



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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See also “*Business of the House*” included in the Israel section below.

House of Commons Written Answers

Faith Schools: Security

Julian Knight (Independent) [202468] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to increase security measures around Jewish schools.

Tom Tugendhat: The Jewish Community Protective Security Grant provides protective security measures (such as guarding, CCTV and alarm systems) at Jewish schools and other Jewish community sites. The Grant is managed on behalf of the Home Office by the Community Security Trust. In March 2023, the Home Secretary announced the continuation of the Jewish Community Protective Security Grant, and increased funding for 2023/24 by £1 million, to a total of £15 million.

In light of the Hamas terrorist acts in Israel and reports of increased incidents of antisemitism in the UK, the Prime Minister has announced additional funding of £3 million for the Community Security Trust to provide additional security guarding at Jewish schools, synagogues and other sites where there may be a risk of antisemitic attacks.

In addition to the provision for Jewish schools, we also provide support for Muslim Faith schools. In June 2023, the Security Minister confirmed that an additional £24.5 million of funding will be available in 2023/24 to provide protective security at mosques and Muslim faith schools.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-13/202468>

The announcements referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-ramps-up-security-measures-to-protect-jewish-communities>

and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-new-support-to-keep-british-jewish-communities-safe>

and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/28-million-funding-will-help-keep-places-of-worship-safe>

Terrorism

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [202508] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact on the threat level from international terrorism of the UK's support for Israel in its war with Hamas.

Tom Tugendhat: The national threat level is subject to continuous review and assessment. Considerations have and continue to be made in light of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas.

The threat level remains at Substantial and will continue to be reviewed to ensure it accurately reflects the threat of a terrorist attack in the UK.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-13/202508>

Terrorism

Alicia Kearns (Conservative) [203133] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the UK's national threat level following the recent (a) Hamas terrorist attack in Israel and (b) Israeli military operations in Gaza.

Tom Tugendhat: The UK National Threat Level remains at Substantial meaning an attack is likely and will continue to be reviewed to ensure it accurately reflects the threat of a terrorist attack in the UK.

Considerations have and continue to be made in light of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-17/203133>

Hamas

Julian Knight (Independent) [201773] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure the police investigate individuals and groups suspected of promoting Hamas in the UK.

Tom Tugendhat: The Government takes proscription offences seriously. Investigations into the activities of proscribed organisations or individuals who may be members of proscribed organisations are an operational matter for the police and intelligence agencies.

Following the terrorist attacks on Israel, the Home Secretary wrote to police chiefs in England and Wales urging them to step up patrols and use the full force of the law to tackle those inciting hatred towards our Jewish communities.

The Home Secretary and the Prime Minister have hosted a roundtable with police chiefs and the Community Security Trust (CST) to discuss the practical steps that can be taken to enhance the operational response to any potential disorder.

Public order policing has disseminated briefing materials to police forces covering hate crime and the proscription offences, including advice on the flags associated with proscribed organisations Hamas and Hizballah.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-13/201773>

Food: Labelling

Rupa Huq (Labour) [202519] To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to introduce mandatory animal welfare labelling on food products.

Mark Spencer: Stimulating market demand for higher welfare products is a key strand of the Government's Animal Health and Welfare Pathway.

We therefore ran a call for evidence in 2021 to gather data on the impacts of different types of animal welfare labelling reforms, which received over 1,600

responses. The evidence provided suggested that there is public appetite for improved welfare labelling.

We will continue working with key stakeholders to explore how we can harness the market to improve food information for consumers and raise animal welfare standards. As part of this, we will continue to gather evidence on the impacts of a wide range of market interventions, as well as how they would align with wider labelling proposals such as eco-labelling.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-13/202519>

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-health-and-welfare-pathway/animal-health-and-welfare-pathway>

Cabinet Office

Preferred candidate for Chair of the House of Lords Appointments Commission

Baroness Ruth Deech has been announced as the preferred candidate for the role of the Chair of the House of Lords Appointments Commission (HOLAC).

Subject to pre-appointment scrutiny, Baroness Deech will commence the role in November 2023, following Lord Bew's term coming to an end.

Baroness Deech has a background in law and taught at numerous institutions ... She has written extensively about family law and was appointed an honorary King's Counsel.

She was Principal of St Anne's College Oxford and a Pro Vice-Chancellor.

In addition to her legal and academic background, Baroness Deech took on extensive regulatory roles including Chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority and Chair of the Bar Standards Board. She was also the first Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

Baroness Deech was appointed DBE in 2003 and made a life peer in 2005. She sits on the crossbenches as an independent legislator ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/preferred-candidate-for-chair-of-the-house-of-lords-appointments-commission>

Home Office

Support for people affected by terrorist attacks overseas

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6530ffd00b5392000da9298c/Victims_of_Terrorism_Unit_VTU_Overseas_Leaflet_-_Updated_18_October_2023.pdf

Scottish Parliament Written Answer

Ross Greer (Green) [S6W-21978] To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S6W-21585 by Richard Lochhead on 3 October 2023, whether (a) it has changed its relationship and (b) public bodies have changed their relationships with any companies listed by the UN Human Rights Office as involved in activities related to the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, following the exchanges of correspondence published in response to FOI/202200334471.

Richard Lochhead: I refer the member to my answer to S6W-21585 on 3 October 2023, outlining Scottish Government action.

The Scottish Government asked public bodies to consider the Office of the United

Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) list as part of their due diligence processes. Relationship management is an operational matter for each public body.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-21978>

The FoI response referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202200334471/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-21585>

CST

Antisemitic Incidents –20 October Update

In the 14 days inclusive between the Hamas terror attack on Israel (Saturday 7 October) and Friday 20 October, CST recorded at least 533 antisemitic incidents across the UK. This is the highest ever total reported to CST across a fourteen-day period. ...

Three hundred and seventy-one of the 533 antisemitic incidents occurred offline and 162 were online. ...

Forty-five antisemitic incidents were related to universities across the UK. In the first six months of 2023, CST recorded just 17 incidents of this kind, and 56 in the whole of 2022. Meanwhile, 35 incidents targeted Jewish schools, schoolchildren and teachers at non-Jewish schools, or schoolchildren on their way to or from their place of education. Between January and June 2023, 67 incidents in the school sector were reported to CST. ...

Examples of antisemitic incidents recorded by CST since Saturday 7 October include:

- Posters of Jewish hostages have been removed or defaced in London, Manchester and Leeds
- One man was assaulted while putting up some of these posters, and the offender shouted, “f*ck you Jew” at him
- A man removed the mezuzah from a home in Hertfordshire
- A man posted the following threat on Instagram: “That’s an average Israeli zionistidiot! We, the Arabs, are going to wipe you completely from the face of the earth! You can shove your Torah, your Talmud, your Moses and all your prophets up your stinky a*s!”
- A letter was sent to a Jewish school in London, saying, “well done Hamas. You Jews will pay the price for what you have done From a PLO Team”
- As a visibly Jewish man was waiting at a bus stop in Manchester, the occupant of a passing vehicle shouted, “filthy Jew!”
- A University Rabbi received a direct message on Instagram saying, “You massacred innocent Muslims, I hope you die too”
- Three men were walking down a street in London. As the victim walked past, they shouted, “What are you looking at you f*cking Jewish c*nts?”
- A visibly Jewish man was at a venue in Liverpool when he was surrounded by a group of men who began to dance around him, shoving him and shouting, “Free Palestine” ...

