

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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House of Commons Written Answers

Sex and Relationship Education

The following two questions both received the same answer

Lloyd Russel-Moyle (Labour Co-op) [144972] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans his Department has to ensure that relationships and sex education is (a) impartial and (b) LGBT-inclusive in all types of schools.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Labour Co-op) [144973] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department plans to take to ensure that faith schools are compliant with the Equality Act 2010 when teaching relationships and sex education.

Nick Gibb: All schools must ensure that the teaching of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) is inclusive to the needs of all pupils, whatever their developing sexuality or identity. Schools are required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and any concerns that they are not doing so should be taken up with the school in the first instance.

The Department recently conducted an engagement exercise with a wide range of expert stakeholders to support the introduction of compulsory RSE in secondary schools. This has included hosting an equalities roundtable and bilateral meetings with LGBT groups and faith organisations. The engagement process included an extensive call for evidence to seek views on what should be included in these subjects. Using the evidence gathered during this process, the Government will develop the regulations and accompanying statutory guidance for these subjects and both will be subject to public consultation followed by a debate on the regulations in Parliament.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-16/144972/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-16/144973/>

Israel

House of Commons Oral Answers

Urgent Question: Gaza: UN Human Rights Council Vote

col 577 ... **The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt):** ... We abstained on calls for a commission of inquiry into recent violence in Gaza during the UN Human Rights Council session on Friday. The substance of the resolution was not impartial and it was unbalanced. We could not support an investigation that refused to explicitly examine the action of non-state actors such as Hamas. An investigation of that kind would not provide us with a comprehensive assessment of accountability. It would risk hardening positions on both sides and move us further away from a just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

However, the United Kingdom continues to fully support the need for an independent and transparent investigation into recent events. We call directly on Israel to carry out a transparent inquiry into the Israeli Defence Forces' conduct at the border fence and to demonstrate how this will achieve a sufficient level of independence. We believe this investigation should include international members. We urge that the findings of such an investigation be made public, and, if wrongdoing is found, that those responsible are held to account. The Foreign Secretary stressed the importance of Israel conducting an independent investigation when he spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16 May.

Richard Burden (Labour): Last Tuesday, the Minister assured the House that he endorsed calls for an international, independent and transparent inquiry into the appalling events unfolding in Gaza, yet when United Nations Human Rights Council resolved on Friday to set up a commission of inquiry to undertake precisely that kind of investigation, the UK failed to join 29 partner countries and instead abstained from the vote. The Government alleged that, as the Minister said today, the UN Human Rights Council resolution was "partial, and unhelpfully unbalanced". May I remind the Minister that the remit of the UN inquiry is to investigate "all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law" and that it calls on Israel and "and all relevant parties" to co-operate fully with the inquiry? That includes Hamas and other Palestinian factions, as well as Israel. Which bit of the resolution and the remit do Ministers not understand? ...

Will the Minister confirm that now the UN Human Rights Council has made its decision, the UK Government will get behind it? What consequences should follow if Israel, or anybody else, either refuses to co-operate with the inquiry or is otherwise found to be in breach of international law? ...

col 578 **Alistair Burt:** ... I draw attention to the detail of the resolution, which names the state of Israel in many cases right the way through. That follows a clear demonstration by the UN Human Rights Council in the past of a biased view towards Israel. I think it was the general nature of the resolution, clearly specifying Israel as opposed to any other, that caused concern. ...

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): I very much welcome the Government's decision not to back a resolution that was one-sided and biased against Israel. Will the Minister urge the UNHRC to desist from adopting these heavily one-sided resolutions as they have done

so many times in the past? ...

Alistair Burt: ... We have expressed concern that elements of the HRC's work have been clearly biased against Israel and that detracts from the other good work that it does. We will continue to maintain that position, but equally, if this inquiry is not the right vehicle, there must be another. ...

col 579 **Emily Thornberry (Labour):** ... The issue today is why the British Government, which claimed repeatedly last Tuesday to support that objective, chose three days later not to vote for it. ...

Before the Minister gets up and extols the virtue of the Netanyahu Government, may I remind him of the last time that that Government were allowed to investigate themselves over an alleged breach of international law? In July 2014, four children were blown to pieces on Gaza beach while playing hide and seek in a fisherman's hut. And the resulting investigation: a blatant piece of nonsense, full of basic untruths, exonerating the IDF completely and saying that the old fisherman's hut was in fact a Hamas compound. That is what an independent investigation by Israel looks like. ...

