



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.

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 [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 Territory, 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. 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](#)
- [Accuracy & Fog of war](#)
- [Framing](#)
- [Reporting casualties, injuries and death tolls](#)

Context

This is a major story in which facts and opinions are highly contested. With such a high level of contentiousness, accurately presenting context and material facts is extremely important.

Ensure all relevant facts and context are included to properly cover the most important issues in your story.

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”.

It does not mean that journalists can assess the evidence on contentious issues, decide what they believe and then state 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 that 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 of evidence 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 the facts and all the competing perspectives fairly and impartially.

Accuracy - the Fog of war

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

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 this conflict.

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.

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

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

How stories are framed will determine what the audience believes is significant and what issues they’re being asked to consider.

While the core of all stories should be the facts as best we can determine them, clearly indicating to audiences their significance in wider debates and providing context will produce stronger and more objective stories.

Strive for clear language and 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.

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/>

Reporting Contentious Allegations

- [Genocide](#)
- [Allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity](#)
- [Apartheid](#)
- [Colonialism/settler colonialism](#)

The editorial policies require ABC journalists to demonstrate objectivity and impartiality in all contentious matters. Objectivity is a process that requires assembling, assessing and analysing demonstratable evidence that reflects on the truth or significance of an assertion, issue or opinion.

Israel has been accused of a range of crimes in Gaza and the West Bank including [war crimes, genocide, apartheid and ethnic cleansing](#). These are highly contentious allegations, 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. Both sides deserve to be heard and given fair treatment. If there are credible allegations, we should lay out what facts are known and allow others to argue about how to interpret them.

In practice, this means as much as possible, news reports, analysis and interviews should contextualise allegations presenting relevant evidence and the reasoning behind different perspectives. Interviewees should be challenged on the substance of their allegations. This helps audiences assess the relative merits of arguments.

Genocide

Genocide is an allegation of the gravest of crimes. Coverage demands the highest standards of accuracy and impartiality.

It is defined in the Genocide Convention as "*... 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.*

The concept of 'intent' is critical to any understanding of genocide.

The ICJ genocide case

South Africa launched a case in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) 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.

While South Africa's case at the ICJ cites alleged war crimes by Israel, the case is not a dispute over whether war crimes are being committed in Gaza. South Africa argued that Israel's actions "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."

On the 26 January 2024 and 28 March 2024 and 24 May 2024 the ICJ 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. However, on 24 May 2024 it did order Israel to cease its operation in Rafah and facilitate the provision of aid by the UN.

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.

Reporting and discussing allegations of genocide

Critics of Israel and the families of victims in Gaza now routinely describe the Israeli actions as genocide.

There continues to be evidence that Israel's actions may be in breach of the genocide convention. Specifically, some of the orders made by the ICJ in January and March of 2024 to avoid the risk of genocide have demonstrably not been followed by Israel, such as cooperating with the United Nations to provide sufficient aid and preventing incitement of genocide. Some political and other high-profile figures have continued to espouse policies that amount to genocidal intent. Statements made by individual Ministers may be treated as potentially credible evidence of Israel's intent regardless of whether they reflect the top line policy.

Many authoritative commentators have concluded Israel's actions now definitively show genocidal intent.

In September 2025 the UN Human Rights Council released the findings of its inquiry into genocide. It found that genocide is occurring in Gaza.

“On the basis of fully conclusive evidence, the Commission finds that statements made by Israeli authorities are direct evidence of genocidal intent. Additionally, on the basis of circumstantial evidence, the Commission finds that genocidal intent was the only reasonable inference that could be drawn based on the pattern of conduct of the Israeli authorities. Thus, the Commission concludes that the Israeli authorities and Israeli security forces have the genocidal intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.”

The report found that four of the five 'underlying acts' indicative of genocidal intent have occurred in Gaza.

- 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;

It found no evidence of the fifth underlying act : Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The full report is available [here](#).

The HRC is a separate entity from the ICJ, it isn't a criminal court and the standard of proof is, 'reasonable grounds to conclude'. The report is not legally binding and while its standard of proof is high it is not at the same standard as required by the ICJ. However, it is a significant finding and may be a source of evidence that informs the ICJ deliberations.

It is the first time a legal opinion of a major body has made a finding of genocidal intent on behalf of Israel.

Refer to the HRC (or UN Commission of Inquiry) report as 'findings' or 'conclusions'. For instance, "The report's findings are..." 'The report found' or 'the HRC found' or 'the HRC concluded', or 'The HRC analysis concluded'.

The HRC describes its section of the report on the factual evidence of genocidal intent as 'legal findings'.

Separately, it refers to a 'conclusion' that there is genocidal intent on behalf of Israel and its security services.

It may be appropriate to refer to legal findings when referring to the report as a whole where the intent of the language is common usage but we should not imply that the report has a legal outcome of the same nature as the ICJ ruling will eventually have.

