guilt or innocence. If there are credible allegations we should lay out what facts are known and allow others to argue about how to interpret them.

All these issues can be discussed on the ABC, but we must recognise that both sides deserve to be heard and given fair treatment.

It's also important to present the wider legal context to these allegations.

Apartheid

Apartheid was a declared policy of the racist South African government between 1948 and the early 1990s.

However, while international condemnation of the practice initially focused on South Africa, the international community has increasingly defined apartheid as a crime regardless of location. The [Apartheid Convention of 1973](#) made it a crime and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998 defines it as a crime against humanity.

It is also outlawed in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) which states: *States Parties particularly condemn racial segregation and apartheid and undertake to prevent, prohibit and eradicate all practices of this nature in territories under their jurisdiction."*

The advisory opinion of the ICJ on 19 July 2024 concluded that Israel was in breach of [Article 3 of CERD](#).

'Israel's legislation and measures impose and serve to maintain a near-complete separation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between the settler and Palestinian communities. For this reason, the Court considers that Israel's legislation and measures constitute a breach of Article 3 of CERD'

This is an opinion and not a legally binding ruling and should be attributed to the ICJ. Suggested wording:

The ICJ found that the restrictions placed on Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem amounted to apartheid and are in breach of human rights law

The ICJ concluded that the restrictions placed on Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem violate an international ban on racial segregation and apartheid.

The ICJ did not find that Israel is an 'Apartheid State'. The opinion is restricted to Israel's governance in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Remember, asking interviewees to describe the effect of a given policy or practice may be more informative than simply quoting sources who apply the apartheid label, which many in our audience may not fully understand.

Israel strenuously rejects this characterisation, which should be included in any story or discussion that focusses on allegations of apartheid.

Colonialism/settler colonialism

The allegation of colonialism is a highly contentious allegation made against Israel. As with the other allegations, the ABC should avoid making any judgement on this issue.

Relevant context includes that both Jews and Palestinians have lived and co-existed in Israel/Palestine since Biblical times.

It is also relevant that there was significant Jewish immigration both before and after the Second World War from Europe, the Middle East and in the 1970s and 1980s from Ethiopia. Many of those immigrants were refugees from persecution, including from the Holocaust.

Genocide

Allegations of genocide have become an increasingly significant feature of discussion over the Israel-Gaza war. It is an allegation of the gravest of crimes. Coverage demands the highest standards of accuracy and impartiality.

"Genocide" has a clear legal meaning in the Genocide Convention, which includes the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" (more on the ICJ case below).

[South Africa launched a case](#) in the International Court of Justice on the 29 December 2023, accusing Israel of committing genocide in the Gaza Strip.

The allegation has been strenuously [denied by Israel, which also argued that Hamas demonstrated its genocidal intent in its attacks on 7 October](#).

Discussing genocide as an issue

The ICJ genocide case has crystalised international debate about Israel's conduct of the war and its intent and it is a legitimate issue to analyse, report and discuss both

in the context of the court case and more generally.

Decisions about coverage should be informed by the fact that a final judgement by the ICJ will likely take years and our reporting should acknowledge the allegation is highly contentious.

News and factual coverage must include or refer to both the principal perspectives and include factual and fair reporting of the evidence to support or rebut the allegation.

There may be unusual occasions, for example in live content or if the story's focus is principally on the personal experience of a person whose family has been killed, by an Israeli airstrike in Gaza, or in attacks by Hamas, where a discussion of the rights and wrongs of the allegation of genocide is impractical or jarring.

In those situations, refer the content to your immediate manager.

Generally, across all coverage, it is the responsibility of editorial managers to ensure there is an adequate diversity of perspectives that includes all material context. Consider consulting an editorial policy advisor and refer to the editorial policies guidance on [Impartiality for further guidance](#).

While opinion-based content may present a single perspective, editorial leaders must have a plan to provide all relevant principal perspectives over a reasonable time, including links to other perspectives or pointers to forthcoming content.

Our job is to report the facts on the ground and present other people's judgements on the rights and wrongs of the actions of the participants.

