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Recognition and Reality: The Future of the State of Palestine



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The France-Saudi Arabia-led high-level General Assembly conference on the future status of Palestine convened on September 22, 2025 at the start of the General Assembly High-Level Week with the goal of reviving the two-state solution. The “High-Level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution” convened for its last plenary meeting, building on a three-day segment held in July. The conference, commenced by French President Macron, concluded with groundbreaking momentum, as Heads of State and Government from ten countries announced their official recognition of an independent State of Palestine. Since October 2023, twenty countries have taken the step to recognise Palestine.¹ The states in this latest recognition process were Andorra, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Portugal, San Marino, and the United Kingdom.² The UK’s recognition of Palestine comes more than 100 years after the Balfour Declaration, and 77 years after the creation of Israel in the British Mandate of Palestine.³

Undeniably, this development represents a critical moment in the decades-long struggle for Palestinian statehood. The recognition of Palestine by a new bloc of countries, including major powers such as France and the United Kingdom, significantly enhances its international legitimacy. At the same time, it increases pressure on Israel and the United States, which risk finding themselves

¹<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/23/which-are-the-150-countries-that-have-recognised-palestine-as-of-2025>

²<https://press.un.org/en/2025/pal2251.doc.htm>

³<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/23/which-are-the-150-countries-that-have-recognised-palestine-as-of-2025>

increasingly isolated within the international community. Yet the key question remains: what follows this symbolic but diplomatically significant step? Does international recognition mean that Palestine is a state?

As a result of the High-Level Conference, the State of Palestine is now recognized by 157 UN member states, representing 81% of its members.⁴ This landmark day in Middle Eastern diplomacy was marked by celebratory flag-raising ceremonies across several Western countries that formally joined the recognition of Palestine, for instance in France and the United Kingdom. At the flag-raising ceremony in London, the prominent Palestinian Ambassador to the UK Husam Zomlot remembered people “that this recognition comes at a time of unimaginable pain and suffering as a genocide is being waged against us – a genocide that is still being denied and allowed to continue with impunity”.⁵ He concluded that “this moment stands as a defiant act of truth, a refusal to let genocide be the final word; a refusal to accept that occupation is permanent; a refusal to be erased and a refusal to be dehumanised”.⁶ In France, more than 86 French towns raised Palestinian flags ahead of Macron’s announcement of recognition on September 22 in New York. The flag-raising ceremonies in French cities proceeded in defiance of the French Ministry of Interior, which advised against such displays and ordered the removal of the flags just minutes later.⁷

International recognition of Palestine allows the Palestinian leadership to open embassies with full diplomatic status, engage in trade agreements, gain support at international forums and approach the International Criminal Court.⁸

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/22/palestinian-flag-raised-outside-embassy-in-london-after-uk-recognition>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250922-french-town-halls-fly-palestinian-flag-despite-government-warning>

⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/23/which-are-the-150-countries-that-have-recognised-palestine-as-of-2025>

However, this huge diplomatic step does not alleviate the intensifying catastrophe on the ground. As the genocide in Gaza reaches its two-years mark, Israel is starving the entire population and dropping bombs on the flattened strip every 8 minutes, massacring women, men and children.⁹ In the West Bank, ethnic cleansing, mass abductions, and escalating settler expansion continue to fragment Palestinian territory into increasingly isolated enclaves occupied by Israel. All the conferences, speeches, statements, and recognitions pale in significance compared to what is unfolding on the ground every day. The situation in Gaza is utterly apocalyptic, an endless cycle of death and destruction, with almost half of people killed being children, according to MSF.¹⁰ The genocide has repeatedly been described as hell on earth by the UN, its agencies, numerous NGOs, and the Secretary-General Guterres himself. Undoubtedly, this latest wave of recognition is relevant and overdue since decades. Nevertheless, the focus of the international community should be on stopping the genocide immediately and ending Israel's occupation of Palestine. This step is underscored by the ICJ's Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024, arguably one of the most significant legal outcomes in Palestinian diplomacy.¹¹

From a legal perspective, there is no single definition of what it takes to be a state. The most commonly used criteria in international law derive from the Montevideo Convention 1933, which specifies that a territory must have defined borders, a government, the capacity to enter into relations with other states and a permanent population. The Montevideo Criteria, however, does not require international recognition. In Palestine's case, most states that have recognized it envisage borders close to those before 1967, including Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem – territories under Israeli occupation deemed illegal under international law. The Oslo Accords of the 1990s created the Palestinian

⁹ <https://www.trtworld.com/article/bcb3fb170976>

¹⁰ <https://msf.org.uk/article/gaza-msf-survey-shows-almost-half-people-killed-are-children>

¹¹ <https://www.icj-cij.org/index.php/node/204160>

Authority to lay the groundwork for statehood, and today the PA maintains foreign relations and diplomatic missions abroad. Furthermore, millions of Palestinians continue to live in these territories despite decades of Israeli destruction, siege, and annexation. Yet the extent to which the PA can exercise true sovereignty remains contested, as its governing capacity is heavily constrained by Israel's ongoing occupation.¹² Therefore, the Montevideo criteria seem impossible to meet as long as Israel illegally occupies the land and undermines the governance of the Palestinian authority.

For decades, Israel has demonstrated that it does not obey international law, and so far, it continues to receive the full backing of the United States. In July, the Israeli Knesset passed a motion to annex the entire West Bank, showing the international community that it does not intend to stop its illegal expansion. While recognitions of Palestine multiply at the UN, Israel expands illegal settlements and annexation, making a viable State of Palestine impossible on the ground. Netanyahu's response to recognitions by the UK, France, Australia, and others was clear: "There will be no Palestinian state."¹³

To conclude, as long as the international community confines itself to paper recognitions of Palestine and empty declarations about a two-state solution, little will change. Without concrete action to stop the genocide in Gaza, holding the perpetrators accountable, imposing sanctions, and enforcing arms and economic embargoes on Israel, the establishment of a Palestinian state will become exceedingly difficult to achieve. No matter how long the list of recognitions grows, if the international community fails to end Israeli impunity, the occupation and annexation will continue, allowing Israel to expand its Greater Israel project in the Middle East and beyond.

¹²<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/26/does-international-recognition-mean-palestine-is-going-to-be-a-state>

¹³ Ibid.

