

Balfour Project

PEACE, JUSTICE AND EQUAL RIGHTS
IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Dear Friends,

We live in turbulent times.

In the occupied territories deadly clashes spread daily. No one appears to be trying to restrain either side, whether aggressive settler vigilantes or new armed Palestinian militias responsible to no one. In Israel, the government turns a blind eye to the provocative antics of its far-right members as well as major new settlements going through the bureaucratic planning system. Cabinet members say these will soon increase the number of settlers in the West Bank - excluding the already annexed region of East Jerusalem and its hinterland - to over a million.

Meanwhile the venerable UN agency responsible for the wellbeing of over six million Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, is in on the point of collapse. Widespread chaos could ensue.

Where is the Biden Administration and our own Government, a loyal follower of Washington when it comes to this issue, in the midst of the mayhem?

As far as Rishi Sunak and Michael Gove are concerned, they seem to believe this is the right moment to table in Parliament a highly controversial new bill that will effectively criminalise support for the BDS movement. More broadly – and disturbingly – it would prevent any British public institution taking actions abroad that differ from the policies of the government of the day in Westminster. The aim, to protect Israel from the consequences of its apartheid-style actions in Palestine and prevent UK citizens from making ethical investment decisions the government does not approve, is barely concealed.

The Balfour Project is active on all these fronts, exposing what is going on, educating the public, especially young people, and working with politicians to try and change prevailing mindsets. The political context in Britain, of course, is the much-anticipated next general election, expected to be held in the next 12 months or so. Working with like-minded partners we are developing an ambitious, multi-year strategy to “Make Palestine Matter” in British politics.

Away from politics, following the success of our annual conference in May, which focused on the utter disregard for Palestinian human rights today, we are planning another event which we expect will interest loyal supporters. This will turn our gaze back to the roots of today’s intractable conflict. In early August, Dr Peter Shambrook, a historian and a founding figure of the Balfour Project, will publish his meticulously researched exposé of the McMahon-Hussein correspondence of 1915-1916 and its far-reaching consequences. His book is called “Policy of Deceit: Britain and Palestine, 1914 – 1939.” We are planning a hybrid conference to mark its launch. Further details will be shared once the final arrangements are made.

We also have an exciting programme of webinars and film screenings in the coming months. On Thursday 6 July, we shall have an online screening of a new documentary by Omar al-Qattan, a well-known champion of Palestinian culture and arts, entitled Going Home. After the screening I shall be live in conversation with Omar about it. Friends of the Balfour Project will be able to watch it free while others will pay the modest amount of £5. Very good value, I should add.

We thank you for your continued loyal support and look forward to hearing any suggestions on how we might improve our work.

Andrew Whitley

Chair of the Balfour Project Board of Trustees



Britain's agreement 'with a rule-breaker'

The *2030 Roadmap for UK-Israel bilateral relations*, published on March 21, was nearly 5,000 words of mutual respect and admiration, pledging the widest and fullest co-operation imaginable between the two states, and signed by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Israel Foreign Ministry. It read as if it had been dictated by Israel and approved without demur in Whitehall.

Israel's Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, visited the British Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, a couple of days later in London in what was a quiet but warm get-together in the afterglow of the roadmap, which mentioned the Palestinians just twice, referring briefly and enigmatically to their 'livelihoods' and 'economic development'. Mention in this encomium was there none of Palestinian rights, freedom, security or nationhood, or of their increased suffering at the hands of Israel's army, security forces and Jewish settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It was as if Israel's new extreme right-wing-Government, with its taste for annexation and harsher than ever treatment of the Palestinians, did not exist and did not pose yet greater threats to the already dire Israel-Palestine situation. As we now know, a few days later, at the beginning of Ramadan in early April, Israeli settlers and security forces invaded the Haram al-Sharif, attacking worshippers, and renewed and increased violence and killing spread across the Holy Land, from Galilee to Gaza, with Palestinians the main victims.