To read the full press release see

<https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2023/10/20/antisemitic-incidents-20-october-update>

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See also written answers, 202508, 203133, 201773, and S6W-21978, and the Home Office leaflet that are included in the Home Affairs section above, and Scottish Parliament draft Regulations in the Relevant Legislation section below.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

col 403 Lucy Powell (Labour Co-op): ...As we continue to witness the horror of the events unfolding in Israel and Gaza, and the emotions that they raise here at home, Hate Crime Awareness Week is a timely reminder that we stand united against hate. The whole House speaks with one voice against antisemitism and Islamophobia. As Members, we know that events in the middle east are directly and indirectly impacting on our constituents. We stand in solidarity.

We condemn unequivocally the heartless terrorist actions of Hamas. Israel has the right to defend itself, rescue hostages and protect its borders. International law must be upheld at all times. The lives of innocent civilians must be safeguarded, and every possible assistance must be made available to those who need help. There must be immediate humanitarian access to Gaza for aid, food, water, medicines, fuel and electricity. We welcome developments today, but it is urgent and it needs to be sustained. Hamas are not the Palestinian people, and the Palestinian people are not Hamas. We will continue to be strong advocates for justice, human rights and international law, and to keep alive the prospect of peace based on a two-state solution. Will the Prime Minister update the House following his visit this week? ...

col 405 Penny Mordaunt: ... I add my voice to those of many in this Chamber who have expressed their horror, sadness and sympathy with all those caught up in the situation in Israel and Gaza. My thoughts are particularly with those who have lost loved ones in the most barbaric terrorist attack, and with those taken hostage and their families who await news of them. At times like these, we in this place may feel that we cannot directly help, but we all can. We can all make judgments based on facts, promote those facts and debunk deliberate disinformation campaigns, keep informed and wide-eyed about the realities of the situation, and reassure communities here in the UK. ...

I join the hon. Lady in saying that all of us in this place are united against hate. She will know that the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary are currently in the region, and I am sure that they will want to update the House. I am sure that many colleagues will want up-to-date information, particularly about some of the situations that have happened in Gaza and the facts behind those situations. ...

col 407 Deidre Brock (SNP): ...today, like so many people, my thoughts are with the civilian populations in Gaza and Israel. People across all nations of the UK share this House's revulsion and fear of what we see unfolding—revulsion at the barbarism of Hamas and fear of what the future holds for innocent children, women and men in both Gaza and Israel. A huge number of MPs have constituents who are worried sick about friends or relatives who are caught up in these events, and of course communities across the UK will be anxious about what we are witnessing and its potential impact. As the House will know, Scotland's First Minister, Humza Yousaf, and his wife and family are directly affected in the most terrible way, and my thoughts are also with them today.

The UK Government have several roles to fulfil in this crisis, and there is an urgent need for action, as we all know. In the first instance, they must direct their efforts to the enormous humanitarian aid needs in southern Gaza—medical supplies, water, food, basic power. Twenty trucks is a start, but there are apparently 100 standing by and they must get through. However, they need to travel safely through, so calling for an immediate

ceasefire to facilitate the provision of aid in Gaza and to give evacuees a safe passage out is vital, as is the release of all the hostages—one's heart breaks to think of them—and the use of every possible diplomatic effort to stop an escalation into a wider regional conflict. The Government should join First Minister Humza Yousaf in calling for a worldwide refugee scheme similar to that established for Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian refugees. In the longer term, they should use all their powers to keep the two-state solution alive and keep a dialogue for peace open. ...

Penny Mordaunt: ...I join her, as I am sure all colleagues will want to, in her sentiments about the plight of the First Minister's family and in wishing that that has a good outcome.

The hon. Lady will know that additional humanitarian support is being provided by the Government to the region, which is built on many years of providing support. We are one of the major contributors to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, and we have done a huge amount of work in Lebanon to support the refugee programmes there. So we bring not just the financial offer, but decades of expertise in working in the region and with our networks. Of course we want hostilities to end, but I would just say to the hon. Lady that we are dealing with a terrorist organisation, and negotiating ceasefires with terrorist organisations is a very difficult thing to do.

The hon. Lady is right to highlight the plight of hostages, and one way we can all help is by keeping a focus on those individuals and their families in the coming days—I hope not weeks—and on their return. This is another area where the UK has a lot of expertise to offer. Israel will not have had a lot of expertise in hostage negotiation. Not just the Government but our non-governmental organisations have huge experience of working with organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and interlocutors in trying to get hostages extracted. I know that all we can do to help will be on offer. She is also right to point to the fact that the barbaric terrorist attack that kicked off this chain of events is in part designed to wreck any chance of peace, in particular the progress that was being made between Israel, Saudi Arabia and others in normalising relations. ...

col 409 **Ian Mearns (Labour):** ... as part of the crisis in Israel, Palestine and Gaza, a number of families in my constituency have been affected. Prior to the horrific Hamas attacks was the Jewish festival of Sukkot. A number of families from my Orthodox Haredi Jewish community were in Israel celebrating Sukkot and then became stranded and could not get home. Some have had to pay eye-watering sums to travel home by alternative means, because lots of flights were cancelled. Will the Leader of the House help me and those who have had to pay out sometimes whole-life savings to get their families of six or seven back home from Israel?

Penny Mordaunt: ... The hon. Gentleman will know that in cases where people are unable to return because they cannot afford to get out of a situation, there are schemes in place, run by the Foreign Office, under which people may be loaned finance. Many insurance products will not cover terrorist events, so I will make sure that the relevant Department has heard his concerns on that front. ...

col 411 **Theresa Villiers (Conservative):** Could we have a debate on media reporting of the conflict between Israel and Hamas so that we can hold to account those media outlets that chose to rush to blame Israel for the hospital tragedy without a sound evidential basis? Accurate reporting is crucial. Failing to deliver that makes the situation worse, could cost lives and could fuel hatred and antisemitism here in the UK.

Penny Mordaunt: ... There are two issues. One is the Ofcom code and certain broadcasters' adherence to it. The guidance for that code says:

"Broadcasters should have regard to the list of proscribed terror groups or organisations in the UK", which is incredibly important. It is also critical that reporters, sometimes stationed in very stressful environments, report facts as facts

and that those things that are not facts—things that have not been verified or are lines to take from terrorist organisations—should not be treated as facts. The BBC does focus on these things to a very large degree, but we know that sometimes it does not get things right ...

col 413 Bob Blackman (Conservative): It is understandable that, after suffering the worst terrorist atrocity in its history and the largest loss of Jewish life since the holocaust, the state of Israel will now seek to eliminate the threat of Hamas and all the other terrorist organisations. Mr Speaker enabled a statement on Monday and then an urgent question. Rather than a statement, would it not be better for the House to have a debate, in Government time and on a Government motion, so that it can express its support for the state of Israel and we can come to a ready conclusion to send a strong signal? Does the Leader of the House agree that there can be no equivalence between the Hamas terrorists, who kill, maim and torture civilians and try to eliminate as many Jews as they possibly can, and the Israel Defence Forces, which seeks to target terrorists and minimise civilian casualties?

Penny Mordaunt: I think that many Members of this House would want further opportunities to discuss this very important matter, so I suggest to my hon. Friend that he pursues the idea of a debate.

