

Australian ministers say Palestinians are being 'collectively punished' for Hamas barbarism



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Body

Palestinians are being "collectively punished for Hamas's barbarism", senior federal minister Ed Husic has said, in the strongest condemnation yet of Israel's reprisals in Gaza by a member of the Australian government.

Fellow Labor frontbencher [Anne Aly](#) immediately backed Husic saying it was "difficult to argue" that Palestinians, including [1,000 children who had been killed](#), were not being "collectively punished". Aly, the early childhood education minister, suggested Israel could be investigated over whether it had committed war crimes.

The comments from the [first two Muslim ministers in an Australian federal government](#) go further than the foreign minister, Penny Wong, who has urged all sides to show "restraint" in protecting civilian life.

This week Labor senator Fatima Payman and MP Julian Hill also spoke out by condemning the killing of innocent civilians in Israel and Palestine.

The opposition has sought to weaponise Labor's position, arguing it is unfair to urge restraint on Israel, given its citizens were the victims of the Hamas attacks.

Husic, the industry and science minister, noted that about [3,000 Palestinians were dead](#), including approximately 1,000 children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

"You've got homes, schools, medical centres destroyed," he told ABC radio on Thursday.

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"That's before we even contemplate how they'll get rebuilt. No food, fuel, medicines, water. I feel very strongly that Palestinians are being collectively punished here for Hamas's barbarism."

Husic said there was "an obligation on governments, particularly the Israeli government to ... follow the rules of international law and to observe in particular, that innocents should be protected".

"I am very mindful of the words of our prime minister in saying that protecting innocent lives is not a sign of weakness.

"It is a sign of strength. That is a really important thing that needs to be considered. I genuinely believe there needs to be a de-escalation. I don't think it's in Israel's interest long term to engage in the occupation of Gaza."

Aly said it was "entirely appropriate" that parliament had [passed a motion](#) condemning the Hamas attacks.

"But with the escalation of violence, and that was something that I feared from the very beginning – that the escalation of violence would mean there would be more Palestinian lives lost and that has come to pass, and it will continue," she said.

Aly urged Israel to abide by the rules of law developed by the international community to protect the human rights of civilians during conflict.

Asked if Israel had committed war crimes, Aly replied that: "That is something that possibly could be investigated. I think that anyone, any state or any group that commits war crimes, should be investigated and should be held accountable."

The prime minister, Anthony Albanese, has recognised Israel's right to defend itself but also urged the Netanyahu government to " [operate by the rules of war](#) " amid increasing expectations of an imminent ground operation in Gaza.

On Monday, Hill told parliament that Israel's right to defend itself did not extend to the "indiscriminate mass killing of innocent Palestinians".

Hill said he had heard an "overwhelming message" from his community "that the mass punishment of 2 million people in Gaza is not a proportionate response and this is a trap that Israel must not fall into – it is what Hamas is trying to provoke".

Payman told the Senate that [Australia](#) "must condemn" civilian deaths as "Israeli missiles strike residential dwellings, civilians, multi-story apartments, health facilities as well as places of worship, indiscriminately killing men, women and children".

"The price tag of Israel's right to defend itself cannot be the destruction of Palestine. Israel's right to defend its civilians cannot equate to the annihilation of Palestinian civilians."

On Thursday, the home affairs minister, Clare O'Neil, [said she was "not going to get into" who was responsible](#) for the Al-Ahli Arab hospital strike because it was an "unfolding" situation.

"What we do know about this is that hundreds of innocent people, who were at a hospital evidently already incredibly unwell and vulnerable, have lost their lives," she said.

"his was set off by these violent and inhumane, barbaric attacks by Hamas."

"What we now see is loss of innocent lives, of men, women and children in Gaza, and I want Australians to know that, for any innocent loss of life, we stand with Australian communities who experience this pain very deeply, whether they are Jewish Australians who are mourning the loss of life in the Middle East, or whether they are Palestinian or Muslim Australians who are mourning the loss there."

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