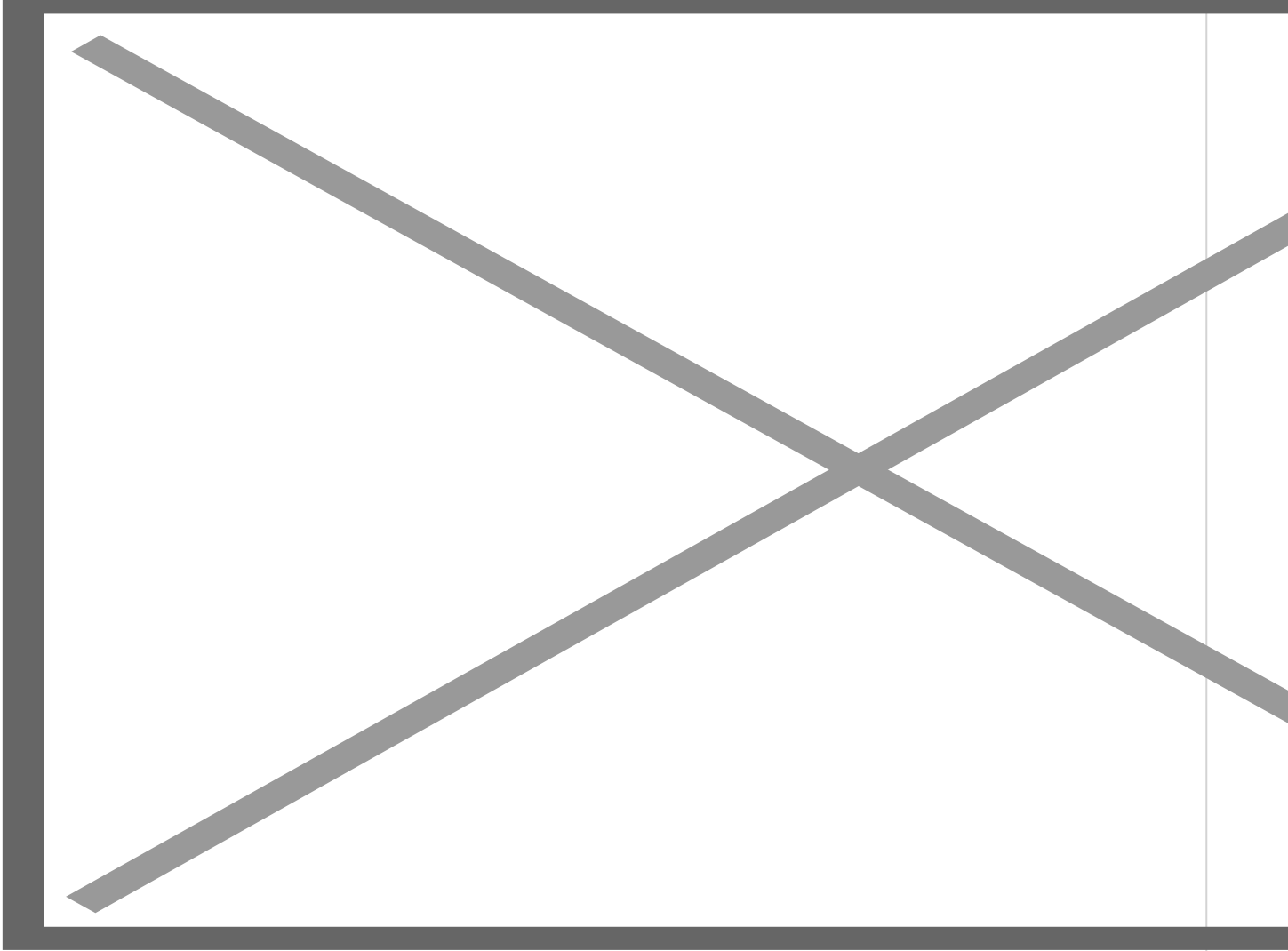


Belgian member of parliament says Europe risks losing credibility over silence on Israeli genocide

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A Palestinian man holds a child as he mourns the death of twin babies Naeem and Wissam Abu Anza, killed in an overnight Israeli air strike, during their burial in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 3, 2024, amid the ongoing Israeli regime forces genocidal war on the Palestinian trapped in the Gaza Strip. (Photo by AFP)

Brussels, March 3 (RHC)-- Europe risks any credibility to speak on Russia's actions in Ukraine if it remained silent on Gaza, according to a Belgian member of parliament, who is among the more than 200 lawmakers who have signed a letter calling for an arms embargo on Israel.