Alistair Burt: ... Let me quote what the United Kingdom said in relation to the explanation of vote:

"Our abstention must not be misconstrued. The UK fully supports, and recognises the need for an independent and transparent investigation into the events that have taken place in recent weeks, including the extent to which Israeli security forces' rules of engagement are in line with international law and the role Hamas played in events. The loss of life, casualties and volume of live fire presents a depressingly familiar and unacceptable pattern. This cannot be ignored.

To that end, in addition to abstaining on today's resolution, we call directly on Israel to make clear its intentions and carry out what must be a transparent inquiry into the IDF's conduct at the border fence and to demonstrate how this will achieve a sufficient level of independence. This investigation should include international members. The death toll alone warrants such a comprehensive inquiry." ...

Mark Harper (Conservative): ... Given that 53 of those killed last week were members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad, how would this resolution—*[Interruption.]* It not only does not mention those two organisations but reaches its conclusions in the resolution outline; it has already prejudged the outcome. ...

col 580 **David Linden (SNP):** ... It was a disgraceful decision of the UK to abstain from the HRC vote, and it flies in the face of previous statements from the Prime Minister and other Ministers in this House calling for an independent investigation. Given the mixed messages from the UK Government, will they now set the record straight and make it clear to the Israeli Government that deadly actions against protestors will not be tolerated by the international community? ...

Crispin Blunt (Conservative): ... Given that Gazans did all the dying and the Israeli soldiers did all the killing, how does the Minister expect an internal Israeli inquiry led by Brigadier General Baruch to be less partial and less unhelpfully unbalanced than the inquiry mandated by the UN Human Rights Council?

Alistair Burt: ... I made it very clear that if Israel is not only to undertake its legal obligations for what has happened on its territory but to fulfil its own processes, an international element to the investigation will clearly be one of the most important things, and that should bring the transparent and independent element that the UK and others have called for in order to find out the answers to these questions. ...

col 581 **Paula Sherriff (Labour):** Israel has maintained a temporary occupation for 51 years. It builds settlements illegally, demolishes homes illegally, confiscates land and water from occupied territory and blockades Gaza by air, land and sea. At what point do these illegal acts ever meet with any consequences?

Alistair Burt: ... as the United Kingdom Government have said on many occasions—that there is no status quo in relation to Gaza. Conditions are getting worse, and

circumstances are getting worse. As we rightly call on Israel in relation to issues such as settlements, in relation to Gaza we remain of the view that until these issues are settled there is no future, and no future for peace in the region.

Stephen Crabb (Conservative): Does my right hon. Friend agree that what this points to again is the need for reform of the UN Human Rights Council? ...

Alistair Burt: ... As I have said, the United Kingdom has had concerns about the UN Human Rights Council for some time, particularly in relation to Israel. We are not alone in that. The Human Rights Council must be impartial and balanced, and it has not always demonstrated those qualities in relation to Israel.

Jo Swinson (Liberal Democrat): ... Given that Israeli officials have authorised soldiers to fire live rounds at people trying to damage or even coming within 100 metres of the border fence, how can he possibly have confidence in an investigation led by those officials rather than by independent voices? ...

Bob Blackman (Conservative): Given that 50 members of Hamas and three members of Islamic Jihad were killed, and given that Hamas has now admitted that one of those incidents involved a gunfight between its members and the IDF, has my right hon. Friend any confidence at all that Hamas will co-operate with any independent inquiry? ...

col 582 **Alistair Burt:** ... I am not prepared to say that there is evidence that Hamas would or would not co-operate with any inquiry into what happened in relation to the allegations made about it. ...

John Lamont (Conservative): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Israel is the only properly functioning democracy in that part of the world, and that it is right for it to be able to defend itself against aggression and terrorism, as it has done so successfully for the last 70 years?

Alistair Burt: By supporting an independent and transparent element in its inquiry, Israel has an opportunity in these circumstances to ensure that its long-standing statement of democratic principles is demonstrated to the rest of the world.

Andy Slaughter (Labour): ... What representations has the Minister made about the current plan to deport Omar Shakir, the well respected director of Human Rights Watch in Israel?

Alistair Burt: ... I said last week that immigration processes were for each individual state, but we have made representations about the closing down of political space. We believe it is much better to interact with people than seek to bar them from a country; however, that is Israel's own immigration right, as it would be ours. ...

col 583 **Rushanara Ali (Labour):** ... Given the UK's position that the Israeli Government should lead the inquiry, how can we continue to play the role of honest broker, which has been a very important role for our Government historically, given our unique historical relationship with that region? ...