There has been discussion over the last week of proportionality, and the term “collective punishment” has been used on the Floor of the House. It is incredibly important that we recognise that the International Committee of the Red Cross principle of proportionality does not mean an eye for an eye, as some have suggested. That would be perverse. We do not suggest via that very important principle that, if the Israel Defence Forces raided Gaza and beheaded a precise number of infants or burned a precise number of families or raped a precise number of women and girls, that would be okay—of course not. That is not what proportionality means. The principle of proportionality seeks to limit damage caused by military operations by requiring that the effects of the means and methods of warfare must not be disproportionate to the military advantage sought.

col 414 What Israel is trying to do is end Hamas, a terror organisation that is a block to peace. The IDF is a trained military force that is subject to the rules of armed conflict and international law. Its soldiers are trained in these ethical matters. Its targeting doctrine and analysis of it is in the public domain and subject to scrutiny. I do not think that Hamas produces joint service publications, but if it did, they would say the opposite. It is there to cause damage and suffering to Israeli civilians and it has no regard, either, to the value of Palestinian lives, whose suffering appears to be acceptable collateral damage to its cause. It is very important that all of us in this House understand those critical principles ...

col 416 Liam Byrne (Labour): I join the Leader of the House in her utter condemnation of Hamas’s brutal attack on Israel. It was not what Hannah Arendt once called “the banality of evil”; it was the calculation of evil. That is why it is right that we defend Israel’s right to self-defence.

Like the shadow Leader of the House and colleagues across the House, I am acutely concerned that 2.2 million Palestinians now face humanitarian disaster. The Prime Minister was right to say in his statement:

“We must ensure that humanitarian support urgently reaches civilians in Gaza.”—[[Official Report, 16 October 2023; Vol. 738, c. 24.](#)]

What is the best way for us to debate the strategy next week? It seems to many of us in this House that an urgent, negotiated cessation of hostilities, binding on all sides, will be required to ensure that we meet the Prime Minister’s objective. We know that the United States and Egypt are working hard to secure that, so it would be good for us to understand how the UK Government are helping to achieve that objective.

col 417 Penny Mordaunt: ... I repeat what I said earlier: it is incredibly difficult to

negotiate a ceasefire with a terrorist organisation but, of course, we want to ensure that innocent civilians are protected and are given the support they need. The UK has a vital role to play in that, not just through diplomatic channels, but through the expertise that Government and our non-governmental organisations have. I am very conscious of the fact that Parliament is about to be prorogued and that Members will want to be kept informed when the House is not sitting, and I shall certainly bear that in mind. ...

col 419 Stephen Doughty (Labour Co-op): ... Many constituents ... have expressed their horror and shock at the loss of innocent life in Israel and Gaza, their revulsion at Hamas, but also the importance of international law and humanitarian access and principles being upheld.

We have seen a shocking rise in antisemitism and Islamophobic incidents in recent days and weeks. It is National Hate Crime Awareness Week and we heard about Show Racism The Red Card yesterday, so can we have a debate in Government time on the importance of tackling hate crime on the basis of race and religion, particularly the important work that faith communities are doing to respond to those issues and to increase cohesion? We have had terrible examples of these issues in the past in my own community, but the response of faith communities has always been amazing. Could we have a chance to praise that work and to share good practice?

Penny Mordaunt: ... He is right that we need to point to good practice and the tremendous number of organisations who are doing wonderful work across communities, ensuring people are brought together and stand against those individuals who seek to divide and spread hate. ...

col 420 Jeff Smith (Labour): ... We have all been horrified and devastated by the Hamas attacks on innocent Israeli civilians and by the suffering of innocent Palestinian civilians facing an unfolding humanitarian crisis. We urgently need the release of the Israeli hostages and we need the opening of viable and sufficient humanitarian and medical relief corridors.

Like a number of Members, I have constituents stranded in Gaza. They are in a terrible situation and it can be very difficult for us to know how to get help to them. I trust that we will get regular updates on the situation next week. Can they include specifically any updates on how we can best engage with the Government and other agencies to get help for our constituents? Further to what the Leader of the House said earlier, will she make arrangements for regular virtual updates as appropriate while we are in prorogation? ...

Penny Mordaunt: ... Those who have worked with Foreign Office consular services will know that they are incredibly diligent and work very hard to ensure that people are kept informed about things, and also that cases can be resolved. I will certainly undertake to ensure that, before Parliament is prorogued, all Members of this House have very clear information about where they can get updates. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-19/debates/881209EF-D7BB-4761-ABB2-FBF78E8D97AE/BusinessOfTheHouse>

House of Commons Written Answers

Middle East: Violence

John Howell (Conservative) [202646] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the debate on Escalation of violence in the Middle-East following the recent Hamas attack on Israel, which was held at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 11 October 2023.

David Rutley: We echo the sentiments of the President of the Parliamentary

Assembly of the Council of Europe in wishing strength to all those who have become victims of the enormous tragedy in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). We express our steadfast and united support to Israel, and our unequivocal condemnation of Hamas and its appalling acts of terrorism. Hamas does not speak for or act in the interests of the Palestinian people. Israel has the absolute right to defend itself and its military operations must be conducted in strict accordance with International Humanitarian Law. Civilians must be respected and protected at all times. The Prime Minister has spoken with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on 12 October. He reiterated the need to ensure the protection of innocent civilians and underlined the importance of safe humanitarian access to Gaza.

The UK Government has authorised the sending of a significant support package to the region, UK military assets will support regional stability and prevent escalation. On the 16 October, the Prime Minister announced a further £10 million in humanitarian funding for civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), in response to the escalating conflict. We will continue to work with our regional partners so that essential aid can reach civilian populations in Gaza including food, water, fuel and medical supplies.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-16/202646>

Information about the debate referred to above can be read at

<https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9242/escalation-of-violence-in-the-middle-east-pace-holds-current-affairs-debate>

Israel: Hamas

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [202506] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he has taken to support Israel in its defence against Hamas terrorism.

James Heapey: The UK and Israel have a long-standing and deep defence relationship. The Prime Minister has offered support to the Israeli Defence Forces but no decisions have yet been taken on the shape of that support.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-13/202506>

Israel: Hamas

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [202507] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing air support to Israel from RAF Akrotiri in its war against Hamas.

James Heapey: RAF Akrotiri offers important basing options for the United Kingdom in the Eastern Mediterranean. We will not, however, offer comment further on operational matters.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-13/202507>

Israel: Defence Equipment

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [202275] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what information his Department holds on whether military equipment supplied from the UK has been used by Israel in its recent military operations in Gaza.

James Heapey: The Government operates a robust and thorough pre-licensing assessment against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria and we will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with that criteria.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-13/202275>

Gaza: Al-Ahli Arab Hospital Explosion

The Foreign Secretary's answer to an Urgent Question on this subject was read in the Lords.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): ... we—the Opposition and the Government—are at one, united in support of Israel against terrorism, and we mourn the deaths of Palestinians and Israelis, and particularly the loss of life at the Al-Ahli Hospital. President Biden made it clear that he believed the main achievement of his trip to Israel was to persuade Israel to allow humanitarian relief deliveries across the Egypt-Gaza border. After speaking to Egyptian President al-Sisi, Egypt agreed to open the Rafah crossing to allow 20 trucks with humanitarian aid to enter—obviously, a limited number. As President Biden said, the roads and the infrastructure to get that aid in has been badly damaged and need repairs. The real issue of the next few days and weeks is: will aid get through, is fuel getting through, and is the United Kingdom helping to facilitate that? My specific question is—I heard what the Minister said earlier today: what are we doing to support Egypt to get that aid through as well as support for those people who are in such desperate need of assistance?