But back to the roadmap: it began by stating that "the bilateral [Israel-UK] relationship has never been stronger" between these "firm friends and natural allies" and went on to enumerate elements of a "strategic partnership" during the coming seven years. There would be a new free trade agreement; the two countries' £5bn trading partnership would be steadily enhanced; Israel and the UK would tackle the "global scourge of antisemitism"; "democracy[w]as" "the finest form of government", and a close strategic partnership would be maintained in defence and security. There would also be joint Research and Development schemes and close partnership in anti-terrorist action and cyber-space.

A pledge of increased British support for Israel in international forums noted "the disproportionate focus on Israel in the UN and other international bodies, including attempts to delegitimise it or deny or deny its right to self-defence", phrasing lifted unsullied from the Israeli handbook. There would also be joint opposition to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement and the moves by the International Court of Justice to pursue Israel for alleged war crimes.

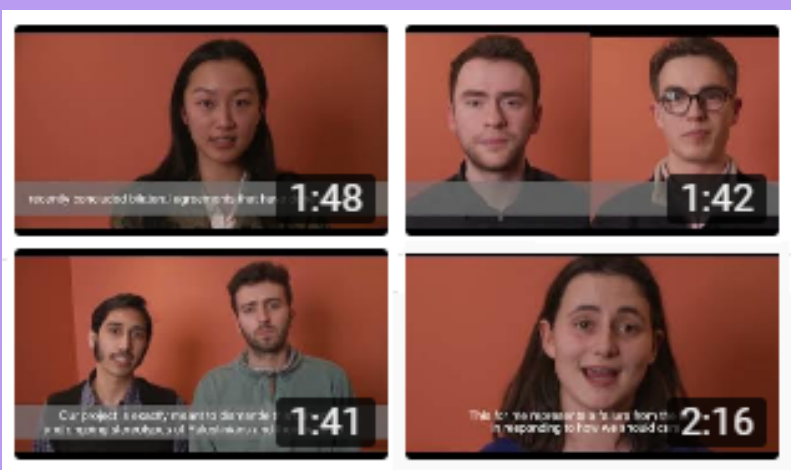
That week, the Balfour Project's partners and friends in the Israeli Policy Working Group, which advocates Palestinian rights and statehood, sent a small delegation to Britain to persuade parliamentarians, the FCDO and civil society groups to stiffen the UK's resolve against Israel's law-breaking and persecution of the Palestinians. "Negotiating a free-trade agreement is not the way to deal with a rule-breaker," said a delegate. The Balfour Project echoes him.

The roadmap and reactions to it are in full on the [Balfour Project website](#).

Tim Llewellyn

Member of the Balfour Project's Executive Committee

Short videos showcase the importance of Peace Advocacy Programme



Our 2022/23 Peace Advocacy Fellows have produced [short videos](#) to explain their projects and why they are important. Do take a look. Our Fellows Programme is one of our most important activities and always attracts a wide range of exceptionally talented young people who are committed to promoting peace, justice and equal rights in Palestine. (See page 6 for information on how to apply to be a Fellow under our expanded 2023/24 programme).

Annual Conference focuses on human rights and realities ‘on the ground’

We held our annual conference in the afternoon of 17 May. Two hundred people attended the event in person, at Church House in central London and another 200 joined via the video link. This was our first ‘in person’ conference since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic.

The conference was opened by our Chair, Andrew Whitley, and by Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, one of our Patrons.

We were delighted that Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, was able to deliver the keynote speech, during which she expertly described the various ways in which Israel is breaching international human rights law, including treaties which its own government has ratified.

Ms Albanese stressed the need to re-frame the way in which the history of Israel-Palestine is considered and the way in which current events are interpreted. This is not an intractable conflict arising from irreconcilable rivalries and incompatible identities, she said. Rather, this is the product of a reality marked by deep and long injustice where one group is the occupier and one is the occupied; one is the coloniser and one is colonised.

Ms Albanese was followed by a session entitled Realities on the Ground in which four experts explained different aspects of daily life in the Occupied Territories, based both on their research and their lived experiences.



Left: Shawan Jabarin (Al-Haq), Francesca Albanese (UN Special Rapporteur), Suhad Bishara (Adalah) and Melanie Ward (MAP).

