

# RECOGNIZING A PALESTINIAN STATE: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

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- ♦ Why is the recognition of a Palestinian state happening now?
- ♦ What does this recognition actually mean—and what does it not mean?
  - ♦ What should be the next steps following this recognition?

Major Western countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Australia, and Portugal, among others, recognized a Palestinian state on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, in a rather symbolic move after almost two years of continuing Israeli genocide in Gaza.

## WHY NOW?

Israel's unfolding Gaza genocide, enabled by the U.S. and Western complicity, has seen growing global, popular outrage. And as the Israeli government disregarded basic calls for humanitarian access and bombed a sovereign state like Qatar, attempting to target the negotiation team, a reaction was inevitable. Western capitals opted for the symbolic diplomatic gesture of recognizing a Palestinian state, rather than exerting real pressure on Israel to halt its ongoing genocide or holding the perpetrators accountable before a court of justice.

This recent wave of recognition, built on the initiative led by France and Saudi Arabia in late July through the *“International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement*

*of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution,”* led to the *“New York Declaration”*<sup>1</sup>. It was endorsed by the U.N. General Assembly on Sept. 12, 2025<sup>2</sup>. The declaration calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages held in Gaza, and the establishment of a Palestinian State that is both viable and sovereign. It also calls for the disarmament of Hamas and its exclusion from governance in Gaza, normalization between Israel and the Arab countries, as well as collective security guarantees.

This move to recognize a Palestinian state was the least costly policy option for Western countries after nearly two years of Israeli atrocities in Gaza following Hamas's Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel. The continuing Israeli assault has killed more than 65,000 Pales-

1 “New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution”, United Nations, August 4, 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/CONF.243/2025/1>, (Accessed on October 6, 2025).

2 “Endorsement of the New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution”, United Nations, September 12, 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/L.1/Rev.1>, (Accessed on October 6, 2025).

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tinians, while displacing hundreds of thousands, and demolishing any condition of livelihood in Gaza. On Sept. 16, 2025, the U.N. *Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel* published its report,<sup>3</sup> saying that Israel has committed genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In the report, the commission urged Israel and all states to “fulfil their legal obligations under international law to end the genocide and punish those responsible for it”.

Meanwhile, Israel’s ongoing genocide in Gaza has generated a global solidarity movement with Palestine, mobilizing crowds from Australia to Canada, urging governments to act urgently against the worsening humanitarian catastrophe. The global movement has spread through the streets of Western capitals and across different sectors – from music and cinema to academia and sport. A coalition of advocacy organizations and fan groups called on European football federations to boycott Israel, kicking off the #GameOverIsrael campaign,<sup>4</sup> months ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2026.<sup>5</sup> Dozens of musicians, including James Blake, PinkPantheress, and Saint Levant, performed to a packed London arena at the star-studded “Together for Palestine”<sup>6</sup> concert, joined by Palestinian activists and Hollywood actors<sup>7</sup>. Hannah Einbinder ended her Emmy Awards acceptance speech by shouting, “Free Palestine!” Javier Bardem strode the red carpet in a keffiyeh<sup>8</sup>.

3 “Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza Pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide”, United Nations, September 16, 2025, <https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/a-hrc-60-crp-3.pdf>, (Accessed on October 6, 2025).

4 Game over Israel, <https://www.gameoverisrael.com/en>, (Accessed on October 6, 2025).

5 “Advocacy Groups Call for European Ban on Israel Team and Players in Times Square Billboard”, Reuters, September 17, 2025.

6 Together for Palestine: A Humanitarian Fundraiser at OVO Arena Wembley on 17 September 2025, <https://togetherforpalestine.org>, (Accessed on October 6, 2025).

7 Michael Hann, “Together for Palestine Concert: Benedict Cumberbatch, Damon Albarn and Neneh Cherry Take Stage at Galvanising and Star-Studded Gig for Gaza”, *The Guardian*, September 18, 2025.

8 Michael Hann, “Hannah Einbinder and Javier Bardem among Emmy stars to call for Gaza ceasefire,” *The Guardian*, September 15, 2025.

Despite all that, the Israeli government announced a new military operation to occupy Gaza City, while continuing its demolition of whatever was left of the urban areas. It also declared its intention to annex the occupied West Bank<sup>9</sup>. The prospect of annexation outraged even Israel’s close regional partners, like the UAE, which may downgrade its diplomatic ties in response<sup>10</sup>.

A response to the ongoing genocide is long overdue, and recognition of a Palestinian state appears to be the least costly policy option for Western countries.

## WHAT DOES (NOT) IT MEAN?

By recognizing a Palestinian state, these major European countries joined almost 140 other countries in backing the national aspirations of the Palestinian people in having an independent state. Recognizing a Palestinian state carries symbolic weight and may upgrade bilateral diplomatic relations, but it will have little, if any, impact on the realities on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank. The “promised” Palestinian state is still undefined, not guaranteed a full U.N. membership, and is not envisaged to have sovereign statehood in the near future. Meanwhile, the recognition does not seem to help Palestinians in Gaza who are facing a continuing genocide, or their fellow Palestinians in the occupied West Bank who are facing a tightened, brutal military occupation and threats of displacement.

These recognitions of a Palestinian state framed their actions as a reassurance of the two-state solution. Yet, the lip service of the two-state solution disregards the reality on the ground, exemplified by the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, expanding settlements, and the recent Israeli reoccupation of the Gaza Strip. What is left of a Palestinian state is rather a performative diplomatic relations and disconnected

9 “Israeli Parliament Approves Symbolic Motion on West Bank Annexation”, Aljazeera, July 23, 2025.