However, there continues to be other evidence that there is not a clear intent by Israel to permanently destroy or depopulate Gaza. Israel as a government has never taken that position. And there are clearly very different opinions in the Israeli public. Likewise, its actions on the ground have been contradictory and inconsistent.

So, while we can make no conclusion about Israel's ultimate intent, we can see that the weight of evidence has grown and shifted.

The impact of that is - assuming the evidence presented backs it up - analysis may give more weight, and therefore space, to the evidence supporting the allegation of genocide than that denying it.

Israeli denials of genocide do not need to be routinely included after incidental mentions of genocide.

However, it is important to emphasise that the ABC has not itself concluded that genocide is or is not occurring. Therefore, in our questions, scripts and articles we should not suggest genocide is a fact.

There is still also a requirement for Israel's perspective to be included over time in our coverage of the war and Israeli responses to specific allegations should be sought and their responses fairly reported. There is no requirement to include statements from either perspective that are demonstrably untrue.

The following is some practical guidance:

- It is not necessary to say every time someone describes the war as a genocide in live content to include the pro forma statement that Israel denies the allegation.
- Likewise, in news stories where victims or their relatives describe Israel's actions as genocide where genocide is not a focus of the story it is not necessary to include a pro forma denial by Israel.
- In substantive interviews, particularly with officials or spokespersons of any sort where genocide is alleged, reporters and presenters should engage with the substantive issues underlying the allegation. You can do this by asking additional questions that provide the audience with additional accurate information that helps them make up their own mind. In addition, you should seek to present additional context.
- In scripted and digital content where genocide is raised as an issue or allegation, the substance of Israel's perspective should be included.
- Arguments both for and against the allegation of genocide should be challenged and critically examined.

Examples

- Questions or challenges for people alleging genocide could include:
 - Israel's prime minister has repeatedly said Israel will not force people to leave Gaza
 - Israel has said that Israel is committed to providing sufficient aid to Gazans and blames Hamas for stealing food/disrupting distribution
 - Israel government's stated objective has always been to eradicate Hamas not to displace the whole Palestinian population.
 - The ministers who have made genocidal statements like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich do not speak for the Israeli government on Gaza policy
- Questions or challenges for Israeli spokespeople and supporters could include:

- The ICJ ordered Israel to cooperate with the UN to ensure sufficient aid is delivered to Gazans – that demonstrably hasn't happened
- Whole sections of Gaza have been destroyed and the population directed to leave – how is that not showing intent to destroy at least a part of the Gazan population and community?
- The ICJ also ordered Israel to prevent genocidal comments being made by its ministers – that hasn't happened.

Summary

Scrutiny of Israel's conduct of the war and the public statements of its political and military leaders are crucial in any analysis of whether Israel has genocidal intent. It is a legitimate issue to analyse, report and discuss both in the context of the court case and more generally.

There is evidence that Israel has committed a genocide in Gaza. The UN Human Rights Council inquiry is the strongest evidence yet that points towards this. However, the ICJ is yet to make a finding and Israel's own actions on the ground have at times been contradictory and inconsistent with genocidal intent.

In our reporting it is not necessary to always include a denial by Israel about allegations of genocide. However, when the issue is substantive and a focus of the story we should include Israel's response.

Overall, be prepared to engage with the topic in a way that helps the audience understand this complex issue.

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

War crimes and other rules which govern behaviour in armed conflict as defined in the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute 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.

The [International Criminal Court](#) issued [warrants](#) in 2024 for the arrest of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the then Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant. The Israeli government denied the allegations against its officials.

The ICC's Prosecutor also requested warrants for Hamas leaders Yahya Sinwar, Ismail Haniyeh and Yahya Sinwar. Sinwar and Haniyeh were confirmed dead before the Pre-Trial Chamber decision.

Deif has now also been confirmed dead, so the ICC has also terminated its proceedings in relation to him.

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.

As with the issue of genocide, there may be 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.

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.”

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 substantive story or discussion that focusses on allegations of apartheid.

Colonialism/settler colonialism

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

The history of Zionism and Israel is complex and its characteristics have developed over time. It is also unique and differs in significant ways from the settler colonialism as practiced, for instance by the British in Australia

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.

None the less, the original Zionist project as conceived in Europe in the nineteenth century was seen as a settler project to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It was related to growing antisemitism in Europe and the growth of nationalism more broadly.

It is important to recognise this complexity and represent it in content.

