

What's Law Got to Do with It?

Palestine and International Law

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Format: Self-paced, Asynchronous

Target Audience: Learners Aged 13 - 18

Estimated Duration: 85 - 110 minutes

Module Description: This module explores how international law has historically shaped the Palestinian struggle and how power affects legal frameworks. You will learn about:

- How law can reflect power rather than justice
- Historical legal milestones affecting Palestinians
- Contemporary international legal debates and mechanisms for accountability
- Critical reasoning and ethical reflection in legal contexts

Activities include journal prompts, discussion questions, knowledge checks, and reflective exercises.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this module, learners will:

- Explain how international law reflects global power dynamics
- Identify key historical and legal milestones in Palestine's history
- Critically analyze political and legal language used to justify occupation or state actions
- Evaluate how law can serve both oppression and justice
- Discuss contemporary legal mechanisms addressing Palestinian rights
- Apply trauma-informed and ethical reasoning to discussions of international law
- Define and use key legal and historical terms accurately

Content Advisory Facilitators should be prepared for the possibility that learners may experience emotional reactions when engaging with the content. These reactions may arise from personal, family, or community experiences related to racism, discrimination, violence, or displacement.

Given the complexity and sensitivity of the topics, it is essential to create a learning environment where all participants feel safe, respected, and able to engage thoughtfully.

The goal of discussion is not to force agreement, but to support thoughtful learning, respectful dialogue, and critical analysis of historical events.

Facilitator Guidance - Establishing a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment

Facilitators should be prepared to:

- Recognize signs of emotional distress in learners
- Pause discussions if needed to allow space for reflection or grounding
- Offer learners the option to step away briefly if they need a break
- Provide access to appropriate support resources
- Encourage respectful dialogue while prioritizing learner wellbeing

Facilitators are encouraged to:

- **Validate feelings:** Acknowledge that learners may experience a range of emotions in response to the content
- **Provide choice:** Offer multiple ways to engage, including writing, discussion, reflection, or listening
- **Encourage autonomy:** Allow learners the option to pause, step back, or observe if needed
- **Promote safety:** Establish and uphold shared agreements for respectful and inclusive dialogue
- **Maintain respect and inclusion:** Ensure all learners feel heard and respected, even when perspectives differ
- **Prioritize learning over debate:** Focus on understanding, inquiry, and reflection rather than argument or persuasion
- **Encourage curiosity:** Support thoughtful questioning and open exploration of ideas
- **Model respectful communication:** Use and reinforce language that is respectful, and inclusive
- **Separate ideas from individuals:** Remind learners to critique concepts and arguments rather than people
- **Acknowledge emotional impact:** Recognize that topics such as racism, colonization, war, and injustice may evoke strong emotional responses
- **Encourage active listening:** Support learners in listening with attention, care, and respect for differing perspectives
- **Provide varied participation options:** Allow learners to engage through discussion, writing, or reflection based on comfort level
- **Ensure equitable participation:** Structure engagement so that all learners have opportunities to contribute, and no single learner dominates, is singled out, or is overexposed

Learners should be reminded that participation in discussions or reflections can be flexible. They may choose to listen, write privately, or participate in other ways that feel comfortable.

Strategies for Managing Difficult Moments

If challenging situations arise during discussion, facilitators may consider the following strategies:

- Pause the conversation if the discussion becomes tense or emotionally charged
- Allow time for reflection or grounding
- Re-center the discussion on the learning goals of the lesson
- Encourage learners to support their ideas with historical evidence or examples from the video module
- Redirect harmful or disrespectful language by reminding learners of shared agreements
- Encourage learners to ask questions rather than make assumptions
- Offer alternative participation options, such as written reflection
- Remind learners that complex historical topics often include multiple perspectives
- If a learner becomes distressed, pause the activity and provide appropriate support or referral

Community Agreements Co-Creations

Facilitators may establish clear community agreements at the outset, such as:

- Listening actively and without interruption
- Respecting diverse perspectives and lived experiences
- Using thoughtful language
- Critiquing ideas, and not individuals
- Maintaining confidentiality if appropriate

Suggested Safe Space Activity (5–10 minutes):

Activity: Community Agreements Co-Creation

Instructions:

1. **Ask learners:** *What do you need in order to feel safe, respected, and heard in this learning space?*
2. Collect responses via discussion board, shared document, or live poll
3. Synthesize responses into a shared set of community agreements
4. Revisit these agreements throughout the module as needed

Optional Reflection Prompt:

- What does respectful dialogue look like to you when discussing complex or sensitive issues?
- How can you contribute to maintaining a constructive learning environment?

Module Structure:

Warm-Up – Word Association & Reflection

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Key Concept: Initial perceptions influence understanding; reflection reveals bias.

- Learning Activities:**
- **Word Association Prompt:** What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you hear the term “Law”?
 - **Optional Activity:**
 - ✧ Facilitators may create a word cloud using learner responses to visualize common themes, patterns, or differences in perceptions. This activity can be revisited at the end of the module to reflect on how learners’ understanding may have evolved.

Part 1: Law as Power “Law is where power announces its victories.”

Estimated Time: 20 minutes

Key Concept: International law reflects global power structures more than universal justice

- Learning Activities:**
- **Content Overview:**
 - ✧ Structure of international law: treaties, custom, general principles
 - ✧ Limits of enforcement: UN Security Council vetoes, absence of overarching authority
 - **Journal Prompt:** How does the concentration of power in the Security Council affect smaller nations?

- **Short Answer Ideas:**
 - ⌘ How does the example of Israel and Iran illustrate the influence of power on law?
 - ⌘ Why might law appear to serve justice but actually protect the powerful?
- **Sentence Starter:** Laws without enforcement can or cannot protect human rights because...