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon): ... Humanitarian aid getting through to Gaza is a key government priority and we are working with key partners. President Biden's visit recently was very much focused on that, and progress has been made. As I came into the Chamber I checked again; although the situation is fluid and the border is not yet open, the noble Lord is correct that the convoys are ready. We are engaging quite directly. I mentioned earlier that both my right honourable friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are in the region. The Foreign Secretary was in Egypt this morning and had a detailed discussion with Foreign Minister Shoukry, who I am also in touch with, on these very issues and some of our key priorities, including the hostages and the departure of British nationals from Gaza. It is also important that we look at the inward flow of humanitarian support. It is not yet operational but I assure the noble Lord and indeed all in your Lordships' House that this is a key government priority, and with the Foreign Secretary's meeting today in Egypt we are engaging quite directly and bilaterally at the highest level in terms of diplomacy.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat): ... There needs to be a proper investigation as to the source of the tragedy. Does he agree with me, however, that we need a humanitarian cessation of hostilities to ensure that life-saving aid, food and water are provided and restored to Gaza and to allow for intense diplomatic activity to be carried out to prevent a wider escalation? I am sure that he agrees with that final element, and I pay tribute to the work that he has been doing with regional powers. That pause would also allow continuing support from these Benches and across the House for Israel's absolute right to self-defence under international law against Hamas terrorism and to recover hostages.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, again I thank the noble Lord for his contribution and for the important message that is going out in our united front, as well as our united front in recognising the suffering of ordinary Palestinian civilians in Gaza, made all the worse by Hamas's abhorrent actions. I assure him that we are prioritising that. There are moving parts to it. Yes, there is Egypt and Israel, but a majority of Gaza is still controlled by Hamas, and that is one of those areas of concern with regard to the security logistics for those who will be taking such support through. The other issue, which I know other noble Lords have been seized of as well, is the previous diversion of aid and support which has gone into Gaza. All these factors add to the complications on the ground but it is important that we

look to prioritise humanitarian support, which we are doing, and we will also focus on ensuring that this is done in the most secure manner possible.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Conservative): ... Can the Minister confirm that the facts that have now come out establish that this was not an Israeli-induced explosion at all and came from an internal rocket that failed, according to the current detailed arguments which been put forward and confirmed? Does he deplore that the Hamas version of this story, which was that 500 had been killed by an Israeli rocket, rattled around the world for quite a long time and was carried, regrettably, by British and American publications, including the BBC? Is this a matter where some move could be taken, while these are independent and free press organs, to encourage organisations such as the BBC News department to take a more cautiously impartial approach rather than regarding it as having two sides, between the butchers and the butchery, and those who suffer and have their throats cut and killed and those who do the killing? There are not two sides in this matter: it is bestiality and evil versus the public and international and world good. Can those sort of views be gently—perhaps privately—put to those who just seize on the latest propaganda for Hamas, which is a very evil organisation?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, my noble friend is correct. We are of course looking at the tragedy which has befallen the Al-Ahli Arab hospital in Gaza. As I said earlier, it is a hospital with strong connections to the Anglican community and has provided, over many years, an important service. On the issue of attribution, as my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary said yesterday, we are working with all key partners, as well as internally to make our own assessment, to establish what happened there. I am not going to speculate any further at this time: work is under way on attribution.

The important point within all this is that the people who have suffered are those who were in the hospital: those who were seeking urgent assistance and support, and among the most vulnerable. It is therefore important that, in establishing the facts, we also do not lose sight of the issue of humanitarian support ...

Lord Stirrup (Crossbench): ... does the Minister agree that the rapid and largely uninformed responses to this tragedy underscore the importance of the information war in this conflict, and that while nothing is likely to move the majority of public opinion in many Arab countries, nevertheless in the context of the wider world, it is crucial that credible evidence on the cause of this disaster is put into the public domain as soon as possible?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: ... we are assessing the facts and the noble and gallant Lord will know of the importance of assessment and evidence. It is right, I believe, that we take time to ensure that the narrative that prevails is one which is based on the evidence that we ourselves have assessed. On wider reporting, I personally think it extremely tragic that we live in a very information-based world today where there are many people commenting on every utterance, including those of government Ministers. I assure the noble and gallant Lord that while everything which is said is being assessed and interpreted in a particular way, we want to ensure that, as far as possible, the facts are established and then, as my right honourable friend said, we will of course share them.

The Lord Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham: I am grateful to the Minister for highlighting the very real connections that there are between the Anglican Church and the hospital. The Al-Ahli hospital is run by the Anglican province of Jerusalem, as he knows, and built around the sacred and historic St Philip's church, which was subject to such an horrendous incident on Tuesday. We grieve with all those who grieve the suffering and the innocent deaths in Israel and Gaza arising from the atrocious attack by Hamas.

The Archbishop of Jerusalem, Archbishop Hosam, called on people in a press conference yesterday to pray for peace, but also paid particular tribute to the extraordinary dedication and bravery of the nurses, doctors and administrators working in the hospital in such desperate conditions. Can the Government continue to impress upon the Government of

Israel how essential it is, in particular, that fresh medical supplies reach the hospitals of Gaza, while also ensuring maximum protection for those buildings? Does the Minister also agree that such incidents, whatever the cause or intention, are very detrimental to the longer-term security and peace that Israel and the Palestinians deserve, in that they risk perpetuating the cycle of violence for generations to come? Protecting the hospitals in Gaza should therefore be a very high priority.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I agree with the right reverend Prelate and pay tribute to the incredible courage and bravery of the doctors and nurses around the world who play a pivotal role in providing medical support, often in the most trying of circumstances. That was exactly the case in the Al-Ahli Arab hospital. I agree also about the important role that faith has, particularly when we look at the current situation in Israel and Gaza. I know Archbishop Hosam very well. We were working directly with many faith communities prior to this conflict; that will continue to be the case. ...

The head of faith—the head of the church—and the head of our Government is His Majesty, and I was very taken by the poignant tone and substance of a speech he made at Mansion House. He himself said that we are a country defined by our communities. That is the strength of the rich diversity in our nation. When something is celebrated in many parts of the world, including in Israel and by the Palestinians, we should not forget that this is not just about Islam and Judaism, as some people claim, since 20% of the Israeli population are Arab. Many of them are Muslim, yes, but many are Christian as well. The right reverend Prelate mentioned prayers for peace, so perhaps we should end with that word: peace; shalom; salaam.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-10-19/debates/AFE5CD4B-50AB-48E9-A13C-0E81768AE0B5/GazaAl-AhliArabHospitalExplosion>

Gaza: Post-conflict Reconstruction

Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to coordinate action to rebuild Gaza after the war.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon): My Lords, rebuilding a safe and stable Gaza will be a high priority for the international community but the United Kingdom's immediate focus is on helping to co-ordinate immediate humanitarian assistance. On Monday, my right honourable friend the Prime Minister announced an increase of £10 million of support to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We are working closely with the UN and partners in the region to ensure that humanitarian support urgently reaches civilians in Gaza. As the Prime Minister said, we are stepping forward with humanitarian support, working to protect civilians from harm and straining every sinew to keep the flame of peace and stability alive.

Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe: ... Looking beyond that, can the Minister confirm that he believes in the existence of a viable Gaza after we find a peace of some sort? To secure that peace, does he agree that we must try to bring into play all possible actors in the region, including some of those who have hitherto declined to get involved in any settlement? In that context, does he recall the debate in this Chamber led by the noble Lord, Lord Polak, on the Abraham accords and some of the positive ideas suggested in it about how we can improve the economic circumstances of Gaza and the surrounding area? In particular, my colleague the noble Lord, Lord Stone, suggested that there should be a complete change in economic approach, bringing in the Saudis. As a result, the Saudis ... responded to the noble Lord's suggestion, but I found that the Government have not followed that up. Will the Government pursue this with the Saudis as a basis on which something might be built for peace?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, the hostages are a priority. Irrespective of whatever faith we follow, or no faith, I am sure that all our prayers and thoughts are with them. We want their safe return and peace and calm restored. A stable Gaza is in the interests of the whole region, but it is clear that the leadership of Hamas—if you can so call this abhorrent terrorist group, which is proscribed in the United Kingdom—is not the future for Gaza, the Palestinians or the people of the region. Of course the Abraham accords are important. We are working with key partners and, as the noble Lord is aware, my right honourable friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are currently in the region.