Omar Shakir, the Israel-Palestine Director for Human Rights Watch (HRW) joined over video from the USA. He said that HRW has concluded that Israel is conducting severe discriminatory oppression against the Palestinians, which falls under the universal definition of Apartheid. HRW has reached similar conclusion in Myanmar, in relation to the treatment of the Rohingya people, and in China, in relation to the Uighur populations.

Melanie Ward, of Medical Aid for Palestinians, noted that in the West Bank those living in Israeli settlements have access to up to 440 litres of water per day (more than four times the amount recommended by the World Health Organisation). Palestinians in many cases have access to less than 50 litres.

Miranda Cleland, from Defence for Children International – Palestine (DCIP), joined the conference from Washington. Among the shocking statistics in her presentation were that DCIP had documented 36 cases of Palestinian children being shot and killed by Israeli soldiers in 2022. By the end of May 2023, 19 such cases had been documented already.

Most of those killed had been shot in the head, the chest or the back.

Then Shawan Jabarin explained that Al Haq has been documenting human rights violations in Israel-Palestine since 1979 and has noted in particular deliberate Israeli efforts to fragment the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

After a short break, the conference resumed in the form of a roundtable discussion chaired by Phylis Starkey, one of the Balfour Project’s Trustees. The final session was a Parliamentary Panel, with representatives from the Conservative Party (Flick Drummond), the Labour Party (Bambos Charalambous), and the Scottish National party (Philippa Whitford). Layla Moran of the Liberal Democrats had to withdraw shortly before the event due to ill-health.

Audio and video recordings of the conference are [available here](#).



We were delighted to be able to hold our annual conference in person again, though many people also joined us streaming, on-line.



“

Keep providing your excellent information about the British Mandate Period which is very poorly understood but is essential for understanding what is happening today.

”



“

I always look forward to Balfour Project events and I always share them with friends afterwards.

”



Left: Programmes Coordinator, Diana Safieh, and Programmes Officer, Martha Scott-Cracknell

“

I listened and watched over Zoom and the speeches came over clearly. I have a particular interest in what was said about Apartheid.

”



Screening of our film, Britain in Palestine 1917 - 1948

The Palestinian Museum of the US held a screening of our 18-minute documentary film '[Britain in Palestine 1917 - 1948](#)', and followed it with a discussion of the film with Trustees Sir Vincent Fean and John McHugo. Both the film and the discussion can be viewed on our website under [Past Events/Recorded Talks](#).

The film provides an excellent overview of key events that led to the creation of the State of Israel and includes interesting historical photos.



Protecting Human Rights in Occupied Palestine

On 12 April, we hosted a round table discussion with Michael Lynk, Richard Falk, and John Dugard, who summarised the contents of their new book, *Protecting Human Rights in Occupied Palestine*.

All three have direct experience of the work of the United Nations in Palestine and all three have a professional background as international or human rights lawyers. The discussion was chaired by John McHugo, a Trustee who is also an international lawyer.

Among the key issues that were explored, were the inability, or unwillingness, of the United Nations to enforce its own resolutions, and the role of the United States in vetoing decisions of the Security Council. An audio and a video recording of the discussion is [available here](#), and it is also posted on our website, under [Events/Past Events](#).

Why was the King-Crane Commission so important?

Twenty one commissions or committees of inquiry investigated the situation in Palestine between the end of the First World War and the creation of the State of Israel three decades later. One of these, the 1919 Inter-Allied Commission on Mandates in Turkey, more commonly known as the King-Crane Commission, stands out, not only for its recommendations, but also for the rejection of those recommendations by the US administration of President Wilson.

King-Crane called for the creation of a single state, embracing what is now Israel-Palestine and some areas of what is now Lebanon and Syria. The area would initially be administered by the League of Nations, in preparation for the creation of a democratic state based on power-sharing and respecting the rights of all communities. The failure of the US to follow up on the report is widely seen as one of the missed opportunities to resolve competing claims being asserted by different communities.

Dr. Martin Smith, a senior lecturer at the UK's military academy at Sandhurst, has analysed the content and significance of the King-Crane Commission's report in an article that we have posted on our website. It can be found [here](#).

