



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Debate

Report Stage: Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

col 877 **Chris Stevens (SNP):** ... many in this House are deeply disappointed at what the Government are doing in proceeding with this Bill. As the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) said on Monday, “now is not the time.”—[[Official Report, 23 October 2023; Vol. 738, c. 611.](#)]

Let me say at the outset that we all condemn the killing of innocent civilians. We do condemn Hamas and their acts of terror on 7 October, and Hamas must release all hostages. We must equally recognise that there is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and it is legitimate to question the actions of the Israeli Government. It is perfectly legitimate to call for a ceasefire to address that crisis and let humanitarian aid flow in to save the lives of innocent Palestinian people.

There are vastly more people around these islands who are perplexed by the Government’s playing party political games when the middle east is in crisis and the rest of the world fears the start of an even broader conflict. This is not the time to seek electoral advantage through tripping up political opponents during semantic exchanges, exploiting small differences in language to pretend there is a vast gulf between positions, or selling that to the electorate as “one party good, all other parties bad.”

Caroline Lucas (Green): ... Does he agree that it is positively dangerous to do what this Government are doing when we see the huge rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia? Just now, our communities need us in Parliament to be showing a lead and to be united on this, and not to do something that is so divisive and so deliberately provocative and deeply damaging to the unity of our communities.

col 878 **Chris Stephens:** ... Many of us have that real fear. This is not the occasion to push forward this legislation. Polarisation is a game that has long been played by the Government, but this is not a game; this is real life, or the loss of it, and such cynicism has no place here. In Israel and Palestine, we have two peoples who feel that they are under

existential threat from the other. Almost everyone understands that, and we have all been trying to find solutions that will bring peace to that region. Ringfencing the interests of one group by diminishing the rights of the other can never yield a long-term solution to the entrenched problems in the middle east; it simply exacerbates the tension between the two. The very real fear, which the hon. Member has just expressed, is that it forces people into one camp or the other, it feeds hatred and it fuels the evil that is antisemitism.

It is not too late to withdraw the Bill. If the Government are determined to proceed with it, I hope they listen to the advice from both sides of the House, in particular from Government Back Benchers, and amend the clauses that will otherwise further inflame the divisions that the Government claim they are trying to heal. As with most conflicts, verbal and military, there tends to be collateral damage that has either not been fully anticipated or where the perpetrator simply does not care about the consequences. In their assumed aim of defending the rights of Israel, the Government are attacking the rights of many sectors of our own society, ranging from the legislative and judicial rights of the devolved Parliaments to the democratic rights of elected local authorities, and cutting a swathe through the individual human rights of all people across these islands.

In its long title, the Bill is described as: "A Bill to make provision to prevent public bodies from being influenced by political or moral disapproval of foreign states when taking certain economic decisions".

It would appear that public bodies are not fit to make political or moral judgments and, as we will see later, individuals are not fit to make such judgments either. ...

The pretext for introducing this legislation was an assumed need to respond robustly to the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement—or BDS—which advocates a complete boycott of Israel and Israeli people and which suggests that the state of Israel does not even have the right to exist. The Government ignore the fact that, in line with other Governments in Europe and the EU itself, the Scottish Government and the SNP unequivocally condemn and distance themselves from members or affiliates within the BDS movement. Rather than wish the state of Israel to cease to exist, most democratic countries are strong supporters of a two-state solution ...

More than 40 Israeli non-governmental organisations have called for this Bill to be rejected, as has the Union of Jewish Students and Yachad, with the latter saying that "we are unequivocal about the need to protect the right to express differences of opinions, even if they are opinions that we fiercely disagree with".

col 879 Let us listen to them. ... Amnesty International asserts that the Bill "would make it almost impossible for public bodies to use their procurement and investment policies to incentivise ethical business conduct that is human rights compliant." But we knew that already. ...

I see this Bill as a clear incitement to such companies to lessen their commitments to human rights and the environment, as they will no longer need them to gain public contracts. ...

The UK is in danger of being a rogue state in this field, going against the tide of international opinion, which considers that public bodies should use procurement and investment policies to incentivise business to be ethical and human rights compliant. ...

col 880 The Bill gives the enforcement authority the power to impose a compliance notice where they consider a person is likely to contravene the ban—not "has contravened", but "is likely to contravene". We are in the realms of Orwell's thought police or Philip K. Dick's "The Minority Report", with precogs catching criminals before they have even committed the crime. ...

Clause 4 of the Bill would prohibit public bodies and their leaders—such as university vice-chancellors, local council leaders, or even the chief executive of a private company delivering public services—from publishing public statements indicating that they intend to act in a way that would contravene the ban, or that they would, in theory, intend to act that way if not for the ban. A local council could no longer publish statements such as, "Our

local council would have boycotted these goods from this state-owned enterprise due to the state's conduct in relation to this territory, but the law does not permit this, and we intend to comply with the law." ...

Liberty has also pointed out that in other jurisdictions, anti-boycott laws have had a severe impact on freedom of expression. In one case in the US, a speech pathologist in Texas lost her school contract because she declined to sign an agreement promising not to boycott Israel on the basis of a similar anti-boycott law. In another, a dermatologist was withheld payment for a lecture for failing to agree not to boycott Israel. ...

Column 881 is located here

col 881 Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru): I have heard the Secretary of State say several times that the Conservatives are in favour of devolution, so should they not be required to seek consent from the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland before they proceed?

Chris Stephens: My hon. Friend is correct that they should. I suspect they will not receive it from either the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Senedd ...

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): ... Does he not think a better process would be for the Secretary of State now to withdraw the Bill altogether?

Chris Stephens: ... The right hon. Gentleman is right. ... We are all trying to make the Bill a little better but ... the ultimate solution would be to withdraw it entirely. ...

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): ... We need this Bill. ... This, of all times, is a time to stand with the Jewish community, following the worst attack on Jewish people since the holocaust.

BDS has been identified in a succession of studies as driving a rise in antisemitism. By singling out the world's only Jewish state for criticism, above and beyond that directed at any other country in similar circumstances, I believe BDS campaigns fall within the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. The French supreme court has ruled that BDS is discriminatory, and the German Parliament views the movement as antisemitic.

Since the shocking Hamas terror attacks, we have witnessed deeply disturbing scenes on our TV screens and in our streets. These include sickening so-called celebrations of the horrific murders in southern Israel, and the anti-Jewish racism and hatred visible at successive protests on the streets of our capital city. At a time like this, when Jewish people are in fear for their friends and relatives in Israel, it is appalling to compound their anxiety and distress with hate-filled banners and chants at such protests. I find it deeply depressing that "Jihad! Jihad!" has been shouted with impunity on the streets of our city, and that ISIS flags have been on blatant display.

col 882 The dramatic rise in antisemitic incidents is wholly unacceptable, and it shows us that we need campaigns to bring communities together, not drive them apart. There can be no doubt that BDS is absolutely focused on division, not unity. The BDS movement deplores co-existence and peacebuilding initiatives. For example, it has condemned co-operation between Israeli and Palestinian universities. The movement's founder, Omar Barghouti, has repeatedly expressed his opposition to Israel's right to exist.

As we go into the voting Lobbies this evening, we are in a situation where the question to be asked of all of us is: "Which side are you on?". I make it clear that I strongly support the right of Israel to defend its land and its citizens from terrorist attack.

Of course, we all worry about the plight of innocent Gazans put in harm's way by Hamas, who brutalise them and deliberately use them as human shields. Of course, we need to get supplies to civilians, so long as there is confidence that they cannot be diverted or misused by terrorists. We must always remember that it is Hamas who have endangered the people of Gaza. Hamas are the people who have caused the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

I am in no doubt that the Israeli Defence Forces are making, and will continue to make, the

greatest efforts possible to prevent civilian loss of life. Israel is one of the most democratic countries in the world, and it respects the rule of law. I am certain that its democratic and legal institutions will hold its armed forces rigorously to account. ...

We need our local authorities to concentrate on delivering services, not on conducting their own trade and foreign policy. ...

Angela Rayner (Labour): ... “When things are so delicate, we all have a responsibility to take additional care in the language we use, and to operate on the basis of facts alone.” — [\[Official Report, 23 October 2023; Vol. 738, c. 592.\]](#)

Those are the words of the Prime Minister in his statement to the House on Monday. He also said that “this is not a time for hyperbole and simplistic solutions.” ...

col 883 It goes without saying that the disgusting rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia since the attack on 7 October only makes that point more profound.

I fear that the Prime Minister’s powerful statement at the Dispatch Box earlier this week has been undermined by how he and his Ministers have brought this Bill before us today, at the last minute and with the least possible notice. The tension and disagreement surrounding the issues are well known to the Secretary of State yet, in the middle of a humanitarian emergency in the middle east, he has chosen this week of all weeks to force this legislation on to the parliamentary timetable ...

