



# HOUSING AND LAND RIGHTS NETWORK

H a b i t a t I n t e r n a t i o n a l C o a l i t i o n

## Solidarity with Barcelona's Break with Apartheid Israel

Habitat International Coalition (HIC) and its Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) commend the decision of Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau and support the vote of the Barcelona City Council to suspend relations with Tel Aviv and Israel until Israeli authorities stop the systematic violation of human rights of the Palestinian people. HIC also joins like-minded municipalities, human rights organizations and allies denouncing the backlash from Zionist organizations in Israel and Spain with false and slanderous accusations of antisemitism.

HIC and HLRN welcome Barcelona's move to suspend ties with Tel Aviv as a measure to meet its duties of upholding the international legal order in this case. As organs of the treaty-bound state in the international system, public institutions, including local spheres of government, share the **common legal obligation** of the territorial state to uphold human rights and international law in their external relations. That duty extends to **cooperation** on measures toward **bringing an end to illegal situations**, including violations of **peremptory norms** such as the acquisition of territory by force; **the denial of self-determination**; **population transfer, including the implantation of settler colonies**; and **apartheid** regimes. Barcelona's action stands as a model for other cities and communities to do the same.

Calling for friendship and cooperation between the cities, Barcelona maintained a twinning agreement with Tel Aviv. The Israeli city was established largely on forcibly acquired Palestinian land, including that of eight ethnically cleansed indigenous Palestinian villages and the Palestinian city of Yaffa.\* After Israel's assault on Gaza in May 2021, a local campaign urged Mayor Colau to break ties. As Barcelona's mayor wrote in an **official letter** to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, her constituents called on her to "condemn the crime of apartheid against the Palestinian people." She heard them and took action."

The campaign included a petition signed by a **federation of over 110 human rights groups** endorsed by more than 4,000 of city's residents. The Barcelona Organizations for Global Justice first **published its demands** in response to Israel's May 2021 attack on the besieged Gaza Strip, in which Israeli military forces killed more than **250 Palestinians** and injured over 2,000. After Hamas authorities warned Israel against striking residences in the Gaza Strip, fighters inside Gaza then launched a barrage of missiles against Israeli

---

\* Abu Kabir, Irshid, Jamasin al-Gharbi, al-Manshiyya, Salama, Sumail, Mijdulin Bidas and Shaikh Mu'annis. See "Tel Aviv and its Palestinian Villages," <https://zochrot.org/en/article/51849>; and Walid Khalidi ed., *All that remains: the Palestinian villages occupied and depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

targets. That war followed two years of lethal Israeli sniper fire on Palestinian refugees in Gaza demonstrating for their right to return their homes and villages that Israel depopulated and destroyed by Israel since 1948. It coincided also with Israeli attempts to evict Palestinians in Jerusalem from their homes in favor of illegal Israeli settlers.

The petitioners had asked the mayor to “condemn the crime of apartheid against the Palestinian people, support Palestinian and Israeli organizations working for peace, and break off the twinning agreement between Barcelona and Tel Aviv.” We also join organizations in Barcelona calling for the Spanish government to end weapon sales to Israel, end all business deals with Israeli companies, and the closure of Israel’s apartheid-chartered parastatal organizations (World Zionist Organization/Jewish Agency, Jewish National Fund and affiliates) operating as tax-exempt ‘charities’ in Spain and some 50 countries.

However, Barcelona’s suspension of relations applies only to all official ties with Israel “until the Israeli authorities put an end to the system of violations of the Palestinian people and fully comply with the obligations imposed on them by the international law and the various United Nations resolutions.” Mayor Colau also explained that the action did not affect relationships between the residents of Israel and the Catalan city.

Barcelona’s declaration follows the precedent of courageous city councils that led the global movement to isolate apartheid South Africa. Local communities had championed the worldwide call to end apartheid in South Africa and Namibia, which culminated in South Africa’s withdrawal from Namibia and democratization where the criminal apartheid regimes formerly ruled.

Applauding Mayor Colau in a petition supporting Barcelona’s action, Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP) **stated**: “We know this is only the beginning — and so does our opposition. That’s why it’s essential that we stand up as proud anti-Zionist Jews to celebrate and lift up what it looks like to hold Israel accountable for its apartheid crimes.” JVP added: “We decry the accusations of antisemitism leveled against Mayor Colau and stand in solidarity with her and the local campaigners who brought about this historic decision.” European Jews for Just Peace, a federation of 12 European Jewish peace groups, also **supported** Colau’s decision.

