

## **Bath & North East Somerset Council Cabinet Meeting**

**Date:** 12th September 2024

**Speaker:** Lara Amro

**Topic:** Proposal for a Palestinian Resettlement Scheme

**Ladies and gentlemen of the council,**

I stand before you today not only as a resident of Bath, but as one of the 12 million Palestinians living in diaspora. Seeing the continued suffering of my people, and now the unimaginable horrors unfolding in Gaza, breaks my heart. As a proud citizen of this city, I bring to you my plea: we must do more to support the Palestinian people, just as we have done for others fleeing war and persecution.

The UK's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was both swift and generous. Refugee schemes such as the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme have enabled over 207,000 Ukrainians to find safety in this country. These efforts are commendable, with local authorities receiving financial support to help integrate those fleeing the conflict. As we reflect on this generosity, we must now ask why the same response is not extended to the people of Gaza, who have faced decades of violence, dispossession, and oppression.

While Ukrainians have found safety in the UK, Palestinians in Gaza continue to face dire conditions. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has condemned Israel's actions, investigating charges of genocide and other war crimes committed against Palestinians. Gaza, under siege, faces starvation, the destruction of infrastructure, and a lack of access to basic human necessities. Children in Gaza now have the highest rates of amputations in the world. Homes are demolished daily, and families, including children, have nowhere to turn. Nearly 700 Palestinian children have been arrested by Israeli forces since October 7th, some as young as 12, for throwing stones at tanks. These are not isolated incidents but a systematic violation of basic human rights.

The state of Israel was founded in the wake of one of the greatest atrocities in human history—the Holocaust. In its aftermath, the world recognized the need to find a homeland for Jewish refugees. Yet, in doing so, we created a new refugee crisis—today, over 12 million Palestinians live displaced, with little to no hope of returning home. Gaza, the West Bank, and surrounding

refugee camps bear witness to this enduring crisis. The suffering of my people is not a distant memory—it is a living reality.

When Ukraine was invaded, the UK government imposed some of the most comprehensive sanctions in its history on Russia , and our leaders—rightfully—condemned the atrocities committed there. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, in October 2023, remarked, “We will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Ukraine until this war is won. Our assistance is both immediate and enduring” . But where is the same moral clarity when it comes to the suffering in Gaza? As Prime Minister Boris Johnson said of the Ukrainian crisis: “We cannot turn our backs on families, women, and children fleeing bombs, terror, and destruction” . Why should we turn our backs on the people of Gaza now?

As a Palestinian in diaspora, I cannot remain silent. I call on the Bath and North East Somerset Council to act. Establishing a resettlement scheme for Palestinians, particularly those from Gaza, is not just a gesture of goodwill—it is an act of moral responsibility. We can no longer afford selective compassion. If the UK can open its doors to over 200,000 Ukrainians fleeing war, we must be willing to offer the same sanctuary to those fleeing the devastation of Gaza.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has acknowledged the suffering of the Palestinian people, stating that “Too many lives have already been lost, and the humanitarian crisis is growing” . But words are not enough. We need action. I urge this council to take a principled stand, to set an example, and to champion the cause of a Palestinian resettlement scheme. Bath can lead the way, urging the UK government to provide safety and refuge for those who have been denied it for far too long.

Thank you,

**Lara Amro**

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3. Gov.uk, "Cost of Ukraine Resettlement Schemes"
4. International Court of Justice, "Investigations into War Crimes and Genocide"
5. UNICEF Report, "Impact on Children in Gaza"
6. Human Rights Watch, "Palestinian Children in Israeli Prisons"
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9. BBC News, "Boris Johnson on Ukrainian Refugees"
10. Gov.uk, "Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on the Palestinian Humanitarian Crisis"