There can be no doubt that Labour is opposed to a policy of adopting boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel, as it wrongly singles out one individual nation and is counterproductive to the prospect of peace. ...

Stephen Crabb (Conservative): The right hon. Lady says with some force ... that Labour is clearly opposed to singling out Israel through BDS measures, yet where Labour is in government in the UK—Wales—the Welsh Labour Government sought to bring forward a procurement note that singled out Israel and the Palestinian territories. ...

Angela Rayner: ... we do not want one nation to be singled out in this boycott. We do not agree with boycott tactics ...

As it stands, the Bill has needlessly broad and sweeping draconian powers and far-reaching effects. It is poorly drafted legislation that risks creating fresh legal disputes, and will only serve as new flashpoints for community tension. We remain far from convinced that protracted legal battles over the BDS would serve or protect Jewish communities in the UK. ...

col 884 However, there is a way forward. In our view, it is not wrong for public bodies to take ethical investment and procurement decisions. There is a difference between applying consistent ethical principles in legitimate criticism of foreign Governments and what, in recent years, some individuals and organisations have tried to do: seek to target Israel alone; hold it to different standards from other countries; question its right to exist; and equate the actions of the Israeli Government to Jewish people and in doing so, create hate and hostility against Jewish people here in the UK. That is completely wrong.

Amendment 13, on which we will seek a vote today, addresses that problem. It would allow public bodies to produce a document setting out their policy on procurement and human rights. The policy would be cemented in a framework, based on principles that apply equally to all countries, rather than singling out individual nations. Such a statement of ethical policy would ensure consistency in how public bodies decide on these matters ...

Under Labour’s proposals, if a public body were to act only against a particular state—for instance, the world’s only Jewish state—and failed to comply a consistent approach to human rights everywhere, such actions would be unlawful. ...

... we have serious reservations about how the Bill effectively rewrites UK foreign policy by explicitly equating Israel with the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights. That is an unprecedented step that, to my knowledge, has never been taken in British statute and is unique in British legislation.

An essential cornerstone of British policy, supported across this House—and at the UN—

is support for a two-state solution as a viable long-term solution to give Israelis and Palestinians the recognition and security that they deserve. The wording of the Bill not only calls into question the UK's long-standing position in supporting a two-state solution but runs counter to the UN resolutions. ...

Secondly, and related, the Secretary of State claims that the Bill is non-country-specific and of general application, but the only states and territories named in the Bill are Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights. Quite apart from singling out Israel, the Bill applies as much to China, Myanmar and North Korea as it does to Israel. ...

col 885 It is important that people should be able to raise concerns appropriately and in the best way. The Bill does not allow that. ...

Thirdly, I want to re-emphasise the concerns raised by Members from all major parties about clause 4—the so-called gagging clause. I acknowledge the changes made to the explanatory notes in this area, but this unprecedented restriction could have far-reaching consequences for our democracy ... The seriousness of the clause must not be underestimated. It is an unprecedented restriction on the ability of the public bodies—many of them directly elected—to express a view on policy, effectively gagging them from even talking about it.

We are concerned that clause 4 would be incompatible with article 10 of the European convention on human rights, which protects freedom of expression. ...

Lastly, it is important to note that the Bill in its current form will not set out what it seeks to achieve. There are loopholes that will allow discriminatory acts to continue unchallenged. ...

Labour feels strongly that BDS practices against Israel offer no meaningful route to peace for the people of either Palestine or of Israel. ...

col 886 But let us be clear: the effect of BDS would be the total economic, social and cultural isolation of the world's only Jewish state, and there are those who use the campaign to whip up hostility towards Jewish people, providing no route to peace and a two-state solution. I can assure the Secretary of State that Labour will continue to condemn and oppose that in the strongest terms. ...

... now more than ever we expect councils to bring all their communities together and represent all their citizens. It would be utterly wrong to choose one community over another—or worse, pit one against another.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Conservative): ... Does she agree it was therefore very unhelpful for the Scottish Labour leader to use terms accusing Israel of breaching international law when we are discussing such a sensitive subject?

Angela Rayner: We rightly expect that our local government must surely stay by the principles I mentioned, but we must also make sure that our national Government do too. ...

col 887 **George Eustice (Conservative):** ... Every single Member of this House is obviously absolutely horrified by the tragedy that is unfolding and the barbaric atrocities committed by Hamas. In my case, I absolutely support the right of Israel to self-defence, but it is possible to believe all these things—to be a friend of Israel, too—but nevertheless to be reluctant to pass bad legislation through this House ...

More importantly, this sends an unfortunate signal around British foreign policy. It has been the long-standing position of all British Governments that we support a two-state solution and that the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are illegal. That is a consistent British Government position over a long period of time, and we must be careful not to send signals that that has changed. ...

... clause 4 is a strong violation of freedom of speech. It has come to something when we are saying that not only would people not be free to follow the procurement policy they want, but they would not even be allowed to say that the reason why they were not free to do so was this Bill. ...

Although much of the debate around the Bill is understandably conducted through the context of BDS and of Israel and the Palestinian situation, the scope of clause 1 is very broad. What is before us this evening is a broad procurement Bill that places quite broad restrictions on procurements and applies to every country in the world. ...

I want to focus on [the] schedule, because it lists lots of different issues that are outside the scope of clause 1, and rightly so, including “environmental misconduct”, but there is no mention of animal welfare. There will be times when public bodies will take a procurement decision based on animal welfare. They need to be free to do that ...

col 888 The Government buying standards were recently revised to encourage all public bodies and all Government Departments to take account of animal welfare in their procurement policies, but the Bill would appear to curtail the right of local authorities to do just that. ...

Margaret Hodge (Labour): ... To bring this wrong-headed, poorly drafted and politically motivated Bill back to the House in the midst of these horrors—horrors that we are seeing every hour of the day and every hour of the night, on our television screens and on social media—is an act of complete irresponsibility and unbelievable foolishness.

I speak as a proud Jew; I speak as a strong supporter of Israel, a committed Zionist; and I speak as someone who opposes the BDS movement and believes that its intent is to try to destroy the state of Israel. ... I know that I speak in the name of thousands of Jews in Britain, who are not always represented in this House—particularly by some Jewish Members in the House—and for millions of Jews in Israel. ...

col 889 This is an emotional time to us all—it is for me—but I urge Ministers: we should all be working together at this time. Every MP in this House should be working to calm things down in the middle east, to contain conflict, to secure the release of hostages and to stop the humanitarian catastrophe we are seeing in Gaza. ...

I put it to Ministers that the Bill contains proposals that will only heighten tensions between communities. Work by the Community Security Trust shows us that there has been a 651% increase in antisemitic attacks from 7 to 20 October. My own family and my own grandchildren have been subject to such attacks, and I know what difficulty this brings to many, many families in this country. The Bill will only deepen the hostilities. ...

The Bill will not help Israel as it seeks to defend itself against an existential threat. It will simply become just one more thing to enrage those people who oppose the state of Israel. It will not help Jews at all as we struggle to come to terms with the pogrom that took place in the kibbutzim and the music festival some two weeks ago. It will not help us as we all struggle to find a route to peace that allows Israel to defend itself without inflicting intolerable hardship on Palestinians, who have also become the victims of Hamas’s terrorist activity. ...

Sammy Wilson (DUP): ... I fail to see the logic of her point that a Bill that prevents local authorities deliberately highlighting their opposition to the existence of the state of Israel, and boycotting goods from it, is likely to lead to bad community relations. ...

Margaret Hodge: ... the Bill in itself is so contentious that it will not actually stop activity, but encourage those who want to argue against the state of Israel and want to argue against what is currently happening in the Israeli-Palestinian war. It will give them added strength ...

Andrew Percy (Conservative): ... the idea that we should not do something because the people who hate Israel will be even angrier about it does not seem to me to be a very credible argument. These people were out in front of the embassy in the immediate aftermath of the attacks demanding boycotts of Israel, before Israel even had time to respond. Is it really a credible argument that we should not do this because it might make the people who hate Israel even angrier?

col 890 **Margaret Hodge:** ... I said a little earlier that I oppose the BDS movement. I recognise that the BDS movement probably has the intention of trying to destroy the state

of Israel. I want to tackle that, but I think that doing so in the way that is proposed in this legislation will simply damage that intent, not meet it. ...

