

The vote to grant Israel accession to the OECD will be held today but **David Morrison** says given the Jewish state's failure to respect human rights such a move is not justified.

NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE

IRELAND should oppose Israel's membership of the OECD. Micheál Martin told the Dáil on April 21 that "it is expected that Ireland will join with the other 29 members of the OECD to formally invite Israel to become a member".

In my opinion, Israel should not be admitted, because it has not met the conditions for membership, laid down in the "roadmap" for its accession, adopted by the OECD Council in November 2007. This states:

"The council reaffirms that OECD membership is committed to fundamental values, which candidate countries are expected to share. . . .

"Accepting these values, along with the established body of OECD instruments, standards and benchmarks, is a requirement for membership.

"These fundamental values include a commitment to pluralist democracy based on the rule of law and the respect of human rights."

In the light of Government statements over recent years, I find it difficult to understand how the Government could take the view that Israel is committed to respecting human rights.

For example, following Mr Martin's recent visit to Gaza, he wrote in the New York Times on March 5: "I view the current conditions prevailing for the ordinary population as inhumane and utterly unacceptable, in terms of accepted international standards of human rights. . . . I genuinely believe that the medieval siege conditions being imposed on the people of Gaza are unacceptable."

In December last year, Mr Martin described Gaza as "an open prison". A year earlier, on November 5, 2008, he told the Dáil: "The Government agrees with those who state that the effective isolation of Gaza constitutes collective punishment and is illegal under international humanitarian law."

The minister was referring to Article 33 of the 4th Geneva Convention that forbids an Occupying Power from applying "collective penalties" on people under occupation.

Israel has made no secret of the fact that the objective of its blockade is to undermine support for Hamas by imposing economic sanctions on the people of Gaza as a whole.

There is little doubt this constitutes collective punishment contrary to Article 33.

Given that Israel has tightened its blockade of Gaza in the interim, the Government can hardly have modified its view that Israel is guilty of collective punishment contrary to international humanitarian law.

In the light of this, I am at a loss to understand how the Government can be of the opinion that Israel is committed to respecting human rights, a requirement for OECD membership. How can a state imposing "medieval siege conditions" on 1.5 million people in Gaza be said to be committed to respecting human rights?

It is not as if this is the only Israeli action that casts doubt on Israel's commitment to respecting human rights.

Its plantation of nearly half a million Jewish settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is in breach of international humanitarian law, in



Minister Micheál Martin chatting with Reem Owida during a visit to a girl's school in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

Efforts to destroy the Israeli economy will not help either side

THROUGHOUT Israel's history, one of the weapons used against it by opponents was economic warfare.

A series of boycotts, imposed by the rich Arab countries against the young and economically struggling state of Israel from the 1950s onwards, failed to bring Israel down.

Israel has managed to become a stable economy to the benefit of all her citizens, Arabs and Jews, as well as assisting developing countries. Israeli scientists are at the forefront of finding solutions to problems that all humanity encounters, and Israeli innovations help combat desertification and illness around the world. More than 10,000 Palestinians were treated in Israeli hospitals in 2009, a fact that contradicts the efforts to demonise her.

Israel is a parliamentary democracy whose Knesset is freely elected by all its citizens, Jews and Arabs, and whose independent judiciary up to Supreme Court level is open to petition by all citizens, as well as

to petitions by Palestinians. It is also a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious society with members of minorities serving at all levels in the Knesset, the civil service, the defence forces, the legal system and civil society.

The Jewish character of the state expresses the reality that Israel is the birthplace and homeland of the Jewish people. It does not confer legal privileges on Jews over non-Jews; rather it is a strong guarantor of the freedoms of expression, association and religious worship enjoyed by all citizens regardless of ethnicity or creed.

Historical facts are again distorted in the letter's repetition of the Israel-bashing mantra of "illegal occupation". It should not need retelling that Israel came into possession of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights following a war of self-defence in 1967 against three Arab states. It has made several efforts since then to

negotiate a peaceful settlement that, consistent with Israel's security, would establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza alongside the existing state of Israel. Unfortunately, Palestinian leaders have rejected all offers made by Israel, as they rejected the UN's original resolution calling for a two-state solution in 1948.

It is worth noting that, only this week, Israel raised no objection to the application of Syria for membership of the World Trade Organisation, believing that the economic interests of all the countries in the Middle East region are closely intertwined. We wish our Palestinian neighbours in the Palestinian Authority a continuation of the economic growth it has enjoyed in recent years with the co-operation of Israel. Efforts to destroy the Israeli economy will not help either side.

— Counsellor Ruth Zakh
Israeli embassy, Dublin

this case Article 49(6) of the 4th Geneva Convention.

Its destruction of Arab property to make way for these settlements and the roads that service them (and the Wall) is in breach of Article 53 of the 4th Geneva Convention.

On top of all this, going on for

more than 40 years, there are the myriad human rights violations that took place in Gaza from December 27, 2008, to January 18, 2009, as attested to by the UN Fact Finding Mission headed by Justice Goldstone

In addition, Arab citizens of Israel are systematically discriminated

against. A European Commission report on Israel dated May 2004 says: ". . . the Arab minority suffers from discrimination in many areas including budget allocations, official planning, employment, education and health."

Four years later, in April 2008, a Commission report on Israel's imple-

mentation of the European Neighbourhood Policy noted little progress in this area.

In employment, for example, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told a parliamentary commission of inquiry on November 11, 2008: "We have not yet overcome the barrier of discrimination, which is a deliberate discrimination and the gap is insufferable."

The other requirement for OECD membership is that Israel be committed to a pluralist democracy. While it is often said Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, I do not believe this proposition is sustainable.

How can a state that has ruled over millions of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories since 1967, without according them any say in the institutions that govern them, be described as a democracy?

Only Jewish settlers in the Occupied Territories can vote in Knesset elections. Surely, that demonstrates a 40-year record of contempt for democracy rather than a commitment to it and is akin to the voting system that operated in apartheid South Africa.

No other OECD state rules over millions of people who are excluded from the franchise.

The overwhelming evidence is Israel has little respect for the human rights of Palestinians either in the Occupied Territories or in Israel and its claim to be a pluralist democracy is bogus.

● Dr David Morrison is a member of the board of Sadaka, the Ireland Palestine Alliance