

# [***Aid worker deaths have appalled Israel's European allies. Some are considering a halt to arms sales***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BR8-CG71-DYMD-64S4-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

April 6, 2024 Saturday 4:07 AM GMT

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**Section:** INTERNATIONAL NEWS

**Length:** 1097 words

**Byline:** JILL LAWLESS, Associated Press

**Dateline:** LONDON

**Body**

LONDON — The words coming from some of Israel’s closest allies have been startling in their vehemence: “appalled,” “outraged,” “no more excuses.”

The Israeli military’s [*killing of seven aid workers*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-world-central-kitchen-gaza-aid-workers-69b6176362dafc8e4e2754b2342faa1d) in Gaza has triggered unprecedented criticism from European leaders, who are stepping up calls for a cease-fire and in some cases halting arms sales to Israel as the war’s toll mounts.

The attack on the [*World Central Kitchen convoy*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-war-news-04-02-2024-9bdf66771b62af37d85a2800f71c0e6c) has sharpened the dilemma for European politicians, who are squeezed between support for an ally that suffered a terrible attack on Oct. 7 and growing public pressure to stop a war over which they have little control.

“Nothing justifies such a tragedy,” French Foreign Minister Sébastien Séjourné said after Monday's attack. [*U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak*](https://apnews.com/article/uk-israel-arms-exports-aid-worker-deaths-ba6ff8b0d409d80e56dca98a9712efd2) said he was “appalled” by the deaths of the aid workers, three of whom were British.

Britain summoned the Israeli ambassador for a reprimand over the killings. [*So did Poland*](https://apnews.com/article/poland-israel-gaza-ambassador-summoned-bc27434c7a8e5eb828867c17d4e884db), which lost one of its citizens and whose foreign minister, Radek Sikorski, expressed “moral indignation.”

Beyond Europe, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said attacking aid workers was “absolutely unacceptable,” and Australian leader Anthony Albanese said his country was “outraged.”

Israel said the attack that killed the aid workers and their Palestinian driver was a tragic mistake. Its military dismissed two officers and reprimanded three others, saying they violated the army’s rules of engagement.

Julie Norman, associate professor of ***politics*** and international relations at University College London, said unease about the conflict was already growing in Europe, and Monday’s attack “accelerated that and made it much more public.”

“Things that had been said more quietly are now being said much louder,” she said.

When Hamas killed some 1,200 Israelis in a [*cross-border attack*](https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war) from Gaza on Oct. 7, Israel’s European allies strongly backed its right to strike back.

Within weeks, some were expressing disquiet at the mounting bloodshed. French President Emmanuel Macron called for a cease-fire as early as November. Sunak has moved from backing a “humanitarian pause” to support for a “sustainable cease-fire" contingent on Hamas releasing Israeli hostages and halting attacks.

Germany is one of Israel’s closest allies and, given memories of the Holocaust, treads carefully when criticizing its actions. While remaining careful to stress Israel’s right to defend itself, the government has become increasingly critical of the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has voiced unease at the war’s toll, asking Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a meeting last month how any goal can “justify such terribly high costs.”

Palestinians, aid workers and international rights groups say Western outrage over the deaths of foreign aid workers contrasts with the subdued response to the suffering of Gaza residents. More than 33,000 people have been killed, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, including more than 220 humanitarian workers. Hundreds of thousands of Gazans are on the [*brink of starvation*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-un-humanitarian-famine-gaza-malnutrition-cf622f843fe531fb6dbd5657a39d6b49).

“It’s sad that it has taken an attack on international aid workers” to crystalize leaders’ attention, said Nomi Bar-Yaacov, associate fellow in the International Security Program at international affairs think tank Chatham House. “But that is unfortunately the reality.”

The World Central Kitchen attack has increased pressure on Europe’s governments to move from criticism to suspending arms sales to Israel.

The United Nations’ Human Rights Council passed a nonbinding resolution to that effect Friday. Among European countries in the 47-nation body, only Germany voted against it, as did the United States.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said Thursday that his country had stopped selling weapons to Israel and urged other nations to do the same. In February, Canada announced it would stop future shipments, and the same month [*a Dutch court*](https://apnews.com/article/netherlands-court-f35-israel-b33608b054a33fbacc518395b53b74e8) ordered the Netherlands to stop the export of F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel — though the Dutch government said it would appeal.

In Britain, more than 600 British jurists, including three retired Supreme Court judges, pressed the government to heed the [*International Court of Justice’s conclusion*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-gaza-genocide-court-south-africa-27cf84e16082cde798395a95e9143c06) that there is a “plausible risk of genocide” in Gaza and stop shipping weapons to Israel.

“I believe we have no choice but to suspend arms sales,” said Alicia Kearns, a lawmaker from the governing Conservatives who chairs the House of Commons foreign affairs committee. “U.K. arms export licenses require a recipient to comply with international humanitarian law.”

Suspending arms sales would be a major political statement by Britain, but it wouldn’t make a big difference to the war. Britain sold just 42 million pounds ($53 million) worth of defense equipment to Israel in 2022, according to the U.K. government.

The only country with major influence is the United States, which has also begun to harden its line toward Israel. President Joe Biden [*told Netanyahu*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-netanyahu-3591fb5f82b22cf8e5d1060fccaef115) in a phone call Thursday that continued U.S. support for the war depended on Israel taking more action to protect civilians and aid workers. Hours later, Israel announced it would open new aid routes into Gaza and increase the amount of food and other supplies getting into the territory.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Friday that Germany expected “the Israeli government to implement its announcements quickly.”

“No more excuses,” she wrote on X — a tone that would have been unthinkable mere months ago.

Germany is the second-biggest weapons supplier to Israel and approved 326.5 million euros ($354 million) in defense exports last year, according to German news agency dpa.

Asked Friday under what circumstances Germany would consider suspending weapons deliveries to Israel, government spokesperson Christiane Hoffmann replied that “weapons exports are always case-by-case decisions \u2026 taking into consideration political and human rights questions.”

Bar-Yaacov said a decision by European countries to stop arms supplies unless Israel complies with international law would “make a huge difference” by increasing pressure on the United States to take its own tough action.

“The question,” she said, “is how much pressure and how much leverage is President Joe Biden prepared to put on Prime Minister Netanyahu in order to ensure that the war ends?”

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Associated Press writers Geir Moulson in Berlin, Joseph Wilson in Barcelona, Thomas Adamson and Sylvie Corbet in Paris and Vanessa Gera and Monika Scislowska in Warsaw contributed to this story.

**Load-Date:** April 6, 2024

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