... if we speak against the Bill, they will try to paint us as antisemites. But I say to the Government that if they pass the Bill in its current form, it is they who will be encouraging antisemitism by fuelling hatred. They will be encouraging antisemitism by specifying on the face of the Bill only one country where the boycott of goods would be illegal, simply confirming in people's minds that Israel and the Israel-Palestine conflict is a special case, different from all the other cases around. ...

So why do the Government now select Israel? It is they who are encouraging antisemitism by gagging free speech in our universities and council chambers. It is they who are encouraging antisemitism by trampling on the democratic rights of local politicians. It is an incredible arrogance for us as MPs to sit here and think that somehow we are better than, or different from, locally elected councillors who also have political views and who also carry out important democratic jobs in their councils. ...

Stephen Crabb: ... Last week, some of us heard from Jewish students who were afraid to give their surnames because they were afraid of giving away their Jewish identity—afraid to admit that they were Jewish. One said that they felt as if Jews were being pushed out of British universities. If July was not a good time to introduce legislation to draw a line in the sand, and if now is an even worse time, when is a good time to make a stand on behalf of Jewish people who are at risk at this time?

col 891 **Margaret Hodge:** Let me start by saying that the growth of antisemitism on the streets and in our communities is absolutely terrible. It is affecting some of the youngest people in my own family, and it is dreadful to observe the impact that it has on young children. ... My point is that the legislation is so flawed that it does not meet its intent. I would love to work with Ministers, and with Members across the House, to produce a piece of legislation that would tackle the issue that we know exists in relation to BDS, but would do so in a way that was not contentious. ...

Let me just say this to the Secretary of State. He is trying to put forward legislation in the name of the Jewish community, but he is not doing so in my name, or in the name of literally thousands of people I talk to here in the UK who are all good Jews, proud of their Jewish identity. ...

col 892 **Michael Ellis (Conservative):** ... Perhaps I can give the House just two examples of why the Bill is needed. The first is the example of the now bankrupt Birmingham City Council, which threatened in 2014 not to renew a contract with the French multinational company Veolia due to its operations in the west bank. In 2015, Veolia withdrew from the Israeli market as a consequence and the BDS movement claimed that decision as a victory. Of course, that hurt Palestinians as well as everyone else. Another example, shamefully, is that of the supermarket Sainsbury's. In at least one of its branches, it was put under so much pressure that it removed kosher food products from its shelves following virulent anti-Israel protests. ...

My second point is that it is inherently discriminatory to engage in boycotts of this type. ... I pray in aid on this point none other than the Supreme Court of France, which ruled as long ago as 2009 that calls for a boycott of Israeli products in France constituted discrimination and were, as such, illegal under French law. I also refer Members to the German Parliament, which designated the BDS movement as antisemitic in May 2019. And again I cite the harm to Palestinians, with the infamous example of the soft drinks company Sodastream, which, under intense pressure, had to shut down its operations causing the loss of 500 Palestinian jobs. ...

... it was stated in evidence to one of the Bill Committees of this House some time ago that the BDS national committee, an international centre point for the movement, includes members of the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, which is a coalition of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Those are all terrorist organisations that are proscribed by His Majesty's Government. The general co-ordinator of the BDS national committee is Mahmoud Nawajaa, who has publicly supported Hamas's armed wing, the al-Qassam Brigades, and the leader of the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, Khaled al-Batsh, is a senior official of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a proscribed terrorist organisation funded and co-ordinated by Iran. ...

Brandon Lewis (Conservative): ... there is obviously a hugely important moral and ethical purpose to being clear about our opposition to antisemitism in any form, at any time and from any organisation, let alone the abhorrence of what BDS stands for, in the light of the terrorist atrocity that we have seen? ...

col 893 **Michael Ellis:** ... Israel clearly has a vibrant economy and welcomes everyone. I challenge those both outside this House and in other countries who support the BDS movement to bear in mind that I suspect that they would not be able to function in today's modern society if they were to personally boycott companies that are already deeply engaged in Israel and do business there. I will give some examples: Apple, Google, Intel, Microsoft, 3M, Alibaba, Amazon, Fujitsu, AOL, Siemens, Bosch, Sony, Texas Instruments, Samsung, Nestlé, Coca-Cola, Western Digital, Xerox, Mitsubishi, Pfizer, Salesforce, Visa, Mastercard, Honda, Ford. ...

John McDonnell (Labour): ... If we descend into accusations that those who do not support the Bill are antisemites, or that those who support it are Islamophobic, I think we are lost, to be honest. It is important that we are careful about our language.

There is a profound misunderstanding about what we are debating. If this is about the BDS movement itself, there are mechanisms that the Government can use to proscribe an organisation. But the debate on this Bill should be about BDS as a method, a tactic. I have supported boycotting, disinvesting and sanctioning a whole range of regimes. ...

col 894 On all of those, I have urged the use of BDS because when other representations and diplomacy fail, there are not many options left. One of the options, unfortunately, is the use of arms. In not promoting that, we have tried to find a middle lane, and that is economic isolation to try to influence. ... The important thing is to ensure that if we use this mechanism, it is used properly and fairly and that we do not discriminate against one particular country. ...

col 895 The arguments that I have heard from those on the Conservative Benches on several occasions is that local councillors should have the right to represent their local communities and, above all else, they should listen to their local communities. ... These amendments simply enable the local community to express their views and for that to be taken into account. ...

Andrew Percy: ... The issue of timing is interesting. I am not sure whether we are being asked to wait until Hamas give us permission to bring the Bill back. Should we wait for their decision to end the violence, so that we are then able to bring this forward? People advanced the same arguments that they are advancing today before the massacre, so there will never be a good time to bring the legislation forward if we follow that line.

col 896 ... I think that it was beneath [Margaret Hodge] to accuse people who support the legislation of driving antisemitism. That was an unfortunate slip, because it is a fact that the Jewish Leadership Council and the Board of Deputies support the legislation. She may be right that others in the Jewish community do not, but it is a fact that leadership groups within the community support the legislation.

Why now? For me, it was going down to see one of the marches two weeks ago. I do not want to call them marches for peace, because they were not; they were marches filled with hate. There were people there enjoying what happened in Israel. I saw many of them holding deeply antisemitic signs, many of which called for a boycott of the Israeli state. That said to me that this is a moment when we have to grasp this issue, which has been a poisonous part of political discourse on the middle east for so long. If not now, then

when? There will never be a perfect time.

... even before the Israeli Government had acted in any way in Gaza in self-defence, BDS campaigners were outside the Israeli embassy, after 1,400 Israelis had been murdered—the worst murder of Jews since the holocaust. What were those campaigners doing? They were not there expressing sympathy for what had just happened; they were demanding that people boycott the state of Israel. This is a pernicious, nasty, antisemitic campaign, and there is no pretending otherwise, as indeed some people who oppose the Bill will agree.

The metrics are clear: BDS activities drive antisemitism. ... On the pretence that there are lots of other countries at which this is aimed, let us be honest: only Israel is the focus of BDS activities. That is where the action in local government and the Welsh Government has been. It has all been about Israel. Let us be honest: for some of the people arguing against the legislation, it will always be about Israel. Whatever has happened, they are always here with words against Israel, holding Israel to different standards. It is the same people; they just find a different argument. It is the same on every issue related to the middle east. They are always here, some of them in this House, and it is always about the behaviour of the state of Israel.

I find it a really bizarre claim that because some people might react unpleasantly, or potentially violently, to us banning a campaign that all of us who have spoken so far—well, maybe not all of us—agree is antisemitic, that might inflame community tensions. What we are saying there, in effect, is that the elected House of Commons of the United Kingdom should not act because some people might not like it and might get violent. A country that follows that line of argument is a country that is lost. We agree that this is antisemitic and it should not matter, therefore, whether some people who might not like our approach might react. They have been reacting fairly unpleasantly already—we have all seen the marches—so I just do not buy that argument.

col 897 Simon Hoare (Conservative): ... at a time when our country can play a pivotal role in trying to de-escalate and find a peaceful solution to the horror unravelling in the middle east, what assessment has he made of the damage that could arise from a claim of partiality being levelled against the Government for bringing this Bill forward at this time?

Andrew Percy: ... How is impartiality impacted by outlawing something that all of us agree is antisemitic? Who sits on the Palestinian BDS National Committee? It is Hamas and Islamic Jihad. So are we saying that we should not ban this antisemitic campaign because some people might not like that. ...

I will end with a powerful quote in *The Jewish Chronicle* today from its former editor Stephen Pollard. He said: “You might think that now of all times, when the world has witnessed the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, there would be a clamour, a rush, even a demand for the BDS Bill to be passed. Now of all times, surely, is the time to stand up and say we see where Jew hate leads.”

That is the best argument for this legislation and for why now. ...

