Dear MP,

I am writing as your constituent to ask you to vote against the Government’s proposed Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill, which was published on 19th June and will be debated in the House of Commons at second reading in the coming days.

If passed into law, this Bill would have the perverse, and possibly unintended, effect of bringing to an end the UK’s decades-long compliance with international law prohibiting the acquisition of territory by conquest – see below. The law will prohibit elected local authorities and other public bodies, including universities, from taking ethical considerations into account when making decisions about investing in or procuring services from companies whose overseas activities implicate them in human rights abuses. This flies in the face of UN rules requiring businesses to ensure that their overseas commercial activities uphold human rights.

The Bill goes further. It contains a “gagging clause” preventing local authorities from even expressing an opinion on actions covered by the Bill. A local council would be prevented’ for example, from explaining to its electorate, if it would have preferred not to procure from or invest in country X, but was banned from doing so by this legislation. This is an unwarranted restriction on the direct and democratic accountability of public bodies to their electorate.

The Bill explicitly prohibits UK public bodies from scrutinising Israel, now or at any point in the future, in respect of any violations of human rights carried out by Israel in the territories that it controls. This gives Israel unprecedented impunity that no other law, and not even this Bill, permits in relation to any other country in the world. The Bill contravenes UN Security Council Resolution 2334 and other relevant international laws to which the UK is a signatory (as well as being a permanent Security Council member). Bizarrely UK public authorities that aim to uphold the UK’s responsibilities as both a signatory, and as a permanent member of the Security Council, would be sanctioned.

I agree with a broad swathe of UK civil society, in expecting the Bill, if enacted, to further embed a culture of fear as regards legitimate criticism of the State of Israel in relation to its policies and conduct in the Occupied Territories.

The Bill is being tabled at the same time as a terrifying rise in anti-Palestinian violence in the West Bank, carried out by Israeli settlers, and in some instances the Israeli army. You may be familiar with the case of 2 year old Mahmoud Tamimi, shot in the head outside his home in the village of Nabi Saleh near Ramallah from an army watchtower, placed there to protect the expansion of the Neveh Tzuf settlement.

Astonishingly, settler violence is being openly encouraged by some Israeli Ministers, including National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir. In 2023 to date, more than one Palestinian has been killed a day on average – a grisly record in recent times and unprecedented since the end of the second intifada.

I urge you to oppose the passage of this Bill and in so doing send a signal that you are not prepared to restrain free speech, democratic accountability at the local level, or legitimate criticism, and response, to illegal actions or abuses of human rights by any nation state, including Israel.