

## **The Call for a Ceasefire**

### **November Humanitarian Pause**

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted a Malta-led resolution (UNSCR 2712) calling for humanitarian pauses and aid delivery to Gaza on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023.<sup>1</sup> This was the fifth attempt to do so, with the motion passing 12-0 with 3 abstentions (UK, Russia, USA). The four-day humanitarian pause began on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

### **UK Government and Opposition— ‘Sustainable Ceasefire’ Position**

The UK Opposition has not only failed to hold the UK Government to account for their refusal to call for an immediate ceasefire, but it has also actively refused to call for a ceasefire. From mid-December 2023, the UK Government and UK Opposition started calling for a ‘sustainable ceasefire’ instead of an ‘immediate ceasefire’.<sup>2</sup> This was proposed by Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron and endorsed by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Leader of the Opposition Keir Starmer the following day. Starmer had previously justified the withholding of food, water, and other essentials, claiming that this fell within Israel’s ‘right to defend itself’.<sup>3</sup>

The sustainable ceasefire position is based on the unsubstantiated belief that calling for an immediate ceasefire is unsustainable, as it risks reducing the likelihood of a permanent ceasefire. This thinking is not only unsubstantiated, but deeply dangerous in the context of continued indiscriminate bombardment of civilians in Gaza. When Cameron, Sunak and Starmer called for a sustainable ceasefire, 18,787 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza,<sup>4</sup> compared to 29,092 by the 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024, when Starmer finally called for an ‘immediate humanitarian ceasefire’.<sup>5</sup> This means that Israel has killed over 10,000 Palestinians in the time since UK politicians first argued for a ‘sustainable ceasefire’ over an immediate ceasefire.

### **First UK Ceasefire Vote: Amendments to King’s Speech**

In November 2023, the Scottish National Party (SNP) tabled amendment (h) to the King’s Speech calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. 294 MPs voted against the motion, and 125 voted in favour of it. 331 MPs did not vote. All Conservatives voted against the motion, whilst 59 Labour MPs did, prompting the resignation of 10 Labour frontbenchers. A different amendment (b) was tabled by Zarah Sultana MP urging the government to call for a ceasefire, however this amendment was not selected by the Speaker of the House to be debated.

### **February 2024 SNP Ceasefire Vote**

On 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024, the SNP tabled an opposition day motion calling for an immediate ceasefire and for the condemnation of the collective punishment of the Palestinian people. The Conservative Party and the Labour Party both tabled amendments and Labour’s amendment was controversially chosen to be voted on first, by Speaker Lindsay Hoyle, in contravention with parliamentary procedure.

In protest, the SNP and Conservative party withdrew from the house and the SNP amendment was therefore not voted on. In the chaos of party politic fulminations, the attention shifted from putting a stop to genocide to political pantomime. Hoyle claimed to justify his actions as an act in the interest of the ‘safety of the members of Parliament’. Such a justification is worrying rhetoric that plays into the mounting discourse that seeks to demonise peaceful pro-Palestinian protesters as violent.

<sup>1</sup> UNSC. (15<sup>th</sup> November 2023) [The situation in the Middle East. UNSC Resolution 2712](#). 9478<sup>th</sup> meeting. S/RES/2712.

<sup>2</sup> Cameron, D and Baerbock, A. (16<sup>th</sup> December 2023) [David Cameron: Why the UK and Germany back a sustainable ceasefire](#). Sunday Times.

<sup>3</sup> McShane, A. (11 October 2023). [Israel ‘has the right’ to withhold power and water from Gaza, says Sir Keir Starmer](#). LBC.

<sup>4</sup> OCHA. (16<sup>th</sup> December 2024) [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel. Flash Update #71](#). OCHA.

<sup>5</sup> OCHA (19<sup>th</sup> February 2024). [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel. Flash Update #121](#). OCHA.

## **UN Security Council Votes for Ceasefire**

The UNSC first voted on a ‘humanitarian pause’ on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023, approximately ten days into the war on Gaza. Despite an overall majority voting for this resolution, it was vetoed by the US. On 8<sup>th</sup> December 2023, the US vetoed a ceasefire resolution co-sponsored by 97 UN member states. This vote took place two days after the UN Secretary General triggered Article 99 of the UN Charter, which allows the Secretary General to bring to the UNSC’s attention any matter which may “threaten the maintenance of international peace and security”.

Another UNSC ceasefire vote took place on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024, on an Algerian-backed resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. The US once again vetoed the resolution, instead introducing a watered-down resolution calling for a truce “as soon as is practicable”, which was rejected.

Finally, on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024, following pressure from the Irish Taoiseach during the annual St Patrick’s Day meeting between the Taoiseach and the US President, the US finalised a draft UNSC resolution calling for an “immediate and sustained ceasefire”,<sup>6</sup> but it was conditionally tied to the release of hostages.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024, the UNSC finally passed a legally binding resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire, with fourteen votes in favour and the US abstaining. This resolution calls for a ceasefire during Ramadan, meaning it will expire by the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2024. This means it will only provide a brief window for parties to reach a ‘lasting sustainable ceasefire’ afterwards. It is not yet clear what mechanisms, including possible sanctions, could be adopted by the UNSC in the case of Israel's failure to comply with the resolution’s terms.

The international community, including the UK, must not only ensure an implementation of a permanent ceasefire to end the genocide, but also ensure a ceasefire is lasting. This can only happen if there is genuine progress towards a resolution which, at its heart, pushes for recognition of the State of Palestine and the self-determination of the Palestinian people.

## **UN General Assembly Votes for Ceasefire**

Following four failed attempts at resolutions on humanitarian pauses, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) passed resolution ES-10/21 on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The resolution called for a humanitarian truce with 121 votes for, 14 against and 44 abstentions. ES-10/22 followed a similar motion calling for an immediate ceasefire and release of hostages in the U.N.

On 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023, the UNGA overwhelmingly adopted a non-binding resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. 153 states voted in favour, 23 abstained and 10 voted against it. The UK abstained whilst the USA and Israel voted against it.<sup>7</sup>

## **Article 99**

On 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Antonio Guterres triggered Article 99, which allows “the Secretary-General to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.”<sup>8</sup> The Secretary-General as well as other UN members have consistently and constantly stressed the urgency of an immediate ceasefire. UN resolutions for a ceasefire have constantly been vetoed by the US with the UK either abstaining or voting against these resolutions.

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<sup>6</sup> Reuters. (14<sup>th</sup> March 2024) [US locks in UN resolution backing efforts to broker Gaza truce.](#)

<sup>7</sup> UN News. (12<sup>th</sup> December 2023) [UN General Assembly votes by large majority for immediate humanitarian ceasefire during emergency session.](#) UN News.

<sup>8</sup> UN News. (6 December 2023). [Gaza: Guterres invokes ‘most powerful tool’ Article 99, in bid for humanitarian ceasefire.](#) United Nations.