Dr Smith's article is just one of many in the History section of our website that provides context and analysis of historical events in Palestine. It is an extraordinary resource – [do take a look!](#)

ELSC report highlights misuses of IHRA anti-semitism definition

The European Legal Support Center (ELSC) has published a report documenting the uses of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism (WDA) to restrict and suppress human rights advocacy related to Palestine. The report, published on 6 June, can be downloaded [here](#). ELSC is an Amsterdam-based NGO created by European jurists that provides legal advice and defence for individuals and organisations advocating Palestinian rights.

Data reproduced in the report indicates that the IHRA WDA is frequently used to delegitimise, smear or sanction those who express sympathy for Palestinian rights or express anti-Zionist opinions. The result is to limit discussion of events in Palestine by conflating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

The Balfour Project has expressed concerns about the wording of the IHRA WDA and about the way in which that wording is being used. We believe that the Jerusalem Declaration on anti-Semitism provides a clearer and more coherent wording that makes a distinction between antisemitic speech and legitimate criticism of Israel, while also providing a framework to identify and combat anti-Semitism. Balfour Project Fellows reviewed the use and effect of the IHRA definition in a project conducted as part of the 2020/21 Peace Advocacy Fellows Programme. Their report can be [seen here](#).

Become our Friend

If you donate regularly to the Balfour Project, you automatically become one of our 'Friends'. There is no minimum donation – we know that our supporters' financial circumstances differ widely – but we recommend £5-£10 per month. Friends receive free tickets to our film screenings, and discounted tickets to our spring conferences. They are also invited to meet with our officers to hear more about the Balfour Project's work and to offer their own views on how we can develop our activities.

And, please remember 'Gift Aid': when you're making a donation, you can increase the amount we receive by 25% (at no extra cost to you), by ticking the 'Gift Aid' box.

To become a Balfour Project Friend, [click here](#).

We're updating and improving our website

We've been making changes to our website www.balfourproject.org so that it's easier to navigate and has even more content.

Take a look at the Resources tab on the website which has links to our film, Britain in Palestine 1917-1948, to some key documents that have shaped events in Israel/Palestine, as well as to videos, podcasts and book reviews. We've also re-organised and updated our '[Online Resources for Educators](#)', which is in the main 'Resources' tab.

We have updated and expanded the 'About Us' section, explaining our origins, and the people who are now overseeing and running the organisation. 'About Us' also has a link to our newsletters.

And don't forget that the History tab contains a wealth of other information on Israel-Palestine, including a timeline, and key documents. We've divided the material into historical periods so that you can go quickly to the area of history in which you are most interested.

Thank you for your support!



Derek Cooper was a British army Major stationed in Palestine during the last days of the British mandate. This film tells the story of his return to Palestine-Israel in 1995 and shows some of the conversations that he had with Palestinians and with Israelis about the events of 1948. This on-line screening will be followed by a Question & Answer session with the film's director, Omar al Qattan. Tickets can be purchased for £5 [through this link](#), free for [Friends of Balfour Project](#).

Applications for Peace Advocacy Fellows to open on 10 July

We will be opening applications for our 2023-24 Peace Advocacy Fellows Programme on Monday 10 July at 5 pm. Details of how to apply will be posted on the Fellowship tab of our website.

Peace Advocacy Fellows work in small groups to research and write on contemporary and historical issues that relate to events in Israel and Palestine. In recent years, Fellows have worked to raise awareness of the environmental effects of the Israeli occupation, they have engaged with UK parliamentarians to understand why so many have misgivings about recognising a State of Palestine, and they have developed teaching material for schools on life in British Mandatory Palestine. We provide a list of suggested topics that Fellows might wish to address, but we are also happy to receive different ideas from applicants.

This year, we are inviting applications from recent graduates, as well as those who are currently undertaking final year undergraduate or postgraduate studies.

Fellows receive training in skills such as public speaking and advocacy, as well as briefings on the historical events that continue to shape events in Israel-Palestine. If you have questions, please email fellowship@balfourproject.org.