Guidance on Language

- [Territory or Territories](#)
- [Palestine/Palestinian - Palestinian Authority \(PA\)](#)
- [Gaza and "Occupied Territory"](#)
- [Golan Heights, Shebaa Farms and Occupied Territories](#)
- [Assassination, targeted assassination](#)
- [Barrier/West Bank Barrier](#)
- [Blockade](#)
- [Famine & Starvation](#)
- [Invasion/Incursion](#)
- [Palestinian Health Ministry & Gazan health authorities](#)
- [Reporting death and casualty numbers](#)
- [Gaza Media Office](#)
- [The ICJ on the legality of occupation](#)
- [The ICJ on the legality of the settlements](#)

- [Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah](#)
- [Israel v Jewish & Hamas v Palestinian](#)
- [Nakba](#)
- [Jerusalem](#)
- [Refugee Camps](#)

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 or Israeli territory, which is one reason why the plural, 'occupied territories' is still in use.

ABC usage is to refer to the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem as the "Occupied Palestinian Territory". "Occupied Territories" is also commonly used, which incorporates the Golan Heights, which is not Palestinian.

Palestine/Palestinian - Palestinian Authority (PA)

Palestinians exist as a people, a community and as an identity. Palestine is a geographical, historical and political entity. You can refer to people who identify as Palestinian whether in the Occupied Palestinian Territory or elsewhere as "Palestinians".

The Palestinian Authority (PA), formally the Palestinian National Authority, is the governing body of parts of the West Bank created after the Oslo Accord in 1994. It exercises sole civil authority over less than 20% of the West Bank. Other parts of the West Bank and Jerusalem are either jointly controlled with Israel or solely governed by Israel. Gaza, prior to October 7 was governed by Hamas.

About 75% of UN members recognise Palestine as a sovereign state and the UN granted it observer state status in the General Assembly in 2011. However, it has not been granted full membership of the United Nations, which would require the approval of all the permanent members of the Security Council. The USA has consistently vetoed Palestinian membership.

In September 2025, Australia announced that it had formally recognised Palestine as a sovereign state. More than 150 countries have taken this step.

This is a domestic decision by Australia, which is being enacted parallel to similar recognition by France, the UK, Canada, Belgium and Portugal. It does not change the status of Palestine at the UN but will change the diplomatic status of Palestine in Australia. In effect, Australia now recognises the leader of the Palestinian Authority, currently Mahmoud Abbas, as the Palestinian head of state.

Palestine does not fulfill all the usually required attributes of a sovereign state – notably, under Israeli occupation the PA does not have effective control over most of the Palestinian Occupied Territory. Palestinians remain engaged in a so far unsuccessful decades-long struggle for a genuinely independent state.

However, it is not unprecedented for countries that do not have effective control of large proportions of their territory to be recognised as states. The fact that Palestine is recognised by most countries in the world, including global powers such as China, Russia, France and the UK, arguably amounts to de facto statehood.

ABC content can refer to Palestine when referring to its geography, history, community and the intended state encompassing the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

There is no need to correct interviewees who refer to “Palestine” or otherwise qualify the word when used by people featured in our stories.

Where relevant, it is useful to include in stories the decision taken by Australia to recognise Palestine. For example, in stories about the international debate over recognition or the peace process an additional line of context, ‘Australia is one of more than 150 countries to formally recognise Palestine as a sovereign state’, should be included.

Despite the move to recognise a Palestinian state, the political entity of Palestine remains occupied by Israel. It is still correct to refer to the ‘Occupied Palestinian Territory’ and in some circumstances ‘Occupied Palestinian Territory’ is preferred as it more clearly communicates the actual current status of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. It also avoids possible confusion or conflation with historical ‘Palestine’ which includes what is now Israel. Likewise, it is preferred to use ‘Palestinian Authority’ (PA) and not the government of Palestine, which implies a level of control that does not exist.

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. Israel contested describing Gaza as “occupied” during the period from 2005 – October 2023. However, 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.

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.

Golan Heights, Shebaa Farms and Occupied Territories

Israel occupied the Golan Heights from Syria and the adjacent Shebaa Farms from Lebanon during the 1967 war and annexed them in 1981. The international community does not recognise the annexation. They are not part of Palestine. Collectively, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Golan Heights and Shebaa Farms are known as the Occupied Territories.

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).

The UN General Assembly and the advisory opinion call it the "wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory", which is also acceptable.

Blockade

Before and immediately after October 7 Israel severely restricted supplies to Gaza. Refer to "Israel's blockade of Gaza" or say "Israel was blockading Gaza". Israel's

defence minister declared a “complete siege” on 9 October 2023.

Subsequently, the degree of Israel’s restriction of aid and other supplies into Gaza has been variable and up to date and verified information about aid has often been difficult to obtain.

The arrangements for the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza is a major, ongoing part of the Gaza story, so ensure your description reflects the circumstances on the day and are clearly attributed to their source.

Famine & Starvation

When reporting on the issue of famine, starvation and malnutrition 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 has warned at times of imminent famine and in August 2025 of actual famine in parts of Gaza. This is also the best source for estimates of the current state of food supply and famine estimates.