Alistair Burt: ... I draw attention to what we said in terms of the explanation of the vote: "The loss of life, casualties and volume of live fire presents a depressingly familiar and unacceptable pattern. This cannot be ignored."

We called on Israel directly to "carry out what must be a transparent inquiry into the IDF's conduct at the border fence and to demonstrate how this will achieve a sufficient level of independence."

Difficult as it is, the UK taking a more balanced position on this than some enables us to remain in an impartial position in relation to this, which would be lost completely if we jumped one side or the other. ...

Matthew Offord (Conservative): Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar says the purpose of the violence is to breach the border and murder Israelis living nearby. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Israel not only has a right to defend its border but must do so, and that includes using military action?

col 584 **Alistair Burt:** Again, uncomfortable as some of these statements are, it is

entirely clear why Israel would seek to make sure that there was no breach of the border. ...

Nigel Huddleson (Conservative): Israel clearly has questions to answer, but can the Minister confirm that Hamas is a proscribed terrorist organisation, so no one in this place or the UN should be seen as inadvertently defending or excusing it?

Alistair Burt: That is correct, and I am sure that no one in this House actually does that ...

Lyn Brown (Labour): The other place recommended last year that the Government stop treating Israel with kid gloves and display some political robustness. This Government's abstention is worse than weak; it is deplorable. How can the people of Palestine trust our Government when we refuse even to look seriously at these issues, let alone challenge them? ...

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat): The United Nations commission of inquiry will be mandated to look at all violations of international law and calls for co-operation from all relevant parties. How do the Government see that as being unbalanced?

Alistair Burt: Mention was made of Israel's activities a number of times throughout the resolution. There was no mention of Hamas, when it appears to be clear that there was engagement and involvement by Hamas, although no one knows how much. ...

col 585 **Rupa Huq (Labour):** Both America and Israel are our allies, yet we are powerless when the US moves its embassy and we are onlookers when the UN votes to hold an inquiry into the killings in Gaza. True friends offer advice and criticism, but are we now content just to hold hands rather than holding anyone to account?

Jess Phillips (Labour): ... Will the UK set out its criteria for assessing the independence, impartiality and effectiveness of an internal Israeli investigation? What action will we take, should those criteria not be met? ...

Alistair Burt: ... Discussions are still taking place among members of the international community to define exactly what the terms will be. I said earlier that I had spoken to the Israeli ambassador last week, and representations have been made in Israel as well. ...

Tom Brake (Liberal Democrat): As I understand it, one Israeli soldier has been injured, and 104 Palestinians have been killed, of whom 14 were children, and 12,500 have been injured, more than 2,000 by live ammunition. Has Israel's response been proportionate?

Alistair Burt: Other allegations include 50 or so Hamas operatives being involved and improvised explosive devices being placed at the border fence. There has been a whole series of allegations about what has happened. That is why it is essential to get to the truth. We have already expressed our concern about the amount of live fire, and we stand by that.

col 586 **Yasmin Qureshi (Labour):** ... The Minister ... has accepted the fact that there have been real abuses of the Palestinian people in Gaza through the use of poisonous water, through illegal settlements and through all sorts of cruelty to the Palestinian people, yet the international community rewards Israel with billions of pounds-worth of aid and armaments. ...

Would it not be appropriate, instead of saying that we criticise Israel and condemn what it has done, if we actually took action over what Israel has been doing over the years? ...

Jim Cunningham (Labour): ... regardless of the outcome of the Israeli investigation, surely the Government should try to initiate a further resolution to resolve the problem?

Alistair Burt: It may come down to resolutions at the end of the day, but an agreed mechanism, whereby we can find out what has happened in order to ensure that the circumstances do not arise again, is more likely to be effective. ...

Ruth Cadbury (Labour): Protesters and children have been shot in the back and shot while standing hundreds of metres away from the border fence. The Israeli authorities are clearly killing and maiming people in Gaza who pose no threat to them. ...

col 587 **Alistair Burt:** ... The hon. Lady comes to her own conclusions about what she thinks has happened, but others have different narratives. ...

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Labour Co-op): The IDF and people here in this Chamber constantly refer to the “Gaza border” despite it not being internationally recognised. If it is a border, what state are the victims of Israel’s latest shooting spree in? If it is not a fence that entraps 2 million people, will the UK recognise the state of Palestine and push for an independent investigation, not just a whitewash by one party?

Alistair Burt: ... the United Kingdom will recognise the state of Palestine when it is conducive to the peace process ...