Part 2: Historical Legal Context in Palestine

Estimated Time: 20 - 25 minutes

Key Concept: Historical legal frameworks have shaped Palestinian displacement and marginalization

- Learning Activities:**
- **Content Overview:**
 - ⌘ **Balfour Declaration (1917):** British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine without Palestinian consent
 - ⌘ **British Mandate:** Legal tools empowering Zionist institutions
 - ⌘ **1947 UN Partition Plan:** Recommended division of Palestine; Palestinians rejected
 - ⌘ **1948 Nakba:** Displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians; right of return ignored
 - ⌘ **1967 Occupation & Resolution 242:** Legal gap and lack of enforcement
 - **Journal Prompts:**
 - ⌘ How does power affect which laws are enforced?
 - ⌘ Why were Palestinians' legal rights overlooked historically?
 - **Short Answer Ideas:**
 - ⌘ How did the Balfour Declaration and Partition Plan set legal precedents affecting Palestinians?
 - ⌘ What role has the U.S. played in shielding Israel from legal consequences?
 - ⌘ Compare international law's promises with real outcomes in Palestine
 - **Sentence Starter:** *Law many times has been used to maintain power instead of ensuring justice by...*

Part 3: Law and Responsibility- "If you don't find the law, the law will find you"

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Key Concept: Understanding law is essential for preventing injustice

- Learning Activities:**
- **Content Overview:**
 - ⌘ Explore how understanding law can help prevent injustice
 - ⌘ Understanding international law as a tool to recognize, challenge, and prevent injustice, and why active engagement with it matters
 - **Journal Prompts:**
 - ⌘ What does it mean for people to understand law in order to prevent injustice?
 - ⌘ Why is engagement with international law a responsibility, not optional?

- **Short Answer Ideas:**
 - ✧ How can ignoring law allow powerful countries to twist it for their own purposes?
- **Knowledge Check Examples:**
 - ✧ What is the Balfour Declaration? (Answer: British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine)
 - ✧ What does Resolution 242 call for? (Answer: Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, that later was not enforced)
 - ✧ Which international bodies hold Israel accountable? (Answer: ICJ, ICC)
 - ✧ True/False: International law alone can guarantee justice. (Answer: False)

Part 4: Contemporary Implications for Palestinians

Estimated Time: 15 - 20 minutes

Key Concept: Law remains a site of power struggle, but also offers tools for accountability

- Learning Activities:**
- **Content Overview:**
 - ✧ Explores how international recognition relates to the existence of states
 - ✧ Analyzes how claims of self-defense intersect with international law in situations of occupation
 - ✧ Discusses how apartheid laws may violate international human rights standards
 - ✧ Reviews the role of international courts, including ICJ rulings and ICC investigations
 - **Journal Prompt**
 - ✧ How do apartheid laws violate international law?
 - **Short Answer**
 - ✧ How do rulings by ICJ or ICC challenge occupation and human rights violations?
 - ✧ Highlight cases of accountability: ICJ rulings, ICC investigations, South Africa genocide case, Nicaragua vs. Germany
 - **Sentence Starter:** *Delayed or absent enforcement does not eliminate the role of law because...*

Part 5: Honouring the Land – Reflection Activity

Estimated Time: 10 - 15 minutes

Key Concept: Understanding our relationship to the land can deepen awareness of historical and ongoing displacement.

- Learning Activities:**
1. Use a resource like Native Land Digital to explore the Indigenous territories where you live.
 2. Research local Indigenous communities, their histories, and present-day stewardship efforts.
 3. Reflect on how land and water are protected and managed by Indigenous peoples.
- **Journal Prompt**
 - ✧ “What is your relationship to the land and waters where you live?”
 - ✧ “What meaningful actions can you take to support their care and preservation?”

- ✧ “How will you commit to these actions moving forward?”
- **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✧ Social movements that acknowledge Indigenous histories and stewardship may be more effective because...
 - ✧ Honoring land may help guide actions for justice and solidarity by...

Part 6: Exit Reflection

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Learning Activities: Students may choose any one of the following formats:

- **Anonymous digital submission** (e.g., Google Form with no name required)
- **Paper reflection slip submitted in a collection box** (no names required if anonymity is preferred)
- **Private journal entry** kept in a notebook or personal document
- **Verbal reflection shared** (if comfortable)
- **Journal Prompt**
 - ✧ One thing I learned
 - ✧ One question I still have
 - ✧ One impactful quote or idea that stuck with me
- **Sentence Starter:** *If law is shaped by power, citizens can help ensure it reflects justice by...*

Facilitators should clearly communicate that **learners are not required to identify themselves** unless they choose to do so.

Optional Extension Activities:

- **Media and Law Analysis:** Compare how media frames “self-defense” vs. “occupation”
 - ✧ Reflect on language, omissions, and bias in news and political statements
- **Critical Reflection:** “If law is shaped by power, how can citizens ensure it reflects justice?”

Glossary of Key Terms

- **International Law:** Rules guiding interactions among nations
- **Treaty:** Legally binding agreement between countries
- **Customary Law:** Practices widely accepted as legal obligations
- **UN Security Council:** Powerful UN body; 5 permanent members can veto resolutions
- **ICJ (International Court of Justice):** Court settling disputes between states
- **ICC (International Criminal Court):** Court prosecuting genocide, apartheid, war crimes
- **Occupation:** Control of land without consent of its people
- **Apartheid:** System of racial or ethnic domination enshrined in law
- **Balfour Declaration:** 1917 British declaration supporting a Jewish homeland in Palestine
- **Resolution 242:** UN call for Israeli withdrawal after 1967 occupation
- **Self-Defense (International Law):** Only permissible when under attack or imminent threat
- **Recognition:** Legal and diplomatic acknowledgment of a country’s existence
- **Nakba:** Mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948

