

Cross-Party Group on Fair Trade

Wednesday 3 December 2025 at 6pm, online

Minute

Present

MSPs

John Mason MSP

Sarah Boyack MSP

Invited guests

Manal Ramadan White, Zaytoun

Yasmina Ferrigan, Hadeel

Non-MSP Group Members

Ailsa Henderson

Alison, Dumfries Fairtrade

Carol Morton

Gerard Hastings

Jeanette McIvor

Joyce Taylor

Katherine Naylor

Kirsty Connell

Martin Meteyard

Matthew Aitken

Morag Rennie

Vicky Allan

Louise Davies

Apologies

Karena Jarvie

Jane Forster

Russell Salton

Maggie Chapman MSP

Basma Barham, Holy Land Handicraft Cooperative Society

Agenda items 1 & 2: Welcome & Apologies

John Mason MSP opened the meeting. He noted that Basma Barham, one of the planned speakers, was now unable to attend. He introduced the meeting topic as Fair Trade in times of conflict and explained that we would hear from Fair Trade businesses working in Palestine.

Agenda item 3: Approval of Minutes

John noted a typo in the September minutes and that the number of health boards referred to should be 14. The minutes were proposed by John Mason and seconded by Martin Meteyard.

Agenda item 4: Manal Ramadan White, Zaytoun

Manal from Zaytoun opened by describing the organisation's long-standing commitment to transparent, ethical trading relationships that help Palestinian farmers stay on their land. Zaytoun sources olive oil, dates, grains and, more recently, skincare products directly from farming communities. She stressed that these relationships provide stability in a context deliberately structured to undermine Palestinian livelihoods.

She explained that the 2025 olive harvest – normally a joyful and defining moment in the Palestinian agricultural calendar – has been the worst in decades. UN figures point to hundreds of settler attacks across dozens of towns and villages, with more than 4000 olive trees vandalised or destroyed. In one week in October alone, around 60 attacks were recorded. Behind these incidents are families prevented from reaching their groves; when a harvest is missed, the damage extends far beyond a single season, as ancient trees produce less the following year and soils degrade.

Many farmers simply could not reach their land safely due to settler violence, checkpoints, and locked gates. Even when travel wasn't directly life-threatening, journeys could take an entire day, forcing people to turn back after hours of waiting. Settlers are increasingly armed, and intimidation includes psychological tactics such as entering groves dressed like Palestinians. Homes and cars have been damaged, and Manal referenced reports of summary executions in Jenin. Movement restrictions also prevent workers from reaching factories, slowing production. Despite all this, Palestinian producer groups continue to process, sort and ship goods, something she described as "nothing short of miraculous".

Climate change adds further pressure: declining rainfall, inability to collect water, extreme heat scorching olives, and blossoms failing before fruiting. Structural issues, especially land confiscation, home demolitions and mass displacement, deepen the crisis. Refugee camps have been repeatedly raided, leaving families displaced for indefinite periods.

Against this backdrop, Fair Trade relationships provide crucial stability. Pre-financing means producers are paid on time and can plan ahead. Predictable prices prevent farmers being forced to sell below the cost of production. Women's cooperatives have

strengthened through Fair Trade markets, helping reduce social isolation as travel becomes harder.

Manal emphasised that recovery is difficult to discuss, especially as the situation in the West Bank deteriorates daily and systemic restrictions persist. In Gaza, Zaytoun hopes one day to trade again and include products from across all of historic Palestine.

She encouraged MSPs to use their voice for public advocacy, including calls to end annexation, settler expansion and land confiscation. She also urged people in Scotland to continue buying Palestinian products, even when certification disruptions occur, and thanked Fair Trade shops such as Hadeel and partners like Green City for their commitment. Scotland, she noted, is one of Zaytoun's key strategic markets and a place where they hope to see continued growth and collaboration.

Agenda item 5: Yasmina Ferrigan, Hadeel

Yasmina from Hadeel began by recognising the long partnership between Hadeel and Zaytoun, noting how vital it is for organisations to speak openly about Palestine, not only during the current genocide but across decades of occupation. Hadeel, based in Edinburgh for 22 years, is the trading arm of the charity Palcrafts and works with producers across Gaza, the West Bank, the Naqab/Negev and within Israel. Their mission centres on justice, dignity, and the preservation of Palestinian heritage across Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities.

She stressed that while incursions and restrictions have always been part of life for their partners, nothing compares to the scale of destruction and repression since October 7. The economic system in Gaza collapsed overnight, and longstanding relationships with producers were devastated. Hadeel worked with groups such as Atfaluna (a society for the deaf) and Sudafa (formerly linked to UNRWA), but workshops were destroyed in the first bombardments. One artisan lost his entire studio before being displaced to Cairo and then Belgium; his family's story of survival, illness and financial precarity reflects the wider humanitarian crisis.