Afzal Khan (Labour): The international community’s immediate focus after last week’s events was on the number of fatalities, but it is also important to dwell on the consequences for the thousands of injured people. Have the Government offered any additional humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza to ensure that the injured receive the medical treatment that they so desperately need?

Alistair Burt: ... I am in contact with international agencies that are involved in delivering humanitarian medical aid. Gaza’s medical resources, which are already incredibly stretched, will have been put under even greater pressure following the events of the past few weeks. I am looking to see what further the United Kingdom can do beyond the support that we already give to those who provide such help.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-05-21/debates/78156DDC-1AD0-4C68-9728-79B9A46C6883/GazaUNHumanRightsCouncilVote>

House of Commons Written Answers

Palestinians: Health Services

Jim Cunningham (Labour) [144156] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what funding her Department is providing to agencies in Palestine to help with medical aid.

Alistair Burt: The UK is working closely with our international partners to monitor the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and ensure a coordinated and effective response to urgent medical needs. The UK provides clean water and rehabilitates sanitation facilities to stop the spread of disease for up to 1 million Gazans through the United Nations Children’s Fund. UK financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority helps to pay the salaries of vetted health public servants in the West Bank. Last year this support provided up to 3,700 immunisations for children and around 185,000 medical consultations. In addition, the UK is a long-term supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which provides basic services, including basic healthcare, to over 800,000 Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and 1.3 million Palestinian refugees in Gaza. I am reviewing how the UK can best support the health system in Gaza at this time. I will keep the House informed of my decision.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-15/144156/>

Israel: Palestinians

Jim Cunningham (Labour) [144157] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to encourage the international community to work together to speed up the process of peace between Palestine and Israel and develop a two state solution.

Alistair Burt: At this highly sensitive time in the region, there is an urgent need to restart the peace process between Israel and Palestine. We regularly press both parties to resume direct negotiations towards a two-state solution. The Foreign Secretary spoke to the Palestinian Authority President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16 May and reiterated the need for progress.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-15/144157/>

Israel: Arms Trade

Ann Clwyd (Labour) [144212] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to investigate allegations of Israel's contravention of UK national arms licensing criteria.

Alistair Burt: The Government takes its defence exports responsibilities extremely seriously. We operate some of the most robust export controls in the world. We have no information to suggest that UK supplied equipment has been used in contravention of UK arms licensing criteria.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-15/144212/>

Israel: Palestinians

Ann Clwyd (Labour) [144213] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the use of live ammunition against Palestinian protesters.

Alistair Burt: The Foreign Secretary discussed the use of live ammunition against protestors in Gaza with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16 May. I also raised concerns regarding this issue with my Israeli counterpart on 13 May and with the Israeli ambassador to the UK on 17 May. As I said in my statement of 14 May, we continue to implore Israel to show greater restraint in its use of live fire.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-15/144213/>

Refugees: Palestinians

Rosie Duffield (Labour) [144395] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans the Government has to support Palestinian refugees seeking to enter the UK as a result of recent violence in Gaza.

Caroline Nokes: We remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and are closely monitoring the situation. We are working closely with UN agencies and others to respond to ongoing needs in Gaza, including supporting up to 1 million Gazans by addressing critical water and sanitation needs through UNICEF. The UK is also a long-term supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which provides basic services to 1.3 million people in Gaza, including basic health care.

There are safe and legal routes for people to come to the UK should they wish to join family members here, work or study. They would need to meet the requirements of the relevant Immigration Rule under which they were applying to qualify for a visa. Details about the criteria and how to apply are available on the GOV.UK website at: <http://www.gov.uk/apply-uk-visa>.

However, there are no specific provisions in the Immigration Rules for people to be allowed to travel to the UK to seek asylum. Those who need international protection should claim in the first safe country they reach or register with mandated UN agencies – that is the fastest route to safety.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-15/144395/>

Gaza: Health Services

Nicholas Soames (Conservative) [144778] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps she is taking to deliver (a) drugs and (b) medical equipment to Gaza.

Alistair Burt: The UK is working closely with our international partners to monitor the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and ensure a coordinated and

effective response to urgent medical needs. UK financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority helps to pay the salaries of vetted health public servants in the West Bank. Last year this support provided up to 3,700 immunisations for children and around 185,000 medical consultations annually. In addition, the UK is a long-term supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides basic services, including basic healthcare, to over 800,000 Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and 1.3 million Palestinian refugees in Gaza. I am reviewing how the UK can best support the health system in Gaza at this time. I will keep the House informed of my decision.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-16/144778/>

Israel: Gaza

Nicholas Soames (Conservative) [144779] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he is making to the Government of Israel on their use of ordnance in Gaza.