The ICJ genocide case

On the 26 January 2024 the International Court of Justice issued interim orders, having found there was a 'real and imminent' risk of genocide and agreed to some of the provisional measures requested by South Africa, ordering Israel to take a range of actions, "to ensure Israel's compliance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention not to engage in genocide, and to prevent and to punish genocide".

The orders were not a judgement on the merits of the case and not a 'finding that Israel is committing genocide'. A final decision on the allegations will likely take years.

The Court did not agree to South Africa's request to order Israel to halt its military operation, which Israel argued would have left it powerless to defend itself against

Hamas.

As the case is ongoing, staff must check for [updates at the ICJ](#) when it is the subject of their reporting.

This is a dispute between South Africa and Israel over whether Israel is in breach of the Genocide Convention. It is not a dispute over whether war crimes are being committed in Gaza.

War crimes Vs Genocide

War crimes are breaches of the Geneva Conventions and other rules which govern behaviour in armed conflict and they do not automatically amount to genocide. They include acts like shooting a soldier who has surrendered, or targeting civilians, and they are prosecuted against individuals in the International Criminal Court.

Genocide is marked by the *"intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group"*. So, while South Africa's case at the ICJ cites alleged war crimes by Israel, it is also arguing that those acts "are genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent (*dolus specialis*) to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group."

International Court of Justice – binding or not binding?

When the ICJ rules on a dispute between two states, its decisions, including provisional measures, are considered binding. This is a result of specific provisions in the UN Charter, the Statute of the ICJ and, in this case, the Genocide Convention.

However, if one side does not comply, the other would need to ask the UN Security Council to take action. In this case, the US would likely veto a move against Israel.

The Genocide Convention states in part:

Article I

The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.

Article II

*In the present Convention, **genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious***

***group**, as such:*

(a) Killing members of the group;

(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Article III

The following acts shall be punishable:

(a) Genocide;

(b) Conspiracy to commit genocide;

(c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide;

(d) Attempt to commit genocide;

(e) Complicity in genocide

References

ICJ – How it works <https://www.icj-cij.org/how-the-court-works>

Submissions and statements of South Africa and Israel [here](#).

South Africa submissions:

[Application instituting proceedings and Request for the indication of provisional measures \(icj-cij.org\)](#).

[CR 2024/1 \(icj-cij.org\)](#).

Israel response: <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240112-ora-01-00-bi.pdf>

The [Genocide Convention](#) is [here](#) (IX)

Allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Israel-Gaza war

The Prosecutor at the [International Criminal Court](#) has asked the Court to issue arrest [warrants](#) for Hamas leaders, Yahya Sinwar, and Mohamed Deif and Israeli leaders Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant over their roles in the Israel-Gaza war. A decision is yet to be made.

This information must be included in stories that canvas claims of war crimes or crimes against humanity in the Israel-Gaza war.

It is not the ABC's job to label a particular act a war crime. However, understanding the rules can allow us to sharpen our questions and look for particular facts or evidence.

The Geneva Conventions and their Additional protocols are the principal source of law that regulates warfare. They are sometimes called International Humanitarian Law or the Laws of Armed Conflict. Other sources include customary international law.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is the custodian of the Conventions and has produced a lot of useful material on them, some of which can be found here: [ICRC: War and Law](#)

The Conventions cover a range of issues, including the protection of sick and wounded combatants, the treatment of prisoners of war and the protection of civilians.

Taking hostages is prohibited, as is deliberately attacking civilians. So, there is little debate that the 7 October attacks constituted war crimes.

The debate on whether Israel's response in Gaza to the killings of 7 October are war crimes turns on whether they are proportionate or excessive.

Combatants are required to distinguish between civilians and enemy forces and when they launch attacks they are required to ensure any risk to civilians is in proportion to the direct military advantage.

Civilian objects, such as schools and hospitals, must not be used for military purposes and are protected from attack. If one side uses a civilian object, such as a hospital, for a military purpose it may lose that protection, but any attack on it must still weigh the damage that would be caused to civilians.

The ICRC has a useful Q and A about many of these scenarios [here](#). The UN has a simple guide [here](#).

In the current context the 1949 Geneva convention's definition is useful:
"Intentionally launching an attack in the knowledge that such attack will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects or widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment which would be clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated."