Caroline Lucas: ... To suggest that those tools [or boycott, divestment, and sanctions] are intrinsically antisemitic is clearly and evidentially wrong. ...

The brutal attacks on Israeli civilians by Hamas on 7 October have filled every right-thinking person with horror and underscored the urgent need to stand against violence. We do that, in part, by defending and advocating human rights. These principles need to guide our response to the collective punishment of the civilian population of Gaza, too, and to any other unlawful action being perpetrated by the Israeli or Palestinian authorities, or by Hamas.

col 898 I am struggling to understand why, as one of the leading global champions of human rights, the UK would want to send a signal that it thinks that human rights matter only selectively—that would be the impact of the current wording if the Bill passes. It would say to the world that some people’s rights matter less than other people’s. ... The

Government risk igniting the situation further by bringing back this Bill with the clause singling out Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This legislation, in effect, applies restrictions on the right to freedom of expression and debate, in a way that risks polarising views even further. ...

col 900 Nicola Richards (Conservative): ... The events on 7 October mean that we are debating the Bill in a different context. We are doing so against the backdrop of the murder of at least 1,400 Jewish people and the kidnapping of hundreds in Israel, as well as a 641% rise in antisemitic incidents in the UK. The Bill is not on its own a solution to antisemitism or the key to solving every problem in the middle east. However, I will explain why it will not only provide much-needed reassurance to the Jewish community here, but benefit both Israelis and Palestinians. I will set out why the BDS movement is harmful internationally and discriminatory towards Jewish communities here in the UK, and why it is vital that Israel is named in the Bill.

I am not Jewish. I grew up in Dudley, where we do not have a Jewish community—I grew up hungry to know more about history and politics—but I when I was young my father worked for an Israeli company, ISCAR. He moved around jobs as a salesman, so I remembered his work by which country the company originated from. For me, Israel was just another one of those places where he had travelled for work. ISCAR was set up by Stef Wertheimer, a German-born Jew who fled the Nazis in 1937. He started a small metal shop and tool-making company called ISCAR in 1952.

Stef believes that capitalism is better equipped than politics to solve the conflict. He believes that, if economic disparity is at the core of the tension between Arabs and Jews, he might have a solution. In 2019, it was reported that of ISCAR's 3,500 employees, more than 1,000 are of Druze or Arab origin. In the eyes of the BDS movement, that normalisation is problematic and should be boycotted.

... SodaStream, a successful Israeli company ... exports its products across the world. It had been providing jobs to countless Israelis, as well as once employing about 900 Palestinians who relied on the company for their livelihoods. But in 2015, it was forced out of the west bank because of the BDS movement, leading to those Palestinians losing their jobs. That harms the very people the BDS movement claims to support. Ali Jafar, a shift manager from a west bank village, who worked for SodaStream for two years, summed it up when he said: "All the people who wanted to close" the factory "are mistaken...They didn't take into consideration the families."

It is those families we should think about when voting on the Bill.

When SodaStream closed its factory in the west bank, it moved to Rahat in the Negev desert. On the final day of Ramadan, it organised the largest Iftar celebration in Israel: almost 3,000 Israelis and Palestinians came together to break bread at the factory. The BDS movement remains against SodaStream's factory in the Negev desert because it has found new reasons for doing so. It said: "SodaStream is still subject to boycott by the global, Palestinian-led BDS movement for Palestinian rights. Its new factory is actively complicit in Israel's policy of displacing the indigenous Bedouin-Palestinian citizens of Israel in the Naqab (Negev). SodaStream's mistreatment of and discrimination against Palestinian workers is not forgotten either."

col 901 Why are the integration successes of companies such as SodaStream and ISCAR not told? Because they show normalisation; they show neighbourly relationships and peace between peoples. I have been struck by the stories of the Hamas hostages and their families. Some of them had lived in Gaza and moved when the occupation ended in 2005, but still have Palestinian friends there. We do not hear about those kinds of relationships. Extremists do not want to portray any kind of normal life, success or quality of existence, whether they are from Hamas or the BDS movement—neither promotes peaceful coexistence.

The BDS movement boasts that, in 18 years, it has done 18 years' worth of "turning darkness into light"—that is quite some sugar-coating ... The BDS movement has an anti-

normalisation charter that forbids “the participation in any project, initiative or activity, local or international, that brings together (on the same ‘platform’) Palestinians...and Israelis...and does not meet the following two conditions: (1) The Israeli side publicly recognizes the UN-affirmed inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which are set out in the 2005 BDS Call, and”—this is the most important part—“(2) the joint activity constitutes a form of co-resistance against the Israeli regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid.”

That is evidence, if it were ever needed, that the BDS movement does not want peace. BDS ignores or rejects the Jewish people’s right to self-determination and occasionally calls for the eradication of Israel, the world’s only Jewish state, so if BDS’s objective is not peace, what is it? At its core, it is antisemitic. ...

The events of the past few weeks will, I hope, give many people a better understanding of why Israel is so important to the Jewish community. Having worked in the community, visited Israel a number of times and worked with holocaust survivors, I thought I understood, but for many in the Jewish community around the world, repeating that 7 October was the biggest loss of Jewish life since the holocaust brings with it unimaginable pain and a new understanding.

Israel’s very existence was borne of the need for a safe haven for Jews. ... Hamas knew they struck at the heart of Israel and, therefore, the heart of the Jewish community. When a movement seeks to single out the world’s only Jewish state as a unique evil, it is clear why that could be regarded as antisemitic. There are no comparable campaigns about any other state on this scale—none that mobilise as many people and seek to divide and maintain division, rather than strive for peace. ...

col 902 Boycotts harm Israel, they harm Palestinians, and they harm any prospect of peace. The Bill is not a barrier to peace: the BDS movement, and opposing the Bill, are barriers to peace. ...

Zarah Sultana (Labour): ... Gaza, the United Nations has said, has become a “hellhole”. Israeli bombs have decimated whole neighbourhoods. In six days alone, 6,000 bombs were dropped on the besieged enclave—more bombs than NATO forces dropped in an entire year of intense fighting in Afghanistan. An Israeli military spokesperson was frank about the purpose of the bombing: “the emphasis is on damage and not on accuracy”.

Nearly 6,000 Palestinians have been killed, including nearly 2,500 children. Last night was the deadliest so far, with 700 people dead. This is happening to one of the most densely populated areas on earth, where 2.3 million people, half of whom are children, are trapped in an area no bigger than the Isle of Wight.

Even before the recent violence, Gaza had been besieged for more than a decade and a half, with access by land, air and water blockaded. Back in 2010, even Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron called it a “prison camp”, but now Israel has imposed a total siege, cutting off water, fuel, electricity and food. The UN says hospitals will run out of fuel today, and incubators with premature babies will stop working. Israel’s evacuation order demanding that 1.1 million people flee their homes was described as “impossible...without devastating human consequences” by the United Nations, and the World Health Organisation has called it a “death sentence for the sick and injured”.

col 903 Indiscriminate bombing, collective punishment and forcibly displacing people are “clear violations” of international law—not according to me, but according to the United Nations Secretary-General. This is in no way downplaying or denying Hamas’s appalling attacks on Israeli citizens, which I absolutely condemn, and I again echo the call for the release of hostages. ... Hamas’s crimes in no way excuse what we have seen since.

That is relevant to this debate because these clear violations of international law have been given the green light by political leaders here in the UK and beyond ... The Prime Minister has still refused to acknowledge these clear violations of international law and, unlike a growing number of his counterparts across the world, he is still refusing to call for an immediate ceasefire. ...

If the Bill is passed unamended ... public bodies such as local councils and universities will not be able to make ethical procurement or investment decisions. Local democracy will be sidelined, and they will be forced to ignore questions of human rights and international law. ...

col 904 Kit Malthouse (Conservative): ... When I am told that in seeking to improve this legislation, or in expressing doubts about its impact, I am somehow picking a side, with the implication that I am not standing with [the Jewish] community, I find it both insulting and offensive ...

For those who say that there is never a good time, there is certainly a better time. As Israel reels from the profoundly evil crime that was committed against it, at the same time as Palestinian parents search in the rubble for the bodies of their children, for us to bring forward legislation that Members on the Government Benches have said in terms is picking a side seems remarkably insensitive, not least because our Prime Minister is frantically touring the world, trying his best to work with the Qataris and others to release those hostages. ...

By carving out Israel, the west bank and the occupied Golan Heights in the legislation, I am afraid the Secretary of State is playing into the antisemitism we have seen rise in this country over the past few weeks. ...

col 905 There is no requirement in law for this carve-out to exist. ... Israel would merely be treated as all other countries in the world would be treated for the purposes of our legislation. ...