Alistair Burt: The Foreign Secretary discussed the use of live ammunition against protestors in Gaza with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16 May. I have also raised concerns regarding this issue with my Israeli counterpart on 13 May and with the Israeli ambassador to the UK on 17 May. As I said in my statement of 14 May, we continue to implore Israel to show greater restraint in its use of live fire.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-16/144779/>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-response-to-violence-in-gaza>

Israel: Palestinians

Roger Godsiff (Labour) [144790] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make an assessment of whether UK arms were used at the Gaza border against protesters.

Alistair Burt: The Government takes its defence exports responsibilities extremely seriously. We operate some of the most robust export controls in the world. We have no information to suggest that UK supplied equipment has been used in contravention of UK arms licensing criteria.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-16/144790/>

Gaza: Overseas Aid

Gregory Campbell (DUP) [144842] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that money supplied to the Gaza region is used only for humanitarian purposes.

Alistair Burt: DFID has a zero-tolerance approach to fraud and has robust controls to prevent the diversion of aid. In Gaza: DFID monitors spending closely; maps the flow of funds through each organisation involved in delivery, regularly audits programme spending; and conducts regular field visits to ensure that UK aid reaches the intended beneficiaries and achieves the best development outcomes, thereby ensuring value for money for the UK taxpayer. Additionally, DFID aid complies with UK and international counter terrorism legislation and our funding agreements commit partners to understand and comply with international counter terrorism legislation.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-16/144842/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

United Nations Human Rights Council: Resolution on Gaza

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon repeated a statement made in the Commons by the Minister for the Middle East. To read the statement, see the “House of Commons Oral Questions” section above.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, last Tuesday the Minister agreed with many on the need for an international, independent investigation. In fact, he assured the House that our team at the UN would be working hard on this, and that he would report back on progress. I hope that the Minister can explain why, if the Government were dissatisfied with what appeared at the Human Rights Council, the UK did not submit its own resolution to address this issue? Why not set it out in a way that last week we were all happy to support?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The noble Lord is quite right to say that the Government’s position has been, and remains, to support an independent and transparent investigation into recent events. In this case, we joined European allies—notably Germany, Slovakia, Hungary and Croatia—in abstaining on calls for a commission of inquiry. I made the reasons for our abstention clear in my opening remarks. To that end, we were concerned that the resolution as presented could not be perceived as balanced because it did not look to ensure that non-state actors were fully considered. We remain true to the fact, however, that we will continue to work through all channels, calling for an international investigation into the events in Gaza last week. There is, as the noble Lord will know, a UN resolution at the Security Council on the situation regarding Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We are aware that Kuwait has also tabled a draft resolution. We are currently considering the text carefully and will make a decision on the way forward on that in due course.

Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, how does the noble Lord feel personally about this decision? He and his colleagues have repeatedly called for the facts to be established, so how does that square with abstaining on this matter? The Statement rightly asks for an independent and transparent investigation. Why, then, does it go on to ask one side—Israel—to carry this out?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, we made clear at the Human Rights Council the importance of any independent investigation. ... We did not vote against the resolution but abstained because we had reservations about the wording as it stood. We were not alone in that: I believe there was a total of 14 abstentions.

The noble Baroness asked about the Government’s position, which has been consistent. We want to see a resolution to the situation between Israel and the Palestinians, and we want to see an inquiry into the events that occurred last week in Gaza. Regrettably, children’s lives were lost. For that reason, we wanted to ensure that all material facts could be fully reviewed by any investigation that had been set up. We felt that the UN Human Rights Council resolution fell short of the requirement to ensure that any factors from the side of Hamas inciting others to act in this way were going to be fully considered. That was regrettable, and that is why the UK Government abstained from voting for the resolution.

Baroness Deech (Crossbench): Does the Minister recall that, only just over a year ago, the Government announced that they were putting the United Nations Human Rights Council on notice for its disproportionate focus on Israel? It is a council that contains countries not noted for their support of human rights, such as Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Qatar and Burundi. Would he entrust the council with an independent investigation into, for example, the behaviour of British soldiers in Iraq? I am pretty sure that I know what his answer will be.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, the noble Baroness points to Item 7 of

the Human Rights Council, concerning various resolutions relating to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Government have made their position clear to members of the Human Rights Council and to the Palestinians and the Israelis—that we want to see any bias in the Human Rights Council agenda addressed directly. That is what we have sought to do in the last few years, and the votes that we have taken have reflected that. ...

