

**Ms. Averil Power**

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Thank you chairman for inviting me to this address this conference on foot of the Irish Senate's recent motion calling for recognition of the State of Palestine.

Last year, I visited the West Bank and Gaza with a group of Irish parliamentarians and saw the impact of the occupation and blockade for myself. I returned to Ireland angry about what I had witnessed there and determined to use my role as a parliamentarian to help in any way I can.

When EU members of the UN Human Rights Council, including Ireland, decided to abstain en bloc in a vote for an inquiry into Israeli war crimes in Gaza last summer, our Senate was in recess.

Like many Irish people, I was furious our Government had taken such a cowardly approach and so I worked to organise a recall of the House to hold them to account.

In an unusual move, the Senate was recalled from its holidays for a special debate with the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

During that debate, Senators from all parties expressed their outrage at Israel's latest assault on Gaza and called on our Government to stand up and speak out in every forum in support of the Palestinian people.

The debate received a lot of media attention and I believe it had an impact on our Government's policy as their public statements have since been much more critical of Israel's aggression since then.

After the Swedish Government announced its intention to recognise the State of Palestine, I proposed a motion for Ireland to do the same.

A majority of Senators signed the motion and it was later agreed by the entire Senate without a vote.

I am currently working with members of our other parliamentary chamber, the Dáil, to secure support for a similar motion there.

I very much hope that Ireland will soon join Sweden in formally recognising the State of Palestine.

Ireland has traditionally been vocal in our support for the Palestinian people and proactive in lobbying on their behalf internationally.

Our history of occupation makes us naturally sympathetic to the plight of others. We also know violence begets violence and that it takes real leadership to achieve peace. Leaders

from both sides must put aside their mutual contempt and distrust and learn to work together.

Over fifteen years on from the Good Friday Agreement, there are still many issues to be resolved. But Northern Ireland is far better place now than the one I remember as a schoolgirl when terrorist atrocities were a regular occurrence and peace seemed impossible.

As a beneficiary of international support for our peace process, Ireland has a responsibility to do everything we can to help others.

That is why I believe we should be to the forefront of international efforts to secure full recognition for the Palestinian State and deliver a viable two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Parliamentarians have a duty to influence the foreign policies of our governments. I am delighted UK, French and Spanish parliamentarians are pushing for their governments to recognise Palestine and I would encourage others to do the same.

Recognising Palestine won't of itself bring peace to the region.

However, it is a strong statement of support for the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination.

In the aftermath of Israel's latest assault on Gaza, the Palestinian people need now more than ever to know that they have real support in the international community.

It is also important we do everything we can to bolster moderate Palestinian and Israeli forces and help them work for peace.

Some of the most impressive peace activists I have met are Israeli. Groups like B'tselem, ACRI and Breaking the Cycle are doing incredible work, as are left wing political groups in Israel who oppose the occupation.

Recently, over 650 prominent Israelis wrote to all members of the Irish parliament calling on us to recognise Palestine. The letter was signed by former Ministers and Ambassadors, a former Speaker of the Knesset, a Nobel Prize Laureate and retired army generals.

In their letter, they expressed concern about the continued political stalemate, the occupation and Israel's settlement activities. They stated that Israel's security and existence depend on the existence of a Palestinian state. And they said that Ireland recognising the State of Palestine would advance the prospects for peace.

135 countries already recognise the State of Palestine. The rest of us should listen to these voices and do so without further delay.

But symbolic statements, while significant, are not enough. We must also do everything we can to make the Palestinian state a reality.

**I very much hope the Security Council will agree a resolution soon setting a clear deadline for Israel's withdrawal from Palestine.**

**However, such a resolution will only have a real impact if it is backed up by proper monitoring and strong enforcement measures.**

**In June 1967, Israel took over the West Bank and Gaza by force, contrary to the UN Charter.**

**Had the UN Security Council done its job in 1967, it would have demanded that Israel withdraw from these territories, and if Israel refused to do so, it would have applied whatever sanctions were necessary to make it withdraw. This was done when Iraq occupied Kuwait in 1990.**

**Unfortunately, the Security Council chose not to do so and Palestinians have now been living under Israeli military occupation for almost 50 years.**

**During that time, the Security Council has passed dozens of resolutions criticising the occupation and Israel's relentless settlement building. However, Israel has ignored all of them without consequences.**

**To this day, Israel continues to exploit the weakness of the international community and do everything it can to make a two state solution impossible.**

**While pretending to talk peace, it has continuously intensified its illegal occupation of Palestine.**

**Earlier this year, a spokesperson for the UN relief agency for Palestine criticised Israel for killing children as they slept next to their parents in a UN designated shelter in Gaza. He said: "children killed in their sleep – this is an affront to all of us, a source of universal shame." He went on to say that the world stands disgraced.**

**I agree.**

**But I also say the world stands disgraced for standing idly by while Israel has ignored countless UN resolutions since 1967. We stand disgraced for not backing up our condemnation of Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine with real action. And we stand disgraced for expressing faux surprise when Israel attacked Gaza for the third time in just six years.**

**The experience of the last 47 years has shown us that condemnation of Israel is not enough. It is time to move beyond mere words and take real action.**

**If the Security Council is unable to do so due to the need for unanimity then individual Governments and regional organisations must act.**

**As an Irish parliamentarian, I intend to put pressure on our Government to push for far stronger action from the European Union.**

**As a trading bloc, we have considerable economic leverage over Israel. Europe is Israel's largest trading partner and Israel benefits additionally from privileged access to**

**European markets under the EU-Israel Association Agreement. That agreement states that relations between the parties shall be based on respect for human rights. Clearly this is not happening in practice.**

**It is long past time for the EU to put our money where our mouth is and suspend our trade agreement with Israel until it respects international law and ends its illegal occupation of Palestine.**

**I urge parliamentarians from other European countries to push for this also and those of you from other regions to use whatever leverage you can to force Israel to make peace.**

**Let's move beyond mere words and take real action.**

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