Lord Polak (Conservative): My Lords, I welcome the Prime Minister's visit to Israel, which is an important statement. Does my noble friend agree that, before we can talk about the construction of a new Gaza, there must be a destruction of all the terror infrastructure underneath Gaza, which is causing the problem?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, while the situation in Gaza was extremely challenging prior to this conflict, it is an inescapable truth that Hamas as an organisation, through what it subscribes to and its actions in Israel—the killing, murder and maiming of so many, including innocent women and children—does not represent the interests of any people who are like-minded about our common humanity. I agree with my noble friend that Hamas should be something that we talk about as the past—that it was defeated and the infrastructure was put to rest—because even now, in the most desperate situation in which Gazans find themselves, missiles continue to land in Israel.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench): My Lords, does the Minister agree that the first step in rebuilding Gaza is to stop the US-backed Israeli destruction of its infrastructure and the merciless killing of its inhabitants, including the sick in hospitals, in collective punishment for the sins of Hamas? Does he also agree that the USA, which has given support to Israel to invade Gaza, should not only meet the financial costs of reconstruction but pay reparations to survivors?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I speak not for the US Government but for the British Government. However, we both stand by the provision of humanitarian support around the world—a proud tradition irrespective of political leadership that continues today for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. As I have said, the Prime Minister has announced additional funding and support. We are focused on that vital humanitarian support, but I am sure that the noble Lord recognises that Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people. This is a very fluid situation. It is time for calm heads. Everyone was shocked to their core by the devastation we saw at the Al-Ahli Hospital—I pay particular tribute to the Lords spiritual for the strong Anglican tradition associated with that hospital—but we cannot jump to conclusions. At a time of conflict, we must ensure that there is patience, resolve and calm before we look at attribution. I assure noble Lords that the United Kingdom Government, as my right honourable friends the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have said, are looking at this very carefully.

Lord Turnberg (Labour): My Lords, does the noble Lord agree that a Hamas-free Gaza, if we can ever get to that point, will provide an enormous opportunity for the case to be made strongly for a possible Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza? Does he agree that, with Hamas there, that is impossible?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I reflected the noble Lord's sentiments in my earlier responses. We are engaging with all key partners, including the Palestinian Authority. Earlier this morning I had a meeting with Hussein al-Sheikh, a senior member of the Executive of Mr Abbas. The Prime Minister has engaged directly with President Abbas, I have spoken to Foreign Minister al-Maliki, and the Foreign Secretary has been fully engaged. We have done so because the PA represents those who represent the interests of the Palestinians. In the future of

that region, the rights and protection of all citizens, irrespective of faith or community, must be upheld. For the long-term horizon, that means a sustainable, two-state solution with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace. However, at this moment we must ensure the return of the hostages, that this threat from Hamas is put to bed and, ultimately, that sustainable peace can be achieved. We all wish and pray for a future in that region without Hamas.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, on Tuesday, just hours before the terrible incident at the hospital to which the Minister referred ... an UNRWA school was hit. Fourteen UNRWA staff have been killed since 7 October and half a million Palestinians are currently sheltering in UNRWA facilities. I welcome the extra £10 million to the OPT, but this March I raised concerns that UK support to UNRWA has been more than halved since 2018, from over £70 million to £28 million. Does the Minister agree that there is now an urgent need for the UK fully to replenish our support for UNRWA, which will save lives?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I was at the UN in September. Two countries often come in for criticism around the protection and defence of Israel—the United Kingdom and the United States. The biggest new pledge to UNRWA, of \$73 million, came from the United States and the second-biggest came from the United Kingdom, doubling our support of £10 million. This new money is in addition to that. I accept that we have had to make reductions to ODA programmes around the world, but I am sure the noble Lord accepts that, when it really matters, it is countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States that stand up for those people who need the greatest level of support.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, the Minister is absolutely right that it has been the United Kingdom and United States standing up for UNRWA, although we have had severe cuts there, but the Question is about the future and how we are working. James Cleverly said yesterday that the Palestinians are victims of Hamas as well. We must remember that. How do we ensure that we do not just rely on the United States but work with countries such as Saudi Arabia so that the proper funds are put back into Palestine?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: ... All of us care about people suffering around the world and the issue of the Palestinians is no exception. I recognised that engagement in the meetings I had this morning. Prior to this, as the noble Lord, Lord Brooke, said in his Question, we were working with key partners. I was extensively engaged on new memorandums of understanding that we have signed with Gulf partners on issues of development. This needs not just the US and the UK. We should get away from “the East”, “the western world” and the “Islamic world”. I am a Muslim of the West. Am I conflicted? No, I am not. I am proud of the traditions of this country—my country—because we stand up for the people when they need us the most. We are working with Israel; of course we are a steadfast partner, but we are also working to ensure that the Palestinians see a future horizon which is bright and in which they recognise that they can live their lives in peace, in a sustainable way with their neighbours.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-10-19/debates/0D73A823-2C1F-4DF3-AC4D-8EDE74C6550F/GazaPost-ConflictReconstruction>

House of Lords Library Briefing

Israel-Hamas conflict: Latest developments

<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/israel-hamas-conflict-latest-developments/>

Downing Street

PM meeting with the President of the Palestinian Authority: 20 October 2023

... The Prime Minister expressed his deep condolences for the loss of civilian lives in Gaza, including the terrible destruction of the Al Ahli hospital earlier this week.

The leaders agreed on the need for all parties to take steps to protect civilians, and civilian infrastructure, and minimise the loss of innocent lives. They condemned Hamas' terrorism and stressed that Hamas do not represent the Palestinian people.

The Prime Minister underscored his commitment to opening up humanitarian access to Gaza to alleviate the suffering of thousands of people who desperately need food, water and medicine. He updated on his conversations with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Sisi on this subject.

The Prime Minister reiterated the UK's long-standing commitment to the two-state solution and to achieving a future where Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace and security.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-the-president-of-the-palestinian-authority-20-october-2023>

PM meeting with President el-Sisi of Egypt: 20 October 2023

... The leaders said that the loss of life in Israel and Gaza over the last few days was truly tragic. They agreed that global leaders should do everything possible to avoid a contagion of conflict in the region, and that every effort must be made to stop terrorism and protect civilians.

The Prime Minister updated President Sisi on the conversations he has had with leaders in the region during his visit. The leaders agreed on the importance of keeping up dialogue to prevent regional escalation.

The Prime Minister welcomed efforts by Egypt to reopen the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza as soon as possible. He said that the UK was committed to playing its part in helping the civilians of Gaza and alleviating the dire humanitarian situation there.

The Prime Minister said that £10 million uplift to the UK's humanitarian aid to the region was the first manifestation of that commitment. As a next step, the leaders agreed to work together to ensure the process of getting aid into Gaza is as efficient and effective as possible. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-president-el-sisi-of-egypt-20-october-2023>

PM meeting with the Amir of Qatar: 20 October 2023

... The leaders agreed that the loss of civilian life following Hamas' attacks was shocking and tragic. They underlined the imperative of avoiding any escalation in the violence across the region and agreed that leaders had a responsibility to do everything possible to prevent it.

The Prime Minister thanked Qatar for their efforts to secure the release of hostages taken by Hamas two weeks ago, including British nationals. He said that the UK Government would use all the tools at our disposal to support these efforts and end the torment of the victims and their families. The leaders agreed to stay in close contact to continue these efforts.