Lord Robathan (Conservative): ... it is important, as my noble friend the Minister has said, to have impartiality and balance. Tragic events took place in Gaza, where, in my opinion, there was a hugely disproportionate use of force—lethal force—by the Israelis. However, this was whipped up by Hamas. We know that and, indeed, I understand that Hamas has claimed that over 50 of the dead people were allegedly members of Hamas. That is not a capital offence, in my opinion, and there was disproportionate use of force, but any investigation must be impartial, and I do not think that that was on offer at the UN Human Rights Council.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, my noble friend raises the issue of the number of lives lost. I believe that over the two days, the count was 60. As my noble friend pointed out, Hamas itself claims that 50 of those killed were members of Hamas. There is another issue, to which my noble friend again alluded: the use of force and live fire. I assure your Lordships' House that the Government continue to call for restraint. Indeed, when I was in Israel most recently, I directly asked the Ministers concerned to ensure that, in any conduct—be it in Gaza or elsewhere—the Government of Israel show such restraint. There were others whose lives were lost. I believe that six children lost their lives during the events of last week, and we all mourn the loss of life of such innocent young children.

The central point of the inquiry, as my noble friend said, is impartiality, balance and independence. The Government's view was that the text that was tabled was not impartial and would not fulfil that objective.

Baroness Blackstone (Independent Labour): My Lords, given the shocking loss of life as a result of the use of live ammunition against unarmed protestors in Gaza, and given what the Minister has just said about the need for an impartial, international, independent inquiry into what happened, can he reassure the House that the Government will not abstain when the resolution put forward by Kuwait comes before the Security Council? ...

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As I alluded to in an earlier response, we are fully aware of the Kuwaiti draft resolution and are currently considering its text carefully.

Lord Steel of Aikwood (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, like the noble Lord, Lord Collins, I am a little mystified as to why the Government did not manage to secure a better draft in the Human Rights Council, so that we did not end up looking very weak on the issue. ...

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: ... The Government, and our ambassador in Geneva, were seeking the kind of text which we could agree with others. However, that was not possible; we are not the sole members of the Human Rights Council. After looking at the text in front of us, the decision was taken that it did not fulfil the full criteria, particularly on the issue of other, non-state actors. That is why we abstained. I assure the noble Lord, and the noble Lord, Lord Collins, that our ambassador on the ground, through instruction from London, sought to get the kind of language that would have been acceptable to the United Kingdom.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-05-21/debates/9FF5F421-A3E7-4C2F-A713-8BA077F36F10/UnitedNationsHumanRightsCouncilResolutionOnGaza>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Richard Burden (Labour) (1294) United Nations Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry into violations of international law – That this House welcomes the resolution of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) on 18 May 2018 to establish an independent, international Commission of Inquiry to investigate all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the context of large-scale civilian protests in the occupied Palestinian territory; regrets the failure of the Government to join 29 partner countries on the HRC in condemning the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian civilians; believes the reasons given by the Government for its abstention from the vote do not bear scrutiny as the HRC resolution calls on all parties to ensure that future demonstrations remain peaceful and to abstain from actions that could endanger the lives of civilians; calls, as the remit of the Inquiry is to investigate all human rights violations and as the resolution, both on Israel and the occupying power and on all relevant parties to co-operate with the commission of inquiry and facilitate its access; and further calls on the Government to make good on the statements by the Minister for the Middle East to hon. Members during the Urgent Question on events in Gaza answered in the House on 15 May 2018 by giving its active support to the HRC Commission of Inquiry and upholding in practice the principle of accountability for violations of international law.

<https://www.parliament.uk/edm/2017-19/1294>

United Nations

We Shall Never Abandon Struggle for Peace, Freedom, Self-Determination, Vows Permanent Observer, as United Nations Forum on Question of Palestine Ends

Despite the increasingly dire circumstances in the territory occupied by Israel and in exile abroad, the Palestinian people would never abandon their struggle for peace, freedom and self-determination, the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine stressed in closing remarks as the United Nation Forum on the Question of Palestine concluded today.

“We have a monumental task before us,” said Riyadh Mansour, who is also a Member of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Central Committee. To say the Palestinian people were going through an extremely difficult time would be an understatement, he said, calling upon the entire international community to stand with them in solidarity. In particular, urgent efforts were needed to end the blockade on the Gaza Strip and to open new avenues for advancing peace.