Resources

This is a list of some useful sources of background information and analysis. It is not a list of approved sources for ABC content. All sources should be read critically. They all, at some point, have a slant, omit key context, or make minor errors.

Primary sources

- [ICRC – War and Law](#)
- [ICRC – Direct Participation in Hostilities](#) Clarifies the meaning and consequences of direct participation in hostilities under international humanitarian law
- [International Committee of the Red Cross – Israel and the occupied territories](#)
- [UN Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#) (OCHA OPT) UN source for daily humanitarian updates
- [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees](#) The largest UN agency in Gaza. News releases and updates
- [World Bank](#) Good stats and analysis
- The [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#) (IPC)
- The UN [World Food Program](#)
- [UNICEF](#)
- The Israeli military [Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories](#) (especially their updates on humanitarian efforts and the [X account](#))
- The Israeli military's [updates](#) on military activity

Analysis

- [European Council on Foreign Relations](#)
- [US Council on Foreign Relations](#)
- [International Crisis Group](#)
- [Chatham House](#)

This page was last updated 03/10/2024

- Title changed to Middle East Conflict Guidance
- Update to Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah
- Update to Allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Israel-Gaza war

Updated 29/08/2024

- Update to Gazan health authorities
- Addition of Gaza Media Office

Updated 30/7/2024

- Update relating to the advisory finding of the ICJ of 19/7/2024 on the legality of Occupation and Apartheid
- Revision to Genocide

Updated 14/6/2024

- Addition of Famine
- Additional links added to Resources

Updated 27/2/2024

- Update to Genocide

Updated 18/1/2024

- Update to Genocide

Updated 4/12/2023

- Update to Gaza and "Occupied Territory"

- Addition of Nakba, Refugee Camps, Right of Return, Territory or Territories

Minimising impact of exposure to distressing content which can lead to vicarious trauma

MANAGE EXPOSURE & ENVIRONMENT

IMAGES, FOOTAGE & SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

TAKE STEPS TO MINIMISE UNNECESSARY EXPOSURE

- DON'T LOOK IF YOU DON'T HAVE TO
- ENSURE EFFECTIVE SORTING & LABELLING PROCEDURES
- TAKE NOTE OF DISTINCTIVE FEATURES TO REDUCE RECHECKING
- DON'T SHOW, OPEN OR PASS DISTRESSING IMAGES TO COLLEAGUES WITHOUT WARNING

BUILD DISTANCE IN VIEWING CONTENT

- PIXILATE DISTRESSING FEATURES
- CONCENTRATE ON CLOTHES NOT FACES
- REDUCE BRIGHTNESS- LESSONS PERCEIVED IMPACT
- TURN OFF SOUND- FEATURE WITH MOST IMPACT

**TAKE FREQUENT SCREEN
BREAKS****DAMPENS THE BODY'S DISTRESS RESPONSE**

- GO FOR A WALK- GET OUTSIDE
- TALK TO A COLLEAGUE
- VIEW SOMETHING PLEASANT/UPLIFTING AT THE END OF SHIFT

**AVOID VIEWING CONTENT
BEFORE BED & AVOID ALCOHOL****VIEWING IMAGES &/OR CONSUMING
ALCOHOL BEFORE BED CAN RESULT IN:**

1. EMBEDDING IMAGERY IN THE MIND
2. NIGHTMARES
3. INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

**Possible Symptoms
resulting from
exposure****PHYSICAL**

- Sleeplessness/nightmares
- Muscle tension/headaches
- Digestive issues: reduced appetite, stomach upset
- "Rundown"- cold/flu, mouth ulcers, cold sores, skin conditions
- Lack of energy

EMOTIONAL

- Irritable, agitated
- Feeling overwhelmed - sadness, anger, fear, despair
- Teary
- Depersonalisation/emotional, detached
- Difficulties switching off at the end of the day - ruminating

COGNITIVE

- Skewed world view
- Cynical
- Distrustful of people
- Increased sensitivity to violence & perceived injustice
- Need to control events

BEHAVIOURAL

- Avoidance of situations perceived as potentially dangerous
- Withdrawn
- Aggressive
- Increased substance use



Minimising impact of exposure to distressing content

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