

The Rt Hon Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer KC
10 Downing St
London
SW1A 2AB

11 June 2025

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to you on behalf of PEN, the worldwide association of writers, to highlight our grave and ongoing concerns for Palestinian civilians, including our fellow writers, across the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) – Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

Since our establishment in 1921, PEN has championed the freedom to write and the freedom to read globally. Throughout our history, the unjust imprisonment and killing of writers for exercising their right to freedom of expression have been key concerns of our work.

The ongoing genocide in Gaza has marked the deadliest period for writers since World War II. Israel's unrelenting bombardment of Gaza is causing widespread death; the systematic destruction of vital infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, libraries, bookstores, water and electricity networks, and communications systems; and the forced displacement of its population, including writers, academics, artists, and cultural workers.

Over the past 18 months, at least 23 Palestinian writers (excluding artists and cultural workers) have been killed by Israeli bombardment. In the same period, Israel has also been responsible for the deaths of at least 173 Palestinian journalists and media workers. The sustained attack on Palestinian culture, including heritage sites, writers, and journalists, is a deliberate strategy to silence and erase the Palestinian people.

PEN has documented harrowing testimonies of Palestinian writers across the OPT, all of whom have reported and corroborated the growing body of evidence demonstrating concerted and systematic efforts by Israel to erase the Palestinian people and their cultural heritage, particularly in Gaza.

Writers in Gaza have reported to PEN the irreversible loss of much of Gaza's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including independent cultural spaces, personal libraries, and locally produced literary work – all destroyed after years of effort under severe restrictions. As of 27 May 2025, UNESCO confirmed damage to 110 cultural sites in Gaza since 7 October 2023, including religious sites, historic buildings, monuments, museums, and archaeological sites.

Testimonies from writers also described the challenges they face amid the persistent threat to their lives. The relentless Israeli military operations, the indiscriminate bombardment of so-called "safe zones" with high explosives, unexploded ordnance, sniper attacks targeting civilians, and the ongoing arbitrary restrictions and ban on humanitarian aid – are a grim, daily reality. All

writers who spoke to us have consistently stressed that: “there is no place safe in Gaza.”

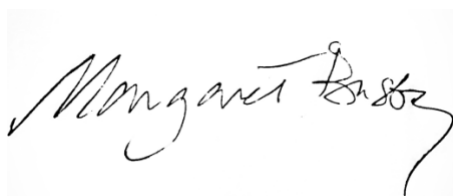
Your government has expressed its commitment to upholding democracy, international law, human rights, and protecting media freedom. At a time when democracy is in decline, and its vital pillars are being eroded, it is critical for democracies to take action, and to match their words with their deeds.

In light of this we ask you to:

- Enact an immediate arms embargo on all parties to the conflict, and particularly a ban on the export of all weapons used by the state of Israel in its persistent and intentional targeting of Palestinian civilians across the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) – Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.
- Call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire; unfettered access to humanitarian aid in Gaza; the release of all hostages and arbitrarily detained Palestinians.
- Call for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, including the systems of racial segregation and apartheid imposed there.
- Call for immediate and unfettered access for international journalists to Gaza
- Support Palestinian journalists through access to equipment and funding, and facilitate their evacuation where required.

Prime Minister – many of our fellow writers in Gaza have been killed under Israeli bombardment; genocide denies the right to free expression. We urge the UK government to take concrete and urgent action to bring an end to violence and oppression, and the establishment of a just and lasting peace.

Yours sincerely,



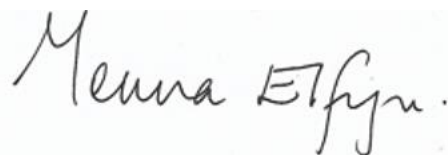
Margaret Busby
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