10 Alexander Cornwell, “Exclusive: UAE Could Downgrade Diplomatic Ties If Israel Annexes West Bank, Sources Say”, Reuters, September 18, 2025.

archipelagoes of besieged Palestinian towns that lack any prospect of statehood and a functioning economy.

In the same vein, some countries, including Canada and Australia, “conditionally” recognized a State of Palestine. Australia conditioned its recognition on “the President of the Palestinian Authority restating its recognition of Israel’s right to exist,” and “given direct undertakings to Australia, including commitments to hold democratic elections and enact significant reform to finance, governance, and education,” while stating that “the terrorist organization Hamas must have no role in Palestine.” As such, the “establishment of diplomatic relations and opening of embassies will be considered as the Palestinian Authority makes progress on its commitments to reform.”<sup>11</sup> The official statement by Canadian Prime Minister Carney on *Canada’s recognition of the State of Palestine* clearly says that “the Palestinian Authority has provided direct commitments to Canada and the international community on much-needed reforms, including to fundamentally reform its governance, to hold general elections in 2026, in which Hamas can play no part, and to demilitarize the Palestinian state.”<sup>12</sup> While the Palestinian Authority undoubtedly needs reform, conditioning recognition of a Palestinian state on prescribed reforms, demands for demilitarization, or the exclusion of Palestinian factions from political participation is simply another manifestation of a colonial mindset and top-down social engineering, rather than a genuine shift in strategy.

Legally, despite new recognitions, including by permanent members of the Security Council (the United Kingdom and France), the status of Palestine at the U.N. will not change. Palestine will remain a “permanent observer state,” a designation that al-

lows for participation but not voting rights. Full U.N. membership requires approval by the Security Council, and thus the support of all five permanent members,<sup>13</sup> including the U.S., which continues to oppose any move to recognize a Palestinian state. Under President Trump’s administration, the U.S. went even further by denying a visa to the Palestinian Authority delegation, led by President Mahmoud Abbas, who had planned to travel to New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly.

The U.S., however, risks becoming increasingly isolated as the only permanent member of the Security Council opposing recognition of a Palestinian state. This isolation is also evident in U.N. General Assembly voting patterns on Palestine-related resolutions, where Washington is often joined only by Israel and a handful of small island nations. However, the current U.S. administration appears indifferent to international norms and unconcerned with its global reputation in this regard.

Finally, the Palestinians in Gaza who are facing unbearable suffering through forced displacement, deprived of basic human rights and needs, would certainly welcome the recognition, but they demand more urgency and concrete steps to stop the killing machine and alleviate their sufferings. At the same time, many may doubt whether such recognitions are merely another diplomatic maneuver aimed at deflecting growing international pressure.

## WHAT SHOULD BE THE NEXT STEPS?

This symbolic move to recognize a Palestinian state should not mark the end, but rather serve as a lever to secure a cease-fire in Gaza, a step toward isolating Israel and building international pressure until a tipping point is reached that can shift the course of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In this critical moment, responsibilities lie with Palestinian regional and international decision-makers.

11 “Australia Recognises the State of Palestine”, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, September 21, 2025, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/australia-recognises-state-palestine>, (Accessed on October 6, 2025).

12 “Statement by Prime Minister Carney on Canada’s Recognition of the State of Palestine”, Prime Minister of Canada, September 21, 2025, <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2025/09/21/statement-prime-minister-carney-on-canada-recognition-state-palestine>, (Accessed on October 6, 2025).

13 <https://www.un.org/en/model-united-nations/how-state-becomes-un-member>

The wave of recognition should not serve as a distraction from the ongoing destruction of Gaza and the accelerating displacement carried out by the Israeli army. Rather, it must underscore the gravity of the situation and the urgent need for an immediate ceasefire, as the ongoing genocide strikes at the very core of any future Palestinian state: its people living on their own land. The “New York Declaration” clearly calls for the war in Gaza to end now, for prisoners to be exchanged, and for the Israeli forces to fully withdraw from Gaza. It also demands “immediate, safe, unconditional and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale through all crossings and throughout the Gaza Strip, in coordination with the U.N. and ICRC and in line with humanitarian principles.” These demands must be upheld and prioritized, and not be conditioned on any political moves, as they constitute basic human rights and obligations under international humanitarian law.

In parallel, these recognitions should serve as a diplomatic avenue to expand active engagement and broaden the international base of support for a Palestinian state. The Palestinian Authority, together with the Ministerial Committee assigned by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit on Gaza, has a crucial role and responsibility to play in this effort. Partnerships with Spain, Norway, and France can help increase pressure on other states – particularly Italy and Germany – that are yet to recognize Palestine. In the

same vein, the recognition should be translated into concrete policies that support the security of Palestinians and Palestinian statehood on the ground and put real pressure on the Israeli government to stop its expansionist plans and ethnic cleansing policies. The annex to the “New York Declaration”<sup>14</sup> provides a variety of tools and policies in this regard, where the co-chairs of the conference and the working groups are tasked with follow-up mechanisms, yet, these recognitions should not be utilized to set a normalization path between Israel and other states, including Saudi Arabia, jumping over the suffering and rights of the Palestinian people.

Finally, recognizing a Palestinian state should be contextualized within the broader framework of international solidarity and as another step in the long path of the Palestinian national struggle. As with the decolonial struggles of other nations, from Timor-Leste to South Africa, isolating military occupations and apartheid regimes is a prerequisite for an international strategic shift. Building on these diplomatic moves, and harnessing growing public pressure and outrage, could push the Palestinian cause toward its own “South Africa moment”: a global boycott of Israel that forces meaningful change.

<sup>14</sup> New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution”, United Nations, August 6, 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/CONF.243/2025/1/Add.1>, (Accessed on October 6, 2025).