The Prime Minister and the Amir welcomed progress on opening up humanitarian access to Gaza. They agreed on the urgent need to get food, water and medicine to civilians who are suffering. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-the-amir-of-qatar-20-october-2023>

Rishi Sunak I welcome the release of two US hostages in Gaza and thank Qatar for their leadership on this issue. I discussed efforts to free hostages with Amir @TamimBinHamad today and we will continue to work tirelessly with Qatar, Israel and others to ensure all hostages come home safely.

<https://twitter.com/RishiSunak/status/1715483358078112227>

Rishi Sunak We all have a shared interest of ensuring peace and stability in the Middle East. Dialogue must prevail. [plus video]

<https://twitter.com/RishiSunak/status/1715434920791638524>

Rishi Sunak I am in Egypt as part of wider efforts to prevent the spread of violence following the Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel. All leaders must work together to avoid any regional escalation and ensure humanitarian aid reaches civilians in Gaza. The UK stands ready to help.

<https://twitter.com/RishiSunak/status/1715358753157939402>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Foreign Secretary statement at the Cairo Peace Summit

... I am sure we all share the revulsion at Hamas's murderous acts of terrorism, the targeting of civilians, the murdering of children, the desecration of dead bodies. And I'm sure we are all distressed by the plight of Palestinian civilians in Gaza whose lives have been made harder, more painful and more dangerous because of the brutal attacks by Hamas on the 7th of October. And we all mourn the dead, both Israeli and Palestinian.

This has been an issue which has long stimulated passions and we are now all seeing on social media and in our communities how divisive and polarising the current situation has become. So we have a duty, a duty to work together to prevent instability from engulfing the region and claiming yet more lives. We must work together to prevent the tragic situation in Gaza becoming a regional conflict because that is exactly what Hamas wants. We remind ourselves that just months ago the Negev summit was a moment of hope, hope for peaceful coexistence between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Hamas has long stood in direct opposition to that vision and we must therefore ensure that Hamas does not win. Rather, we must ensure the peaceful co-existence wins.

The UK notes the thoughtful and calm words of President Abbas on behalf of the Palestinian people, and we are grateful to the governments who are seeking to intercede on behalf of those held hostage and those foreign nationals who are trapped in Gaza. And we are grateful for the work to ensure that the humanitarian aid, which many of us have partially funded, reaches those Gazans who are deeply in need.

The UK is clear and has been consistently clear that Israel has the right to self-defence and the right to secure the release of those who were kidnapped on the 7th of October. And we are also clear that we must work and they must work to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza and that their actions are in accordance with international law. I have spoken directly to the Israeli government about their duty to respect international law and the importance of preserving civilian lives in Gaza. Despite the incredibly difficult circumstances, I have called for discipline and professionalism and restraint from the Israeli military. ...

I still believe that we can work together to secure a future where Israelis and Palestinians live in peace.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-statement-at-cairo-peace-summit>

James Cleverly Get British nationals and British hostages out of Gaza. Get humanitarian aid into Gaza. Stop the conflict spreading to the region. [plus video]
<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1716091347969384638>

James Cleverly Trucks carrying lifesaving aid are beginning to cross at Rafah into Gaza. This aid is a lifeline for those suffering. But it cannot be a one off. The UK continues to push for humanitarian access to Gaza.
<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1715634181164728610>

Gaza: what you can do to help. How to donate responsibly to help the people of Gaza.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gaza-what-you-can-do-to-help>

Updated Travel Advice: Israel
<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

Updated Travel Advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories
<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

Ministry of Defence

Defence Secretary Grant Shapps visits US for urgent talks in support of global stability amid Gaza-Israel crisis

... Following Hamas' barbaric attack on Israel and Ukraine's continued defence against Putin's illegal invasion, Defence Secretary Grant Shapps visited Washington D.C. ... to hold urgent talks with his counterpart and members of Congress, in support of global stability. The UK and US stand firm in our shared commitment to uphold international law and protect civilian lives wherever freedom is challenged. That commitment has been clear in the last week as our two countries have led the response to prevent escalation in the Middle East, and support Israel's right to defend itself - taking all steps possible to minimise civilian casualties.

Prior to the trip, Grant Shapps held calls with his Israeli counterpart, Minister Gallant, to set out the UK's support to Israel and to urge the importance of a proportional response to the situation. ...

The Prime Minister ordered the deployment of surveillance aircraft and RFA ships to the Eastern Mediterranean to support regional stability and announced the UK will provide a further £10 million in humanitarian aid funding for civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

Defence Secretary Grant Shapps said: The UK and US are determinedly standing up to aggressors and terrorists and supporting our friends and partners in the fight for freedom and security. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-grant-shapps-visits-us-for-urgent-talks-in-support-of-global-stability-amid-gaza-israel-crisis>

Scottish Government

Humza Yousaf How can this be justified? What crime have these babies committed? This is why collective punishment must be called out and condemned. Let aid in, including fuel. Otherwise, these images should haunt us for the rest of our lives. A ceasefire is needed and needed now. [plus photo and link to Medical Aid for Palestinians]

<https://twitter.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1715835260720607644>

Secretary-General's remarks to Cairo Summit for Peace

... Yesterday I went to the Rafah border crossing.

There I saw a paradox -- a humanitarian catastrophe playing out in real time.

On the one hand, I saw hundreds of trucks teeming with food and other essential supplies.

On the other hand, we know that just across the border, there are two million people -- without water, food, fuel, electricity and medicine.

Children, mothers, the elderly, the sick.

Full trucks on one side, empty stomachs on the other. ...

But the people of Gaza need a commitment for much, much more -- a continuous delivery of aid to Gaza at the scale that is needed. ...

Let's be clear.

The grievances of the Palestinian people are legitimate and long.

We cannot and must not ignore the wider context for these tragic events: the long-standing conflict and 56 years of occupation with no end in sight.

But nothing can justify the reprehensible assault by Hamas that terrorized Israeli civilians.

And those abhorrent attacks can never justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

International humanitarian law -- including the Geneva Conventions -- must be upheld.

That includes protecting civilians and not attacking hospitals, schools and UN premises that are currently sheltering half a million people. ...

Our near-term goals must be clear:

Immediate, unrestricted and sustained humanitarian aid for besieged civilians in Gaza.

Immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

And immediate and dedicated efforts to prevent the spread of violence which is increasing the risk of spillover.

To advance all these efforts, I appeal for a humanitarian ceasefire now. ...

As we focus on ending the bloodshed, we cannot lose sight of the only realistic foundation for a true peace and stability: a two-State solution.

Israelis must see their legitimate needs for security materialized, and Palestinians must see their legitimate aspirations for an independent State realized, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-10-21/secretary-generals-remarks-cairo-summit-for-peace>

As Geopolitical Tensions Escalate, United Nations, Regional Organizations Must Strengthen Cooperation, Preventive Diplomacy, Speakers Tell Security Council

... **Mohamed Khaled KHIARI, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific**, noted that, today, the stakes for preventive diplomacy and dialogue could not be higher, warning that absent a negotiated two-State solution for Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the vicious cycle of violence risks plunging the entire region into conflict for years and generations to come. With the post-cold-war period over and a transition under way to a new global order, he noted that "the world has entered a new era", but already it is marked by deepening divisions and retrenchment, with geopolitical tensions at their highest in decades. ...

"With increasing geopolitical strife and challenges to international norms, negotiated settlements of conflicts have been harder to achieve," he said, pointing to the pursuit of military solutions prominently featuring in recent conflicts for which the civilians are paying a heavy toll. ...

Regional organizations and frameworks, which have a critical role in resolving armed conflict, can bring credibility and legitimacy for preventive diplomacy, increase trust and reduce misperceptions, as well as enhance mechanisms for crisis management, he pointed out. They can also offer avenues for trust-building and détente, he added, highlighting that regional actions have successfully prevented conflicts and escalation throughout recent history. ...

Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, said the impact of the Council's work on preventing conflict will be in its results and "not in our statements". ... The United Arab Emirates believes that the current crisis in the Middle East is the result of the belief that conflict can be managed indefinitely, without addressing its root causes. This clearly not a solution, but rather highlights the need for international and regional actors to prioritize preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. While these tools are clear, "what we need is the political will to deploy them, even when the risks of failing are high". ...

Gerardo Peñalver Portal (Cuba) said the indiscriminate bombing by Israel against the Palestinian population and the destruction of housing, hospitals and civilian infrastructure, and the withholding of food, water and fuel from the Palestinian people, must stop immediately. Nothing can justify such actions which constitute serious violation of international law, he said, calling for an immediate ceasefire, access to humanitarian assistance for the civilian population and the prevention of forced displacement of Palestinians from land which belongs to them by right. There cannot be peace if atrocious violations of international humanitarian law are allowed, such as those being perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, against Palestine, he said, adding that the complicity of the United States in the commission of these war crimes is shameful and sets a dangerous precedent. ...

Amir Saeid Irvani (Iran) ... [said] Iran deplores the uptick in atrocities and collective punishment against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip by Israel, particularly the attacks on the Al Ahli Arab Hospital. Voicing disappointment at the Council's inability to adopt a basic resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and addressing the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Palestine, he urged the organ to take action to end a tragedy that amounts to genocide and crimes against humanity. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc14548.doc.htm>

Third Committee Urges States to Classify Domicide, Conflict-Related Starvation, Poverty Wages as War Crimes, Ramp Up National, Multilateral Responses

... **Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context** ... said today we need to recognize domicile as an international crime of its own standing. This applies equally to indiscriminatory rocket attacks by Hamas on many communities in Israel and to massive attacks on and destruction of apartment buildings and civilian infrastructure in Gaza by Israeli bombing — killing, injuring and displacing thousands of people. ...

On the theme of conflict, **the delegate for Israel** noted that Member States who want to implement measures to secure adequate housing for their populations under hostilities must instead invest those funds in building bomb shelters. ...

Mr. Rajagopal ... [said] There is not only an obligation to treat intentional destruction as a crime, he said, but an obligation to repair and rebuild. He said that, per capita, the people of Gaza already have incomes comparable to those of other very poor least-developed countries. Further, military actions end up damaging houses that belong to innocent people who have nothing to do with terrorism. ...

Michael Fakhri, Special Rapporteur on the right to food ... called on the Third Committee to include language in its resolution on the right to food to prevent genocide and starvation in Gaza and elsewhere. ... starvation recently has been used to trigger ethnic cleansing, he said, citing the blocking of aid to Armenian civilians in Nagorno-Karabakh and now to Palestinian civilians in Gaza. He expressed serious alarm about the risk of genocide in Gaza ...

... **the representative of Israel** said it is not her country that is denying the right to food. "It is Hamas, whatever food, electricity and fuels that exist within Gaza are used by Hamas for the maintenance of their terror forces and infrastructure," she stressed. She added that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) announced that such resources had been stolen by Hamas militants from their facilities and then deleted their statement. She emphasized that it is utterly shameful that any accusation in the context of the right to food is made against Israel. "We know these supplies will only feed the death machine and their dreadful terror organization," she said, stressing that the only entity with genocidal aspirations is Hamas. "They say it, they do it. Why do you disregard their actions harming the Palestinians?" she asked, urging other delegations to speak out for the Palestinians, deprived of the right to food.

The representative of Syria said that Israel and its allies are facing tremendous problems in promoting their allegations to cover their crimes against humanity. "It is obvious who is the victim and who is the occupying authority," he stated. **The representative of Iran** urged States to ensure the right to food for innocent Palestinians in Gaza under the siege of the Israeli apartheid regime. ...

The representative of the European Union ... condemned Hamas and its brutal terrorist attacks across Israel, reiterating the importance of ensuring the protection of civilians. ...

The representative of the United States said that Israel, like all countries under the Charter of the UN, has the right to defend itself. He also noted the concerning shift in Member States' terminology from "violent extremism" to vague "extremism" without qualifiers, which can negatively affect the ability of civil society members and human rights defenders to exercise their rights of freedom of expression. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2023/gashc4388.doc.htm>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Update: OPT/Israel

With over 3,700 people killed in Gaza and 1,000 more presumed under the rubble, as well as 1,300 people killed in Israel, and a further one million Palestinians – half of them children – reportedly displaced, we implore all parties to allow the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for all civilians in need, wherever they are.

At the same time, we remain very concerned that Israeli Forces' heavy strikes are continuing across Gaza, including in the south. The strikes, coupled with extremely difficult living conditions in the south, appear to have pushed some to return to the north, despite the continuing heavy bombing there.

We are also concerned about continued indiscriminate rockets being fired from Gaza into Israel.

We also reiterate that all civilians captured and held by Palestinian armed groups must be released immediately and unconditionally. The taking of hostages is prohibited by international law.

We are extremely alarmed by the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied West Bank and the increase in unlawful use of lethal force. ...

For the past 13 days, many Palestinians in the West Bank have been denied freedom of movement, including being prevented from reaching hospitals to receive life-saving care.

Restrictions on freedom of movement must be necessary and proportionate to achieve a legitimate aim.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, stresses that it is of paramount importance that all parties must respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law. In the conduct of hostilities, the principles of necessity, distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack must be respected at all times by everyone.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2023/10/update-optisrael>

UN experts say rights of victims of terrorism must be protected, insist counter-terrorism cannot be basis to breach international law

UN experts ... unequivocally condemned the targeting of and violence against civilians in Israel and Gaza.

They condemned the atrocity of terrorist acts carried out by Hamas on Israel civilians starting on the morning of 7 October, in Israeli towns, villages, homes and at an open-air dance party for young people.

“We decry the scale of the brutal assault on mothers, children, babies, the elderly and ordinary citizens going about their daily lives on the Jewish Sabbath and on a Jewish religious holiday (Sukkot),” the experts said. “The essence of terrorism is the targeting of civilians, and terrorist attacks leave the lives victims’ families, and survivors of these attacks irreparably damaged,” they said.

The number of those killed and injured stands at 1400 killed and more than 3300 injured. The experts said the scale and severity of injury was incalculable, and the wounded, their families and communities have a heavy painful road ahead.

They said these acts constitute gross violations of international law, particularly of international humanitarian law and specifically found that war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed in particular the crime against humanity of murder and persecution, the experts said.

In addition to the acts of perfidy, murder, and wounding it is estimated that nearly 200 people including elderly persons, seriously wounded persons, mothers and children and infants were kidnapped and taken hostage. The vast majority of hostages are civilians, and they included both citizens of Israel and citizens of other countries. While recognising the deep and decades long grievances and violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people under occupation, nothing justifies the targeting of civilians in this way.

“Hostage taking is absolutely prohibited under international law and constitutes a war crime. ICRC access must be provided to those taken hostage, and the hostages must receive medical care. No harm must come to the hostages taken and held incommunicado by Hamas. They must be released,” the experts said.

The experts welcomed solidarity and sympathy to victims of terrorism but said words alone do not discharge the legal obligations of the State to victims.

“Victims have a right to know what government actions or non-action contributed to violations of their right to life and other harms,” they said. “Victims have a right to necessary, medical, psychological, social and material assistance. They have a right to restitution and truth. They have a right to privacy. They have a right to remedy and information,” they said.

The UN experts also stressed their equal concern for victims of counter-terrorism measures. Acts of terrorism, no matter how horrific, absolutely do not justify the commission serious violations of international law including war crimes, or crimes against humanity, they noted.