He expressed gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people for hosting the Forum in the midst of a turbulent week that had seen deadly violence against protesters at the Gaza border, bringing the Palestinian cause into focus in both the Security Council and the Human Rights Council. The anger and frustration expressed by some participants in the Forum was both understandable and justified, he added. The Palestinian observer delegation was already taking action, he said, noting that the Human Rights Council had voted just hours ago to deploy a fact-finding mission charged with examining the violence in Gaza. In addition, it was drafting a Security Council resolution aimed at securing international protection for Palestinian civilians. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gapa1408.doc.htm>

Human Rights Council holds a special session on the deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory

... Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, in a video message, said that the events in Gaza in the past week and the past two months, and the past 11 years haunted the conscience of the international community. A tiny crowded enclave of land, holding two million people under occupation, cut off from the outside world by an imposing and comprehensive air, sea and land blockade, living in an utterly dire situation that the United Nations had called unsustainable and unliveable and a form of collective punishment, seeking the elemental human demands of freedom, justice and the right to enjoy the fruits of life, like anyone else. Mr. Lynk noted that the overwhelming majority of Gaza inhabitants had been committed to non-violence over the past seven weeks, armed only with the oldest and most human of aspirations: to live free in one's own land. Over the past seven weeks, over 100 Palestinian demonstrators had died at the hand of the Israeli military. Among the dead were children, journalists, health professionals, and many young unemployed men. Many of the wounded had serious, life-long physical disabilities. Who bore responsibility for all that? It had to start with Israel and its political and military command. It was Israel that had imposed the 11-year old travel and economic blockade that had strangled the Gazan economy and society. It was Israel that remained the occupying power, because it maintained "effective control" over Gaza and its inhabitants. And it was the Israel Defence Forces which, over the past seven weeks, had fired lethal ammunition again and again into the crowds of demonstrators, notwithstanding the calls of the international community and the demands of human rights defenders. Responsibility for the grim conditions in Gaza also rested with Hamas, with the Palestinian Authority, and with Egypt. They also had to fulfil their obligations to the people of Gaza. And responsibility also rested with the international community, which had the ultimate obligation to ensure that Israel respected all of its many unmet obligations under international law. ...

Israel, speaking as a concerned country, noted that the proposed resolution was yet again politically motivated, stressing that the people of Gaza were not seen as enemies of Israel. There was no occupation in Gaza; it was a myth. Israel had unilaterally withdrawn from Gaza in 2005. Hamas was cynically exploiting its own population in a violent campaign against Israel. It was regrettable that so many were fooled by the narrative of peaceful protests with knives and Molotov cocktails. Israel reminded that the same Palestinian Authority refused to transfer salaries and resources to Gaza. Unfortunately, the special session had already succeeded in empowering and rewarding Hamas. Israel long ago saw that the human rights of the Israelis were not on the agenda of the Council. The violent confrontation on the Gaza fence was orchestrated by Hamas, which had ruled Gaza since 2007. Israel's obligation to defend its own people was a principle enshrined in international law. It was deplorable that the Council turned a blind eye to the reality on the ground. The loss of life could have been avoided had Hamas not sent terrorists to the fence.

State of Palestine, speaking as a concerned State ... [said] The declaration of the American President on the opening of the American Embassy in Jerusalem was in breach of the Geneva Conventions and human rights. The killing and criminal acts of the Israeli occupation forces against civilians who protested their refusal of occupation policies on 20 of March was unacceptable. ... The demonstrators had asked for freedom and wanted to be free from occupation. They had been living under siege for over 10 years and under occupation for over 60 years. ...

Referring to the attempt to falsify the information, the State of Palestine underlined that the demonstrators on the streets were civilian protestors. They were Palestinians first, and had been carrying the flag of the State of Palestine. None of them used any lethal

weapon or fire. Palestine noted the justifications that the Human Rights Council had just heard that there was a threat against Israel, and that it had the right to self-defence. The Ambassador of Israel had used these excuses to prevent a special session at various other fora. ... This Council must help and must decide on an international independent fact-finding mission in order to determine the facts. If Palestinians had carried out any violations, they were ready to shoulder their responsibility. However, the other party must also be held accountable. ...