To assume that councillors are merely elected on the basis of their attitude towards potholes and refuse collection is completely erroneous; they are elected for all sorts of reasons. Many councillors and Members of the devolved Administrations who campaign on social, moral, ethical and, indeed, foreign policy issues would say that they have a mandate, and not even to be able to express opposition to the law while still complying with it seems very un-British, extremely illiberal and unnecessarily draconian. ...

col 906 The technical issue is about universities being classified as public bodies. ... there has been a flurry of activity in the Treasury because further education colleges have been classified as public bodies, which means all their debt comes on to the public balance sheet. This is another step towards universities, with their even greater levels of debt, coming on to the balance sheet, about which the Treasury ought to have a say. ...

I know that the Secretary of State, like every member of the Government, is extremely keen on international law and wants to ensure it is followed in all circumstances, and particularly in this current horrific conflict in Israel and Gaza. One of the great benefits of our more flexible system is that, as the Government called for boycotts of Russian businesses and Russian individuals following the invasion of Ukraine, other parts of civic society were able to move extremely quickly to comply, whereas under this legislation they would have to wait for the Government to issue some kind of regulation, which would have to go through this House and be debated. That could possibly take weeks, if not longer, particularly if the House is in recess. ...

Claudia Webbe (Independent): Human rights groups have rightly condemned the Bill as an outrageous and unwarranted interference in the ability of councils, universities and other public bodies to use their purchasing power to pursue ethical procurement and investment policies in order to help defend human rights and tackle issues such as climate change. ...

col 907 The Bill specifically protects the state of Israel, Israeli companies and their human rights abuses from local authority sanctions, no matter what human rights abuses they might commit or are committing now. It is self-evident that councils and other public bodies must be free—and, indeed, have a duty—to act to prevent or discourage breaches of international humanitarian law. It is clear that Israeli settlements are illegal under international law, and no local authority or Government should offer support to such

activity. The Government's anti-BDS Bill contradicts the guiding principles on business and human rights published by the United Nations. It penalises public bodies that comply with the UK's responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. It takes away the democratic right of public bodies to make ethical financial decisions.

The Bill uniquely shields human rights abuses by Israel, allowing it to act with impunity. Indeed, the Bill exempts specific countries—namely Israel, despite its human rights abuses and war crimes—even though we do not know what future actions such countries may take. That is a show of complete contempt for the people of Palestine and the daily inhumanity, abuse and discrimination they face. ...

It is profoundly disappointing that the Government are pursuing the anti-boycott Bill at this moment, when tensions are extremely high in our communities. In the past few weeks, almost 7,000 Palestinians have been killed—almost half of them children—and 1,400 Israelis have been killed, and the civilians of Gaza have been massacred by Israeli airstrikes. War crimes are happening in real time. ...

Boycott, divestment and sanctions are an effective means of peaceful resistance. ...

Miriam Cates (Conservative): ... Some have said that the Bill would limit free speech, but that is not correct because individual councillors and public bodies can still say whatever they like as private citizens, as long as that speech is lawful. But local councils have no democratic mandate to use their control of taxpayers' funds and assets to create their own foreign policy or to express divisive opinions that undermine social cohesion in the communities for which they are responsible. ...

col 908 When my constituents go to the ballot box at local elections, they vote for the candidate who they think is the best person to ensure regular bin collections, well-maintained roads or social care; they are not voting on foreign policy, defence policy or income tax rates, because these are nationally reserved issues for the Westminster Government. It is therefore unjustifiable for local authorities to pretend they have a democratic mandate to use ratepayers' money to signal their own foreign policy positions. ...

BDS ... is unique in its targeting of the world's only Jewish state. The BDS movement is not a harmless, peaceful movement; it has alarming links to extremists, including the Hamas terrorist group, which have just committed probably the worst crimes in my lifetime—the worst mass killing of Jews since the holocaust. Public bodies funded by UK taxpayers should not be expressing public support for the divisive ideology advanced by the BDS movement. Its founder has, indeed, repeatedly expressed his opposition to Israel's right to exist as a state of the Jewish people and has endorsed Palestinian armed resistance. When public bodies seek to undermine British foreign and trade policy and choose to do that only for matters relating to Israel, it gives legitimacy to and encourages the sort of appalling antisemitic protests and attacks we have seen over the past few weeks. ...

Since the horrific terrorist attacks on Israel by Hamas, we have seen some shocking scenes on the streets of Sheffield: the Israeli flag torn down from the town hall; antisemitic chants on our streets; even a roadblock set up by supporters of Hamas, intimidating drivers and asking for money. I find it unbelievable and shameful that, after witnessing the despicable attacks, torture and rapes of Jewish civilians, such actions can take place in Sheffield, supposedly a "city of sanctuary". It is very difficult for the Jewish community in Sheffield to feel safe when the local authority—the official elected body—appears to align itself with hard-line anti-Israel movements.

col 909 That is why we need this Bill: because yet again Israel and the Jewish people are being singled out and subjected to discrimination across this country and across the world. This singling out of Israel, the only democracy in the middle east, is just another form of the world's oldest prejudice. ...

Steve McCabe: ... I am not sure it is helpful to link these proceedings with the current

crisis in Israel and Gaza ...

The nature of the BDS campaign is to promote anti-normalisation: it encourages the notion that there should not be contact, trade, exchange, negotiation, or even dialogue with Israel. The founder of the BDS movement has repeatedly expressed his view that the Israeli state should not exist. ... Consequently, I am utterly opposed to the aims of BDS, and I believe that they are as detrimental to the interests of the people of this country as they are to the people of Israel and the Palestinians.

When I hear people talking about the BDS movement, I often think they completely misunderstand the exact nature of our relationships with Israel in trade, medicines, security and technological exchange, and how people in this country are kept healthier and safer as a result. ... Not only does it target Israel and hurt the Palestinians, it is also completely detrimental to the interests of the people of this country. ...

I support ... new clause 3, which seeks to provide protection for religious dietary requirements. I think it was mentioned that one of the BDS movement's proposals was to remove kosher food from supermarket shelves. I cannot believe that anyone in their right mind would think that a reasonable way to proceed ...

col 910 Richard Graham (Conservative): ... We can define national interest in different ways: deep family ties with Commonwealth members; our close cultural and economic ties with our neighbours in Europe; our shared values with fellow democracies; and our historical links with nations around the world. But we would place first, surely, our security and the potential vulnerability of this nation to terrorists and nations abroad who would damage us. It is therefore strongly in our interests to bring forward legislation that builds bridges for communities both here and abroad as part of our role as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, committed to the rule of law and promoting the values of free speech and transparency, strong in the belief, for example, of democracies sticking to international rules of engagement because to do otherwise risks us descending to the level of the thugocracies that exist elsewhere.

Where does that leave me and us in today's debate? It means that we, without reservation, condemn the appalling acts of Hamas in their invasion of several villages and kibbutzes in southern Israel close to the border, their murder of civilians and their taking of hostages from, I believe, 41 countries. It means that we strongly support Israel's right of defence. But it also means that we believe that the invasion of Gaza by air, let alone by ground, has inevitably already caused as many, if not more, civilian casualties in ways that have already almost certainly broken the rules of international engagement, including in terms of access to water, electricity, fuel, medicines and so on.

I understand and accept that all infrastructure in Gaza is compromised by Hamas. There will be buildings and basements of schools and hospitals and so on that Hamas are using, but that does not justify, for example, bombing buildings of refuge in the compound of St Porphyrius. Our position in this nation is for a genuine two-state solution that allows for both the state of Israel, a remarkable state with so much to admire, and a state of Palestine, with people have suffered since the Nakba of 1948 over access to lands sometimes seized illegally in the occupied territories, as United Nations law makes clear. ...

col 911 This, then, is the relevance of a pro-UK policy to this particular Bill. Into this delicate landscape of increasing polarisation throughout the middle east strides the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill. I agree with the principle of reducing local government posturing on foreign policy ... I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak and many others on both sides of the House that the BDS movement is clearly antisemitic. It is clearly aimed at Israel. There is no question about that. But at the same time, when ... Andrew Percy advised that we should therefore stop everything regardless and support Israel and its Government's statements on any issue regardless, I do not think that that is the case. Our support should not be at the price of explicitly giving the Israeli Government a completely free hand in their policy towards the west bank and the occupied territories, riding roughshod through UN Security Council motions drafted by the United

Kingdom. ...

I believe that the representatives of those Arab Governments who have reached agreement with Israel and signed the Abraham accords have done so because they do not want to see Israel destroyed and they do want to see peace in the middle east, and I do not believe that any of them would support the clauses in this Bill that prevent us from holding the occupation—the illegal occupation—by Israeli settlers to account. ...