The Deputy Mayor of Barcelona and the leader of the Catalan Socialist Party in Barcelona, Laia Bonet, opposed the decision and demanded the “restoration” of the relationship. She **urged** authorities make efforts to “reinforce, not weaken, the role of Barcelona in the world.” HIC-HLRN Coordinator Joseph Schechla countered, saying that “Barcelona’s move to oppose Israel’s apartheid and colonial regime in Palestine enhances the reputation of Barcelona in the world as a community of conscientious and law-abiding global citizens.” Barcelona’s decision will be subject to the City Council’s vote on 24 February.

As a broad coalition of diverse, multiracial, intergenerational community of allies, HIC knows that justice is indivisible, joining all faith groups, impoverished urban and rural

communities, Indigenous Peoples, and all people in need of adequate housing. The call for justice in Palestine, for Palestinians and other occupied, dispossessed and displaced peoples is indivisible with the call of those fighting for another, more equitable and sustainable world and human rights habitat, where all people live equal in dignity and rights.

**Support Barcelona and urge other concerned municipalities to join Barcelona with your own solidarity letter here.**

Or send your own solidarity messages, using the sample letter below:

Mme. Ada Colau  
Alcalde de Barcelona  
Pl. Sant Jaume 1  
Ciutat Vella: El Gòtic  
08002 Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain  
Tel: +34 93 402-7000 / 93 413-2731  
Email: [bigestio@bcn.cat](mailto:bigestio@bcn.cat)

Dear Madam Mayor:

We are writing in support of Habitat International Coalition (HIC) and its Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) commending the City of Barcelona for joining the honor roll of progressive cities fulfilling their **extraterritorial human rights and international law obligations** with regard to Palestine. As Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau **explained** on 8 February, the Catalan capital is suspending all ties with Israel, including its twinning relations with Tel Aviv, until “Israeli authorities stop the systematic violation of human rights of the Palestinian people.” We also joins like-minded municipalities, human rights organizations and allies denouncing the backlash from Zionist organizations in Israel and Spain, defaming Madame Colau with false and slanderous accusations of antisemitism.

With Barcelona’s move to suspend ties with Tel Aviv, we welcome Barcelona leadership’s conscientious position and measures to meet its duties to uphold the international legal order in this case. As organs of the treaty-bound state in the international system, public institutions, including local spheres of government, share the **common legal obligation** of the territorial state to uphold human rights and international law in their external relations. That duty extends to **cooperation** on measures toward **bringing an end to illegal situations**, including violations of **peremptory norms** such as the acquisition of territory by force; **the denial of self-determination; population transfer, including the implantation of settler colonies; and apartheid regimes.**

We also condemn the crime of apartheid against the Palestinian people, and support Palestinian and Israeli organizations working for peace. We also join organizations in Barcelona calling for the Spanish government to end weapon sales to Israel, end all

business deals with Israeli companies, and the closure of Israel's apartheid-chartered parastatal organizations (World Zionist Organization/Jewish Agency, Jewish National Fund and affiliates) operating as tax-exempt 'charities' in Spain.

Barcelona's move to oppose Israel's apartheid and colonial regime in Palestine enhances the reputation of Barcelona in the world as a community of conscientious and law-abiding global citizens. Barcelona's action stands as a model for other cities and communities to emulate, and we look forward to the Barcelona City Council's affirming vote on 24 February.

Justice is indivisible and must be applied equally to all faith groups, impoverished urban and rural communities, Indigenous Peoples, and all people in need of adequate housing. The call for justice in Palestine, for Palestinians and other occupied, dispossessed and displaced peoples is indivisible with the call of those fighting for another, more equitable and sustainable world and human rights habitat, where all people live equal in dignity and rights.

Sincerely,

[your signature]

#### **Other sister/twin cities with Tel Aviv:**

-  [Almaty](#), Kazakhstan
-  [Beijing](#), China
-  [Bonn](#), Germany
-  [Budapest](#), Hungary
-  [Buenos Aires](#), Argentina
-  [Chişinău](#), Moldova
-  [Cologne](#), Germany
-  [Essen](#), Germany
-  [Frankfurt am Main](#), Germany
-  [Freiburg im Breisgau](#), Germany
-  [Incheon](#), South Korea
-  [İzmir](#), Turkey
-  [Łódź](#), Poland
-  [Milan](#), Italy
-  [Philadelphia](#), United States
-  [Sofia](#), Bulgaria
-  [Thessaloniki](#), Greece
-  [Toulouse](#), France
-  [Warsaw](#), Poland