United States remained concerned about the recent outbreak of violence along the Gaza fence, but the special session was blatantly taking sides and it ignored the real culprit for it, the terrorist organization Hamas. Hamas messages over loudspeakers urged demonstrators to burst through the fence, falsely claiming Israeli soldiers had been fleeing. Hamas also allegedly encouraged demonstrators to attack the Kerem Shalom crossing, the biggest entry point in Gaza for fuel, food and medical supplies. The United States affirmed Israel's right to defend itself. It was hypocritical for the Council to spend time and money on a commission of inquiry if there were no commissions looking into human rights violations in other countries. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23104&LangID=E>

Human Rights Council concludes special session on the deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory: Decides to Dispatch an Independent, International Commission of Inquiry to Investigate Human Rights Violations in the Context of Large-Scale Civilian Protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

... In the resolution, adopted by a vote of 29 in favour, two against, and 14 abstentions, the Council decided to urgently dispatch an independent, international commission of inquiry, to be appointed by the President of the Human Rights Council, to investigate all alleged violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip, in the context of the military assaults on the large-scale civilian protests that began on 30 March 2018. The Commission of Inquiry was to present an oral update to the Council at its thirty-ninth session and a final, written report at its fortieth session.

The Council condemned the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian civilians, including in the context of peaceful protests, particularly in the Gaza Strip, and called for an immediate cessation of all attacks, incitement and violence against civilians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and it called on all parties to ensure that future demonstrations remain peaceful and to abstain from actions that could endanger the lives of civilians. Finally, the Council called upon Israel, the occupying power, and all relevant parties to cooperate fully with the commission of inquiry and facilitate its access. ...

United Kingdom, in an explanation of the vote before the vote, said more than 100 Palestinians had been killed in the protests in Gaza. This loss of life was tragic and concerning. The United Kingdom had also expressed concern that Hamas and Islamic Jihad had acknowledged that a substantial number of deaths were their militants. The United Kingdom could not support a resolution that was partial and imbalanced. Such investigations heightened the risk on both sides. Therefore, the United Kingdom would abstain from voting. The United Kingdom called directly on Israel to carry out an independent inquiry into the events. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23107&LangID=E>

Violations of international law in the context of large-scale civilian protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/HRC/S-28/L.1)

The Human Rights Council ...

1. Condemns the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian civilians, including in the context of peaceful protests, particularly in the Gaza Strip, in violation of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and relevant United Nations resolutions, and expresses its grief at the extensive loss of life, including of children, women, health workers and journalists, and at the high number of injuries;
2. Calls for an immediate cessation of all attacks, incitement and violence against civilians throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem;
3. Demands that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately and fully end its illegal closure of the occupied Gaza Strip, which amounts to collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population, including through the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of the crossings to the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons, especially those in need of urgent medical attention, to and from the Gaza Strip, in compliance with its obligations under international humanitarian law;
4. Decides to urgently dispatch an independent, international commission of inquiry, to be appointed by the President of the Human Rights Council, to investigate all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip, in the context of the military assaults on the large-scale civilian protests that began on 30 March 2018, whether before, during or after, to establish the facts and circumstances, with assistance from relevant experts and special procedure mandate holders, of the alleged violations and abuses, including those that may amount to war crimes, to identify those responsible, to make recommendations, in particular on accountability measures, all with a view to avoiding and ending impunity and ensuring legal accountability, including individual criminal and command responsibility, for such violations, and on protecting civilians against any further assaults, and to present an oral update to the Council at its thirty-ninth session and a final, written report at its fortieth session;
5. Calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, and all relevant parties to cooperate fully with the commission of inquiry and facilitate its access, requests the cooperation, as appropriate, of other relevant United Nations bodies with the commission of inquiry to carry out its mission, and requests the assistance of the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in this regard, including in the provision of all administrative, technical and logistical assistance required to enable the commission of inquiry and special procedure mandate holders to fulfil their mandates promptly and efficiently;
6. Decides to remain seized of the matter.

To read the full document see

<http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/S-28/L.1&Lang=E>

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Other Relevant Information

Faith Matters

**Faith, Hope, and Clarity: The reintegration of terrorist offenders after custody:
A blueprint for change**

<https://www.faith-matters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TACT-Offender-Resettlement-Report-The-Sunnah-Programme-2018.pdf>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

European Union (Withdrawal) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/europeanunionwithdrawal.html>

Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/holocaustreturnofculturalobjectsamendment.html>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/organdonationdeemedconsent.html>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

Integrated Communities Strategy green paper (closing date 5 June 2018)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper>

Measures to further improve the effectiveness of the fight against illegal content online (closing date 25 June 2018)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-measures-further-improve-effectiveness-fight-against-illegal-content-online_en

Home Education (closing date 2 July 2018)

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/home-education-call-for-evidence-and-revised-dfe-a/>

Ecclesiastical exemption and guidance on scheduled monuments (closing date 13 July 2018)

<https://beta.gov.wales/ecclesiastical-exemption-and-guidance-scheduled-monuments>

Antisemitism: Survey of European Jews (closing date not stated)

<http://www.eurojews.eu/>

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438