Even in the West Bank and Naqab, movement restrictions, checkpoint closures, and courier shutdowns have made trade extraordinarily difficult. Deliveries that once took an hour can now take four; financial transfers bounce back repeatedly; and postal services have been suspended for months. Producers have exhausted savings and are relying on whatever orders can still get through. Despite these barriers, Hadeel supports around 35 producer groups and has had to innovate constantly to keep even a partial flow of goods and income alive.

She reflected on the emotional toll: the loss of skills and traditions passed down through generations, the trauma experienced by Palestinians who visit the shop, and the everyday fear felt by artisans travelling to their workplaces. Yet Yasmina highlighted the profound resilience of Palestinian producers, many of whom continue working as an act of hope. Centres supporting neurodivergent adults, for example, have chosen to stay open despite risk because the income and community they provide are life-saving.

The Fair Trade movement has offered essential solidarity, encouragement and a framework of protection. It also helps counter the dehumanisation of Palestinians by connecting customers directly with artisans' stories, culture and craft. Public interest in Palestinian-made products has grown, though Yasmina urged caution: boycotts must be nuanced, as Palestinian communities inside Israel also face discrimination and need support.

She closed by emphasising the role policymakers can play, through sanctions, advocacy, and pressure for a ceasefire, and the importance of enabling Palestinian producers to trade freely and safely.

Agenda item 6: Discussion

John Mason asked about the proportion of Palestinian olive production that is Fair Trade, how income differs between Fair Trade and non Fair Trade farmers, and whether olive farming provides a full livelihood.

Manal said that Fair Trade remains a small proportion of total olive production, largely due to limited export market access. Farmers receive both the Fair Trade price and a premium, used collectively by cooperatives for community investments (e.g., kindergartens, women's centres). Olive income is significant but seasonal; most families diversify with grapes, almonds, za'atar, citrus, and summer crops. Fair Trade supports livelihoods, food security, and land retention, which is important as unfarmed land is more vulnerable to confiscation.

John asked whether most artisan producers (embroidery, woodcarving, ceramics) operate under Fair Trade, since many non-food Fair Trade products are hard to find in the UK market.

Yasmina said that certification works differently in Palestine; the focus is on whether each organisation aligns with Fair Trade principles rather than formal certification. Hadeel works with cooperatives and women-led groups to trace materials and ensure community benefit. Production is affected by the destruction of olive groves, reducing availability of olive wood for carving. Sustainability and protection of future livelihoods are key concerns.

Matthew Aitken asked how difficult it is to get products out of Palestine, and what controls exporters must navigate.

Manal and Yasmina said that export is possible but highly burdensome: products must travel via complex routes, be unloaded/reloaded at checkpoints, and pallets cannot be stacked high so sniffer dogs can inspect them. Shipping is slower, unpredictable, and more expensive, with long waits for containers in Haifa. Air freight costs have doubled, and courier/parcel services face delays or have stopped at times. Goods labelled "Palestine" attract additional security checks, causing payment delays and financial strain. Despite obstacles, Palestinian partners show remarkable resilience in finding workarounds.

Martin Meteyard asked whether the recent closure of the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) offices and arrests of staff indicate further tightening on West Bank farmers.

Manal said it represents a serious escalation, especially given previous attacks such as the destruction of the Palestinian heirloom seed bank in July. These actions threaten the heart of agricultural resilience and heritage preservation. Manal highlighted the success of the Trees for Life programme (300,000+ saplings planted) as an example of long-term agricultural support.

Louise Davies asked whether positive consumer messaging, alongside BDS campaigning is strong enough; whether new ethically-motivated consumers can be engaged in wider Fair Trade choices; and how to do this sensitively.

Yasmina said that new customers are actively seeking ways to “do more”. Some misunderstandings exist about BDS; Hadeel aims to provide balanced education, including the impact of boycotts on Palestinian communities within Israel. Relationships with Israeli-based initiatives that employ Palestinians need careful, contextual communication. Education through stories, relationships and transparency is key, though there is always reputational risk. She suggested future collaborative educational work with Scottish Fair Trade and others.

Manal said every purchasing decision has power and Zaytoun’s messaging centres on supporting Palestinian producers, dignity, and resilience through positive Fair Trade choices.

Jeanette asked about the timing of Fairtrade Fortnight. Fairtrade Fortnight remains in the same period as previous years (September).

Agenda item 7: Next meeting

John Mason confirmed that the next meeting would be on 5th February and would welcome a farmer from Colombia. It will be a hybrid meeting.

The meeting closed at 7:20pm.