This is not about being naive; it is about recognising that the BDS movement is deeply unpleasant, and is targeting Israel. Yes, we must be vigilant against both antisemitism and Islamophobia, but we should not exclude holding Israel to account. ...

col 912 **Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat):** ... It is with a heavy heart that I am taking part in this debate. I was half minded not to do so, because now is not the time. The impact of the awful violence in Israel and Palestine on communities across the world cannot be underestimated, but the answer is not to debate the Bill right now. ...

What [Margaret Hodge] said was exactly what members of my Jewish community have said to me. They are appalled that the Government are choosing to play politics at this time. The Bill was divisive at the best of times, and the fact is that this is the worst of times. ...

Amendment 7 cuts to the chase. It addresses the fact that on the face of the Bill, in clause 3, is a reference to the conflict in Israel and Palestine—a conflict that has cost thousands of innocent lives over the past three weeks, and a conflict in respect of which intense diplomacy is required. ...

I am sorry to say that arranging for this Bill to be debated this week ... is a disgrace. It is a disgrace because this conflict is affecting families across the UK as well as those abroad. Maybe they are fearful of becoming the victims of hate crime. We have seen a dreadful rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia over the last three weeks. The Community Security Trust has recorded the highest ever number of antisemitic incidents across this 17-day period. Or maybe they are fearful for their family in the region. I have spoken many times already about my fears for my extended family in Gaza. Or maybe they are fearful for their loved ones who are being held hostage by Hamas. If we are going to engage in this conflict, we should speak about how to get those hostages freed.

col 914 Earlier this week, I and my party leader met some of those families, including the aunt of Ariel and Kfir, who are four years old and nine months old. I was disgusted to see a picture of four-year-old Ariel defaced with horns and Hitler imagery at a bus stop in Finchley this morning—an utterly grotesque act. I hope the perpetrators are caught and the full force of the law is applied. This hateful antisemitism has no place in our society, and that is not up for debate.

On Palestinians, we should be speaking about the situation on the ground in Gaza and how we can get aid in. Children in Gaza are writing their names on their hands so that if they are killed, they can be buried with their families. ...

I have heard arguments, primarily from the Government Benches, that Hamas are purportedly telling people not to move and find safety, but that is not what I am hearing—certainly not from my own family. ... The reason people are not moving is that they are frail and cannot move, but even if they do, the south is being bombed too. The conversation has changed in Gaza. No longer do they ask, “Where do I go to be safe?”. The question now is, “Where do I go to die?” ...

I do not want something like this to drive a wedge between any Members in this House and our Jewish community. I stood with members of my Jewish community in Oxford in the first week of the attack and I grieved with them. We shed tears together. I stand shoulder to shoulder with them now. We all stand shoulder to shoulder with them now. I say to those Members who suggest that I should pick a side or, even worse, that by not voting with the Government today I am against peace: how dare they? I will tell them what I am on the side of. I am on the side of basic humanity. I am on the side of those who want to bring consensus. I am on the side of the Israeli community, the Palestinian community

and the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities. This is a tragedy that affects the whole world, and I say to this Government: do better.

David Jones (Conservative): ... This Bill was introduced pursuant to a Conservative manifesto ... “to ban public bodies from imposing their own direct or indirect boycotts, disinvestment or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries.”

col 914 It is important to note that the wording of that commitment is not country-specific. ... But it is very clear ... that the measures contained in the Bill are aimed primarily at the BDS campaign that has for some two decades targeted the state of Israel. ...

The Bill is broadly drawn, except in one respect, which paradoxically robs it of its breadth. It contains a specific measure to prevent any attempt at a later date to modify its provisions in respect of the conduct of the Government of Israel in relation to the territory of Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the occupied Golan Heights. It is clear from the Secretary of State’s remarks on Second Reading that the principal mischief that the Government intend to target is the undoubted evil of antisemitism and antisemitic behaviour, which have been among the most regrettable—in fact, deplorable—consequences of the BDS campaign. ...

It is more than arguable that in the case of public bodies, there is a legislative vehicle for doing that already, in the shape of the Equality Act 2010, most particularly section 149, which imposes a “public sector equality duty” on such bodies, requiring them to pay “due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons” of different religions, ethnicities and nationalities. ...

col 915 The absence of neutrality may indeed cause offence to people from other countries around the world, not least those moderate Islamic states that are doing their very best at the moment to try to defuse the tension that has arisen in the middle east. Moreover, it creates an unacceptable equivalence between the status of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights, both of which are arguably illegally occupied and are certainly in the view of the Government in the case of the OPTs illegally settled, and that of the sovereign territory of Israel itself. ...

Secondly, that exception is frankly perplexing. It means that if at some future time the Government were to decide to show disapproval of the actions of the state of Israel, a Cabinet Minister would not be able to do so without launching stand-alone primary legislation. How can that possibly be a sensible approach? ...

col 916 **Michael Gove:** ... [Committee stage] debates took place before the horrific events of 7 October, to which so many colleagues in this debate have referred. It is important to remember—I do not think that anyone in the House can forget—that on 7 October we saw the largest loss of Jewish life since the holocaust. That atrocity was perpetrated by terrorists from Hamas whose aim is very clear and very simple: the elimination of the Jewish state, the elimination of Jewish lives. Whatever the background beliefs or origin of those Jewish lives, they were to be exterminated.

More than 200 hostages are still being held by Hamas in Gaza. Across the House, we grieve for them and their families. ...

We also sympathise across the House with the innocent people of Gaza, and with all those Palestinian people who have suffered. We recognise that many of the innocent people in Gaza are hostages too. They are hostages of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the other terrorist organisations that operate within that territory. It is vital at all times that we draw a distinction between those who suffer in Gaza and those who are perpetrating suffering in the name of terrorism.

I am very conscious that we are debating these issues against that backdrop, but it is important that we look at the principles behind the Bill. ...

It is important to recognise what the Bill does not do. ... The Bill does not prevent any individual from articulating their support for the BDS campaign, or indeed any particular policy that the BDS campaign puts forward. It simply prevents public bodies and public money being used to advance that case. Any of us as individuals has a total right to

freedom of speech. However offensive or difficult some of the words that some utter might be, free speech is not affected by the Bill.

col 917 The Bill also does not prevent human rights considerations from being taken into account by local authorities. The Bill makes it clear that legitimate human rights considerations, provided that they are non-country-specific, should be taken into account. ...

... the BDS campaign is in itself antisemitic. It is not exercising disapproval of some particular foreign policy or domestic policy decision of the state of Israel; it is saying that Israel should not exist. It is instructive, though not easy, to look at the communications that the BDS movement has issued on social media since 7 October—not one word of sympathy for the Israeli people in their suffering. Indeed, what it has said on social media, when talking of those deaths, is that “their blood”—the blood of the Jewish people; the Israeli people killed—“is on the hands of the Israeli government.”

The BDS campaign has said that the “root cause” of this violence—the deaths on 7 October—“must be acknowledged...Israel as the occupier.” ...

col 918 There is an argument that perhaps this Bill is divisive and it is not wanted, particularly by many voices in the Jewish community. There are some voices in the Jewish community who have concerns, and we have listened to them, but the representative bodies that speak for Britain’s Jewish community are united in supporting this Bill. They include the Board of Deputies, which contains representatives of every Jewish constituency, Jewish organisation and every Jewish community, be it secular or religious, and the Jewish Leadership Council, which contains representatives of every political and faith tradition within the Jewish community. ...

So we respect the diversity of voices, but when we have such unity from those who speak for the Jewish community—indeed, the Jewish communities—of the UK, when they are so clear that this legislation is in the interests of community cohesion, fighting antisemitism and making the UK a safe house for everyone, we should treat their words with respect.

The point has been made that the specific mention in the Bill of Israel could perhaps, in some cases, engender a greater degree of polarisation and antisemitism. I know that the people who make that argument make it sincerely, but, ... sometimes we just have to stand up for what is right. If there are people who are provoked as a result of that, it is regrettable but we should not shy away from telling the truth. ...

col 919 **Chris Stephens:** ... Does he recognise the concerns that not just Israel is mentioned in the clause? This is also about why the Government have included the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights. ...

Michael Gove: ... I take the hon. Gentleman’s point and appreciate the concerns that he articulates, which are shared by a number of people, but the way in which the Bill is designed makes it clear that there is a separation between Israel, the OPTs and the Golan Heights. As the Jewish Leadership Council pointed out in its evidence to the Committee ... “This clause recognises this distinction”—it absolutely does—and closes a loophole to ensure public bodies cannot remain tools of the BDS movement against Israel.” ...