"We are so hypocritical in Europe to speak about international law when we speak about Ukraine and Russia, [but] if we don't have the same [views] when we speak about the Palestinians, we will not have any credit in the future to speak about [it]," Simon Moutquin, a Belgian member of parliament, told Al Jazeera in an interview on Saturday.

More than 200 legislators from countries, which fund Israel militarily, on Friday called for their countries to stop selling weapons to Tel Aviv citing "violations of international law" as Israel's relentless bombardment of Gaza has killed more than 30,000 people, most of them civilians.

In a letter signed by parliamentarians from 13 countries, the lawmakers announced that they would not be "complicit" and would take "immediate coordinated action" in their respective legislatures to stop their governments from arming Israel.

The Belgian member of parliament said that his own country had to act to stop Israel as well, citing a "risk of genocide" if countries continue to fund Tel Aviv's war on Gaza. "As a signatory country of the Convention Against Genocide, [Belgium has] a legal and moral obligation to act and prevent the risk of genocide, so I think this letter ... is a good first step, but we need to go further," said Moutquin, who raised concerns about an internal split in the European Union that has seen the bloc struggle to address Israel's war on Gaza cohesively.

The United States is by far the biggest funder of the Israeli military, providing roughly \$3bn in aid annually. Presently, U.S. lawmakers are debating an additional \$14 billion to support Tel Aviv's operations in Gaza.

Washington sent guided-missile carriers and F-35 fighter jets, as well as other military equipment to Tel Aviv in the immediate aftermath of Hamas's October 7 attacks on Israel, and Tel Aviv's subsequent declaration of war on the Gaza Strip. Some 68 percent of Israel's weapons imports between 2013 and 2022 came from the United States.

Tel Aviv also relies on German weapon imports, primarily air defence systems and communications equipment. In total, Germany provides 28 percent of Israel's military imports, although that rose nearly tenfold between 2022 and 2023 after Berlin ramped up sales to Israel in November.

The United Kingdom, Canada, France and Australia among others also provide military support to Israel.

However, following an International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling that found Israel may "plausibly" be committing genocide in Gaza and that ordered Israel to prevent genocide in Gaza, some countries have stopped exporting arms to Tel Aviv.

In the Netherlands, a court in February ruled that exports of parts for military fighter jets be halted after rights groups sued the government. Similarly, Belgium, Spain and Japan have also ceased military cooperation with Tel Aviv in recent weeks.

An arms embargo on Israel is a legal necessity, the legislators said in the open letter, citing the ICJ's February ruling. "Our bombs and bullets must not be used to kill, maim, and dispossess Palestinians,"

they said. “But they are: we know that lethal weapons and their parts, made or shipped through our countries, currently aid the Israeli assault on Palestine that has claimed over 30,000 lives across Gaza and the West Bank.”

Largely from France, Australia, Spain, Turkey and Brazil, the representatives accused Israel of defying international law by not only continuing its war on Gaza, but also ramping up plans for an invasion of Rafah, the last enclave that is housing more than 1.5 million Palestinians displaced by the war.

“Today, we take a stand,” the letter further read. “We will take immediate and coordinated action in our respective legislatures to stop our countries from arming Israel.” Legislators from Germany, Portugal, the U.S., Ireland, Netherlands, Canada, Belgium and the UK were also signatories to the missive.

At least 30,228 people have been killed in Gaza since October 7, most of them children and women. Aid is barely flowing in, causing deaths from starvation and dehydration. The UN has warned that invading Rafah will be “the nail in the coffin” of the humanitarian crisis in the strip.

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