Echoing the UN Secretary-General’s view, the experts said the evacuation order to Gaza which applied to approximately 1.1 million people, the majority of whom are children, will

have devastating consequences. They condemned the complete siege of Gaza including the cutting off of water and electricity which indiscriminately and excessively harms civilians and may constitute the war crime of starvation of civilians.

“The governing legal framework to this conflict is international humanitarian law, and that civilians must be protected,” the experts said. “Children are especially deserving of special protection in armed conflict and this fundamental rule must be observed not breached now in Gaza. Schools and hospitals filled with civilians -- primarily women and children -- cannot constitute a legitimate military target for either State or non-state armed groups. The grievous destruction of Al-Ahli hospital underscores the humanitarian consequence of non-compliance with IHL. Persons fleeing from military bombing must not be targeted. Breaches of these fundamental rules would constitute war crimes and may also constitute crimes against humanity,” they said.

The experts called on all states to fulfil their obligation to ‘ensure respect’ for international humanitarian law by all parties, including those states in a position to exercise influence over them and ensure accountability for all violations.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/un-experts-say-rights-victims-terrorism-must-be-protected-insist-counter>

Gaza: UN experts decry bombing of hospitals and schools as crimes against humanity, call for prevention of genocide

UN experts ... expressed outrage against the deadly strike at Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, which killed more than 470 civilians on Tuesday (17) and trapped hundreds under the rubble. The strike reportedly followed two warnings issued by Israel that an attack on the hospital was imminent if people inside were not evacuated.

“The strike against Al Ahli Arab Hospital is an atrocity. We are equally outraged by the deadly strike on the same day on an UNRWA school located in Al Maghazi refugee camp that sheltered some 4000 displaced people, as well as two densely populated refugee camps,” the experts said.

The experts raised serious humanitarian and legal concerns over Israel tightening its 16-year siege of the enclave and its population and long-standing occupation, depriving 2.2 million people of essential food, fuel, water, electricity and medicine. ...

They recalled that the UN Security Council has repeatedly condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, which is prohibited under international humanitarian and criminal law. The unlawful denial of humanitarian access and depriving civilians of objects indispensable to their survival are also a violation of international humanitarian law, the experts warned.

The UN experts called for the protection of all humanitarian workers ...

“The complete siege of Gaza coupled with unfeasible evacuation orders and forcible population transfers, is a violation of international humanitarian and criminal law. It is also unspeakably cruel,” the experts said.

They recalled that the wilful and systematic destruction of civilian homes and infrastructure, known as ‘domicide’, and cutting off drinking water, medicine, and essential food is clearly prohibited under international criminal law.

“We are sounding the alarm: There is an ongoing campaign by Israel resulting in crimes against humanity in Gaza. Considering statements made by Israeli political leaders and their allies, accompanied by military action in Gaza and escalation of arrests and killing in the West Bank, there is also a risk of genocide against the Palestinian People,” the experts said. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/gaza-un-experts-decry-bombing-hospitals-and-schools-crimes-against-humanity>

World Health Organisation

Joint statement by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO on humanitarian supplies crossing into Gaza

A first, but limited, shipment of life-saving humanitarian supplies from the United Nations and the Egyptian Red Crescent entered Gaza ... on 20 trucks, passing through the Rafah Crossing.

It will provide an urgently needed lifeline to some of the hundreds of thousands of civilians, mostly women and children, who have been cut off from water, food, medicine, fuel and other essentials. But it is only a small beginning and far from enough. ...

With so much civilian infrastructure in Gaza damaged or destroyed in nearly two weeks of constant bombings, including shelters, health facilities, water, sanitation, and electrical systems, time is running out before mortality rates could skyrocket due to disease outbreaks and lack of health-care capacity.

Hospitals are overwhelmed with casualties. Civilians face mounting challenges in accessing essential food supplies. Health facilities no longer have fuel and are running on small amounts they have secured locally. These are expected to run out in the next day or so. Water production capacity is at 5 per cent of normal levels. Pre-positioned humanitarian supplies have already been depleted. Vulnerable people are at greatest risk and children are dying at an alarming rate and being denied their right to protection, food, water and health care.

Nearly one-third of the population of Palestine was food insecure before this conflict in Gaza. Today stocks in shops are nearly exhausted and bakeries are closing, while tens of thousands of people are displaced and unable to cook or safely purchase food.

We call for a humanitarian ceasefire, along with immediate, unrestricted humanitarian access throughout Gaza to allow humanitarian actors to reach civilians in need, save lives and prevent further human suffering. Flows of humanitarian aid must be at scale and sustained, and allow all Gazans to preserve their dignity. ...

And we call for the utmost respect of international humanitarian law by all parties.

Gaza was a desperate humanitarian situation before the most recent hostilities. It is now catastrophic. The world must do more.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.who.int/news/item/21-10-2023-joint-statement-by-undp--unfpa--unicef--wfp-and-who-on-humanitarian-supplies-crossing-into-gaza>

UNRWA

The Gaza Strip: Fuel is running out, without fuel, humanitarian response will stop

“In three days, UNRWA will run out of fuel, critical for our humanitarian response across the Gaza Strip.

“Without fuel, there will be no water, no functioning hospitals and bakeries. Without fuel, aid will not reach those in desperate need. Without fuel, there will be no humanitarian assistance.

“No fuel will further strangle the children, women and people of Gaza.

“UNRWA is the largest humanitarian actor in the Gaza Strip. Without fuel, we will fail the people of Gaza whose needs are growing by the hour, under our watch. This cannot and should not happen.

“I call on all parties and those with influence over them to immediately allow fuel supplies into the Gaza Strip and to ensure that fuel is strictly used to prevent a collapse of the humanitarian response.

“UNRWA is currently hosting more than half a million people out of nearly 1 million displaced across the Gaza Strip.

“I welcome yesterday’s convoy into Gaza, the first in two weeks of a very tight siege impacting 2 million people. It is, however, far from enough. To be meaningful, Gaza needs an uninterrupted and scaled up humanitarian supply line.”

<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/gaza-strip-fuel-running-out-without-fuel-humanitarian-response-will>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

**** Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475>

Amendment paper

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/0325/amend/econactivity_rm_rep_1023.pdf

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186>

Holocaust Memorial Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3421>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3325>

Online Safety Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137>

Nakba Commemoration Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3461>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3217>

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3188>

Same Sex Marriage (Church of England)

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3438>

Schools Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156>

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/terrorism-protection-of-premises-draft-bill-overarching-documents>

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3163>

Universal Jurisdiction (Extension)

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3454>

Scottish Parliament

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

**** The Social Security (Residence and Presence Requirements) (Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [Draft]**

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/sdsi/2023/9780111058312/contents>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 4 days**

The future of population and migration statistics in England and Wales (closing date 26 October 2023)

<https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/ons/futureofpopulationandmigrationstatistics/>

**** closes in 9 days**

The UK's engagement with the Middle East and North Africa (closing date 31 October 2023)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3205/>

Management of burial grounds, application for burial, exhumation, private burial and restoration of lairs: regulation in Scotland (closing date 17 November 2023)

<https://consult.gov.scot/burial-cremation/regulation-burial-scotland/>

Statutory inspection of burial authorities, cremation authorities and funeral directors (closing date 17 November 2023)

<https://consult.gov.scot/burial-cremation/statutory-inspection-burial-authorities/>

Funeral director licensing scheme for Scotland (closing date 17 November 2023)

<https://consult.gov.scot/burial-cremation/licensing-funeral-directors-scotland/>

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) [Northern Ireland] (closing date 24 November 2023)

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/consultations/relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse-consultation>

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