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.’

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.

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 usually a significant aspect of the story.

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 in most circumstances we should say the information is from the "Gaza Health Ministry".

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.

Reporting death and casualty numbers

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.

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

The death and casualty data released by the Gaza Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. Therefore, do not say or write that 'x thousand civilians have been killed according to the Gazan Health Ministry', say 'people'. It is accurate to say most or many are believed to be civilians.

Gaza Media Office

This is controlled and run by 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".

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.

If interviewees describe the Occupation as illegal, there is no requirement to include that Israel disputes this unless the legality of the occupation is the issue being discussed.

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’.

Hammas, 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 a broader description, encompassing a wide scope of activity.

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.

In interviews, Palestinians will often simply describe Israelis as Jews (Yahud or Yahudy (يهود)). Translate accurately and do not correct.

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. More than 55% of the land would be in Israel despite a much smaller population. Prior to partition Jewish militia started expelling Palestinians from areas designated for the Jewish homeland.

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.

In 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 194 (III), resolving that “refugees wishing to return to their homes ... should be permitted to do so”. 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.

Some supporters of Israel deny these facts about the Nakba. Their perspective is not required in stories referencing the Nakba.

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.

Refugee Camps

See Nakba

Right of Return

See Nakba

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".

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.

The Genocide Convention

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)

Other 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 22/09/2025

Updated 8/09/2025

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**

VICARIOUS TRAUMA (VT)

VT is the experience of trauma symptoms resulting from repetitive exposure to other peoples' trauma

Being affected by incidents you're not directly exposed to



Potentially risky tasks: Development of VT

- Empathetic engagement with talent/public/audience who have experienced trauma, grief or other forms of distress
- Viewing confronting images, footage, social media posts/commentary

Important points

1. Exposure to distressing material doesn't automatically result in VT
2. Development of VT is based on individual perceptions- not everyone will be impacted by the same content
3. VT symptoms are on a spectrum & people can recover

Potential signs/symptoms of VT

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
- Overwhelmed, sad, anger, fear, despair
- Teary
- Depersonalisation/emotionally 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 potentially dangerous
- Withdrawn
- Aggressive
- Increased substance use

STRATEGIES TO MINIMISE RISK OF VT:

TRAUMA-INFORMED INTERVIEWING & REPORTING

AIM:

MINIMISE POTENTIAL HARM TO PARTICIPANT, YOU & COLLEAGUES BY:

ESTABLISHING, ARTICULATING, MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES WITH PARTICIPANT/S

HOW:

1. BE CLEAR & TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR ROLE & PURPOSE:

TO TELL THEIR STORY, GIVE THEM A VOICE, BRING TO LIGHT THEIR SITUATION

2. EXPLAIN PROCESS & PROVIDE PARTICIPANT SOME CONTROL

- **SOME QUESTIONS MAY BE DISTRESSING OR UPSETTING.**
- **PARTICIPANT CAN PAUSE OR STOP THE INTERVIEW AT ANY TIME**

3. OUTLINE LIMITS OF YOUR ROLE

REINFORCE YOU'RE NOT A PSYCHOLOGIST OR COUNSELLOR

SHOULD THE PARTICIPANT FIND THE PROCESS TRIGGERING OR DISTRESSING, YOU CAN FIND THEM PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

4. HAVE A LIST OF SUPPORT SERVICES

- **ESTABLISH IF PARTICIPANT HAS A SUPPORT PERSON- OBTAIN CONSENT TO CONTACT IF NEEDED**
- **PROVIDE LIST OF RELEVANT SUPPORT SERVICES**

MANAGE EXPOSURE & ENVIRONMENT

IMAGES, FOOTAGE, SOCIAL MEDIA
COMMENTARY, TRANSCRIPTS

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 REPOSE

- 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

SUPPORT SERVICES

PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM

Peer Supporters are specifically trained colleagues who:

- provide confidential support during/after time of professional or personal distress
- make referrals to health professionals e.g. EAP, GP (if necessary)
- Available across the ABC



Trauma Intervention Program

Anyone experiencing distress as a result of exposure to events/content/images within their role can:

- access up to 6 confidential sessions with a Psychologist who is external to the ABC & has specific experience in trauma
- for further information or referral to this program contact Alex Mitchell, Manager, Trauma Programs:

mitchell.alexandra.j@abc.net.au

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)

 **TELUS** Health



PLUS MUCH MORE!

For appointments call:
1800 959 416

Outside Australia: +61 2 8295 2292

Social Media Wellbeing Advisor & Safety Hub

Provides resources & advice to support social media safety, including:

- preparing for, responding to & reporting concerns or incidents
- Tools for self-care
- Advice as to where to find further information & support contacts



Minimising impact of exposure to distressing content

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