Richard Graham: I am interested in clause 3, which specifically states that the exceptions to any prohibition are: “(a) Israel...(b) the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or...(c) the Occupied Golan Heights.”

What is the distinction between Israel and those two that means that we can still hold the Government of the day accountable for illegal settler occupations in those two occupied areas?

Michael Gove: ...The fact that they are listed separately and individually affirms the absolutely principal purpose of treating them individually and separately. ...

col 920 **Greg Smith (Conservative):** ... does my right hon. Friend agree that, given that the United Kingdom is party to a series of World Trade Organisation framework agreements, such as the general procurement agreement, the UK has a duty not to

discriminate in its trade practices, and that to permit public bodies to engage in antisemitic BDS activities would undermine our international agreements?

Michael Gove: ... I understand the intent of the proposal from Labour's Front-Bench team, but I disagree, because—as they acknowledge in their own amendment for ensuring that people cannot adopt, through an ambiguous form of words, a means of preventing people from accessing kosher or halal food—there is the potential, as lawyers have been clear, for an ambiguous form of words to be used in order, without mentioning Israel by name, to make it clear that a boycott campaign is directed against Israel. ...

The BDS movement is clear in what it upholds: an evil campaign not just to eliminate the state of Israel but to target Palestinians who work with Israeli institutions. It has been crystal clear in recent weeks in its total failure—not just a failure, but a conscious desire not to express a shred of sympathy or regret for the loss of innocent lives. ...

[Amendments 14, 13, 7, and 28 were voted on and rejected. All other amendments were withdrawn.]

To read the full transcript see

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-25/debates/13BE6BE3-E8FB-415F-AC96-7D6FF6979F83/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies\(OverseasMatters\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-25/debates/13BE6BE3-E8FB-415F-AC96-7D6FF6979F83/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies(OverseasMatters)Bill)

The amendments discussed above can be read at

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/0325/amend/econactivity_day_rep_1025.pdf

House of Commons Oral Answer

Topical Questions: Women and Equalities

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): As the Minister for Women and Equalities, it would be remiss of me not to reflect on the way religious communities in the UK have been impacted by the terrible events in the middle east. All our citizens have a right to feel secure and at peace in Britain. One of the reasons we have been able to integrate people from all over the world is an unwritten rule that people with roots elsewhere do not play out foreign conflicts on the streets of this country. We owe a duty of care and civility to our neighbours, whatever their ethnicity, religion or background. All of us are free to practise our faiths and celebrate our cultures, but we must do so in a positive way, consistent with fundamental values that are the bedrock of Britain.

I am afraid to say that in recent days we have seen that social contract being breached. In particular, I believe that the hostility directed towards our Jewish communities, the calls for jihad, the ostentatious indifference to the victims of terrorism, the aggressive chanting by mobs brandishing placards of hate, and the odious people ripping down posters of missing children do not reflect our values as a nation.

We must all stand firm on the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, particularly in the public space that we all share. That is why today I am reminding public sector organisations that they have a legal obligation, as part of the equality duty, to consider how they contribute to the advancement of good relations in communities as they deliver public services. Where organisations are having difficulty doing that, I urge them to write to me as soon as possible for advice on how they can fulfil their legal obligations.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-25/debates/4394C5FA-3BFC-4A81-8F88-7E8B74F31132/TopicalQuestions#contribution-F3BAEAD4-283C-43E5-9505-0CA45C412E3E>

House of Commons Written Answers

Faith Schools: Special Educational Needs

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [201641] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the implications for her policies of the findings of the research paper entitled *Serving their communities?* The under-admission of children with disabilities and 'special educational needs' to 'faith' primary schools in England, published in the Oxford Review of Education on 2 October 2023.

David Johnston: The department is determined that all children and young people receive the support they need to benefit from their education and progress to the next stage of their lives.

Children should be able to attend a school of their parents' choice where possible. By law, all children with an Education Health and Care (EHC) Plan must be admitted to the school named in the Plan. A parent, carer, child or young person can request that a school designated as having a religious character (commonly known as a faith school) be named on an EHC Plan. Local authorities should do their best to accommodate such a request but should not name the school if it is unsuitable for the child's age, ability, aptitude and special educational needs, or if naming the school would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education of other children or the efficient use of resources.

Where a child with special educational needs does not have an EHC Plan, their parents will need to apply for a school place in the same way as for other children without an EHC Plan. Places must be allocated in accordance with the schools' published admissions criteria, which are set by the admission authority for each school, but they must comply with the statutory School Admissions Code which exists to ensure that places are allocated in a fair and transparent manner.

Admission authorities for schools designated as having a religious character may adopt admissions criteria which give priority to children of their faith, but they must offer a place to every applicant regardless of faith if there are sufficient places available. Free schools with a religious character may only allocate 50% of their places pupils by reference to faith in order to open up places to other children. Some other schools choose to limit the number of places they allocate with reference to faith, and many do not have faith admissions criteria at all.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-13/201641>

The research paper referred to above can be read at

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/120049/1/Campbell_serving_their_communities_published.pdf

Ethnic Groups: Equality

Afzal Khan (Labour) [906703] To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking to help tackle racial inequality.

Maria Caulfield: We published our ground-breaking race equality strategy last year.

Inclusive Britain set out 74 actions to tackle entrenched ethnic disparities across health, education, employment, policing and criminal justice.

18 months on and we have completed over half of the actions, including:

- publishing new ethnicity pay guidance for employers;
- issuing improved guidance on behaviour in schools and on suspensions and permanent exclusions; and
- improving the stop and search process through new de-escalation skills training for police officers.

A further update will be provided to parliament in Spring 2024

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-19/906703>

Inclusive Britain, referred to above, can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-britain-action-plan-government-response-to-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Places of Worship Security Funding Scheme

Afzal Khan (Labour) [203940] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many places of worship of religion have applied for funding through the Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme since 2016.

Protective Security for Mosques Scheme

Afzal Khan (Labour) [203941] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications have been received for the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme.

Tom Tugendhat: The Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme provides physical protective security measures, such as CCTV, intruder alarms and secure perimeter fencing to places of worship and associated faith community centres that are particularly vulnerable to religiously or racially motivated hate crime in England and Wales. In the first seven years of the scheme between 2016 and 2022, the Home Office approved protective security measures at 523 places of worship across England and Wales: 225 mosques, 201 churches, 47 gurdwaras, 38 Hindu temples, and 12 places of worship of other faiths.

The Home Office is currently processing applications for this year's scheme with a view to informing applicants of the outcome in the near future.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-23/203940>
and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-23/203941>

Information about the Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme and the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme, referred to above, can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/places-of-worship-security-funding-scheme>

Hamas: Israel

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [203665] To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions she has had with (a) representatives from the media and (b) Ofcom on ensuring the (i) accuracy and (ii) objectivity of coverage of the Israel-Hamas war.

John Whittingdale: The attacks carried out by Hamas in Israel since 7 October are terrorist acts committed by a terrorist organisation, proscribed in the United Kingdom since 2021 and designated as such by many other governments and international organisations.

As my right honourable friend the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister's Questions (18 October 2023), "it is incumbent on all of those in positions of responsibility in this House and outside in the media to recognise that the words we say will have an impact, and we should be careful with them".

Ofcom is the UK's independent broadcasting regulator. In particular, it is required by legislation, and accountable to Parliament, to draw up and enforce a Broadcasting Code for television to ensure that audiences are adequately protected from harm and that news is reported with due accuracy and due impartiality. It is for Ofcom to determine whether there has been a breach of the Broadcasting Code, and whether to take action. The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Ofcom and representatives from the media on a range of issues.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-20/203665>

The Prime Minister's comment referred to above can be read at

Hate Crime

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [203394] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to combat the rise in hate crimes following the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October.

Chris Philp: The Government is clear that all forms of hate crime, including antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate crime, are completely unacceptable. We expect the police fully to investigate these abhorrent offences and make sure those who commit them feel the full force of the law.

In light of the horrific Hamas terrorist acts in Israel and related 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 at Jewish schools, synagogues and other sites. The Home Secretary also chairs the Jewish Community Crime, Policing and Security Taskforce. This meeting brings together Government, law enforcement and the Community Security Trust in order to address Jewish community security concerns.

The Government is also concerned about increased reports of anti-Muslim hatred. The Home Office has extended the deadline for the protective security for mosques scheme and invite mosques and Muslim faith community centres to register for protective security measures. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has allocated over £6m to Tell MAMA since their inception in 2012 for their vital work monitoring and supporting victims of anti-Muslim hatred.

We are continuing to support the police to ensure they have the resources and tools required to tackle any incidents relating to the ongoing conflict. Where people incite racial or religious hatred or where people's conduct is threatening, abusive or disorderly and causes distress to others, we expect the police to take action to ensure perpetrators can be brought to justice.

