



Mayor of Barcelona

8 February 2023

Mr Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister
State of Israel

Dear Prime Minister,

As Mayor of Barcelona, I would like to inform you that, recently, over a hundred social organisations and associations based in the city presented a petition to the City Council under the banner *Barcelona says NO to Apartheid, Barcelona says YES to Human Rights*. The petition was carried out through a regulated participatory process which, along with having thousands of signatures by Barcelona residents, requires us to provide an institutional response to their specific demands, which are namely:

- to condemn the crime of apartheid against the Palestinian people,
- to give support to Palestinian and Israeli organisations working for peace in the territory
- and to break off the twinning agreement between Barcelona and Tel Aviv, as it does not respond to the context or the objectives subscribed to 25 years ago.

The signatories of this petition censure the violence endured by the Palestinian people in a process of persecution and dispossession that has lasted for more than seventy years and decades of military occupation by the State of Israel in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. As the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk, pointed out, this occupation has been carried out contrary to international law. The annexation policies of the Territories, the construction of settlements and the violation of Human rights against the Palestinian population constitute a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and resolution 242 of the United Nations Security Council of 1967.

Different international voices have in recent years concluded that these facts are equivalent to, or similar to, apartheid. Ban Ki-Moon, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, wrote in 2021 that the "structural domination and oppression of the Palestinian people through indefinite occupation [...] arguably constitutes apartheid". In 2014, Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu stated: "I know first-hand that Israel has created an apartheid reality within its borders and through its occupation". He co-signed a letter calling for the UN and governments to impose a military embargo on Israel with other Nobel Peace Prize winners such as Rigoberta Menchú, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and Betty Williams.

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Ada Colau Ballano





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In the same way, recognised organisations defending human rights worldwide, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Israeli association B'Tselem, have condemned the practices of the State of Israel against the Palestinian population as committing the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution. Likewise, the Catalanian Parliament approved a resolution by a majority describing the Israeli occupation practices as "equivalent to apartheid" in June 2022.

The number and seriousness of human rights violations documented by international organisations in the occupied Palestinian territories have increased. The start of a new era of impunity forces us to take action: we cannot stand by and ignore the violation of international law. History has taught us that cities must take sides and play an active role in peace-building and defending human rights. An example is Barcelona's recent suspension of relations with Saint Petersburg in condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukrainian territories and flagrant violation of international law.

That is why, as Mayor of Barcelona, a Mediterranean city and defender of human rights, I cannot be indifferent to the systematic violation of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian population. It would be a severe mistake to apply a policy of double standards and turn a blind eye to a violation that has been, for decades, widely verified and documented by international organisations. I am aware that the Israeli civilian population has also suffered attacks and violent episodes, and you may rest assured that, as Mayor, I do and will condemn any form of violence against the civilian population of any country.

For all the reasons above, I will temporarily suspend relations with the State of Israel and its official institutions until Israeli authorities end the systematic human rights violation against the Palestinian population and fully comply with international law and the United Nations resolutions. This measure also includes the twinning agreement with the Tel Aviv City Council. This measure solely and exclusively concerns the institutional relations of the Mayor's Office of Barcelona with Israel and its official institutions and under no circumstance includes its citizens. It is essential to differentiate at all times between the policies and actions of a State and, in the case of Israel, that of the Jewish population and its culture as a whole. Barcelona is proud of its Jewish heritage, and its Jewish communities are integral to the city. As Mayor, I will stand by this community and defend them from any anti-Semitic sentiment.

Finally, I would like to inform you that Barcelona City Council will strengthen its support and collaboration with both Palestinian and Israeli bodies that work to build peace in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Yours sincerely,

cc: *Embassy of Israel in Spain*

Ada Colau Ballano