More broadly, the Government continues to fund True Vision, an online hate crime reporting portal, designed so that victims of hate crime do not have to visit a police station to report. We also continue to fund the National Online Hate Crime Hub, a central capability designed to support individual local police forces in dealing with online hate crime. The Hub provides expert advice to police forces to support them in investigating these offences.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/203394>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

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

The True Vision website, referred to above, can be read at

https://www.report-it.org.uk/your_police_force

Information about the National Online Hate Crime Hub, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-announces-new-national-online-hate-crime-hub>

Hamas: Arrests

Adam Afriyie (Conservative) [203670] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been arrested for publicly endorsing Hamas since the attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023.

Tom Tugendhat: As of 1200hrs Monday 23rd October, as a result of Counter Terrorism Policing led investigations, there have been 6 arrests of individuals for publicly supporting Hamas.

The following three questions all received the same answer

Facebook: Non-crime Hate Incidents

John Hayes (Conservative) [203207] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many non-crime hate incidents relating to posts made on Facebook were investigated by the police in each year for which records exist.

X Corp: Non-crime Hate Incidents

John Hayes (Conservative) [203208] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many non-crime hate incidents relating to posts made on X were investigated by the police in each year for which records exist.

TikTok: Non-crime Hate Incidents

John Hayes (Conservative) [203209] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many non-crime hate incidents relating to posts made on TikTok were investigated by the police in each year for which records exist.

Chris Philp: The Home Office does not centrally collect data on non-crime hate incidents from the police.

A review into the recording of NCHI, reporting to the Policing Minister, is underway.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/203207>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/203208>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/203209>

Teachers: Training

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [202554] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of trainee teachers for (a) religious education, (b) English, (c) history and (d) geography were trained through (i) school-led provision and (ii) higher education institution-led provision in 2021-22; and if she will make a statement.

Nick Gibb: Religious Education trainees for 2021/22 split by training route shows 51% were trained through higher education institution led provision (HEI), and 49% percent were trained via school led provision.

English trainees for 2021/22 split by training route shows 43% were trained through HEI-led provision, and 57% percent were trained via school led provision.

History trainees for 2021/22 split by training route shows 44% were trained through HEI-led provision, and 56% percent were trained via school led provision.

Geography trainees for 2021/22 split by training route shows 46% were trained through HEI-led provision, and 54% percent were trained via school led provision.

These statistics are taken from the Initial Teacher Training Census 2021/22, which can be found online at:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/initial-teacher-training-census/2021-22>

The percentages provided are revised.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-16/202554>

CST

Antisemitic Incidents – 25 October Update

In the 18 days inclusive between the Hamas terror attack on Israel (Saturday 7 October) and Wednesday 25 October, CST recorded at least 704 antisemitic incidents across the UK. This is the highest ever total reported to CST across a nineteen-day period. CST has been recording antisemitic incidents since 1984. ...

For comparison, CST recorded 96 antisemitic incidents over the same 19 days in 2022. This means that we have seen an increase in anti-Jewish hate acts of 633% this year compared to the same period last year. ...

The 704 antisemitic incidents recorded over this twelve-day period fall into the following categories:

- 32 Assaults
- 41 Damage & Desecration to Jewish property
- 71 direct Threats
- 557 Abusive Behaviour, including verbal abuse, graffiti on non-Jewish property, hate mail and online abuse
- 3 instances of mass-produced antisemitic Literature

CST has recorded 405 antisemitic incidents in Greater London; 116 in Greater Manchester; 27 in West Yorkshire; 16 in Hertfordshire; 14 in the West Midlands; 13 in Scotland; 11 in Merseyside; ten in Nottinghamshire; ten Thames Valley; and the remaining 82 incidents were spread across 26 different police regions around the UK. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2023/10/25/antisemitic-incidents-25-october-update>

TOP

Holocaust

House of Lords Oral Answers

Polish Jewish Holocaust Victims: Stolen Property

Baroness Deech (Crossbench): To ask His Majesty's Government what is their assessment of progress made at the International Terezin Declaration Conference in November 2022 towards securing from the government of Poland (1) restitution, (2) compensation, or (3) commemoration, of property stolen from Polish Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon): My Lords, it is this Government's assessment that there has been no progress on these important issues in Poland itself following legislation passed in 2020 which closed the door to any restitution or compensation claims. However, we continue to urge the Polish Government to take steps to ensure that claims are addressed. My noble friend Lord Pickles, the UK Special Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues, raised this in a meeting with the Polish ambassador on 3 August. He will raise it again during his visit to Poland this week.

Baroness Deech: Continuing the theme of breaches of human rights, Poland is the only modern European country not to fulfil its moral and legal duty in relation to property. I have been asking this question for 14 years: asking the Government to take action on behalf of thousands of dispossessed victims, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and Poland has responded by putting more and more obstacles in the way of claims by legislating against them and even making it an offence to discuss Poland's involvement—if it was—in the Holocaust. New Prime Minister Tusk promises to restore the rule of law and take Poland forward to liberal democracy, so, rather than just attending conferences with supporters, will the Government reopen direct negotiations with Prime Minister Tusk and raise at the Council of Europe Poland's human rights failure to honour the obligation to restore property? It is a stain on Poland's record.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, the noble Baroness will also recognise, as I did when I was preparing for this particular Question, exactly how her sentiments were similar to my sentiments, in that I have had to respond on a number of

occasions in different ministerial portfolios on this question. The new Government are being formed. Obviously, the results are still being taken forward and different parties and alliances are coming together. The clear indication is very much that Mr Tusk may well emerge in forming the new Government. We will of course continue to prioritise it.

I would say to the noble Baroness that it is not just about attending meetings or conferences. The noble Baroness will know of the direct leadership of my noble friend on this issue. We take a strong stand on the issue of property restitution, in line with our unwavering commitment to supporting Holocaust survivors and families, and we will continue to do so in the months and years ahead.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, three years ago, the noble Baroness raised the question of the US legislation, and the Minister gave a sort of equivocal reply then. Clearly, this is something that should be reported on a regular basis. I ask the Minister to examine what the US was able to do in 2017, five years ago, and ensure that this Parliament can take up its responsibilities. We should not forget that the declaration requires us to do something; it is not simply a matter left to Poland.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, equally, the noble Lord will recognise, first of all, that I agree with his sentiments, but the Terezin Declaration was signed by 47 countries. It puts obligations on each country, including us, and I have given assurance again today about the importance of restitution and the United Kingdom Government's position on this. We will also have a moment of focus next year when we take on the presidency of the IHRA, which will allow us again to prioritise this particular issue. Of course, we look at countries and the legislation they have proposed. Let us not forget also that Poland has signed this declaration. It is of course non-binding: nevertheless, I assure the noble Lord that we are looking at all avenues to see how we can make the case most effectively. One hopes that the new Government in Poland will reflect on their responsibilities again.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, I pay tribute to the persistence of the noble Baroness. The Commission for Looted Art in Europe, whose work I commend, has been lobbying very hard for the implementation of the legal agreements that have been made. There has been European Union legislation, which Poland should be held to account to implement. What mechanisms are there when it comes to the United Kingdom, not only for public collections to make sure that they are properly audited, but also the private sector trade, sometimes far too regrettable, in looted goods? What mechanisms are there within the TCA with the European Union that we negotiated that will ensure that there are full audit trails for any goods? When we are negotiating bilateral trade agreements going forward, I have not yet seen any mechanisms in place through which this will be able to be reported on. I am very happy to discuss this separately with trade Ministers, but this surely is an area where there should be no loopholes.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I agree with the noble Lord about identifying where we can strengthen our legislation and legislative approach. Also, when it comes to issues of agreements, I will follow that up with our colleagues in the Department for Business and Trade. The noble Lord makes a more general point about how we can hold countries also to their responsibilities. One does hope for this. As I said, it is a non-binding declaration: nevertheless, the countries that have signed up have taken action. When it has come to issues of culture and books—there was a particular issue with the Library—we ourselves as a Government have ensured that those artefacts are fully protected and sustained, and indeed, where we can find true ownership, are returned.

Lord Grade of Yarmouth (Non-affiliated): My Lords, after years and years of pressing Polish Administrations to move on this issue, as Poland is the only country that has not in Europe, out of those discussions the Government must have some idea of what objections the Poles have got to acceding to their obligations.

I wonder whether the Minister could enlighten the House and tell us what the arguments are that Poland is putting forward and has done over past decades as to why it refuses to accept its obligations.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, many agreements were signed after the Second World War. Often, different Governments in Poland have sought to point to these issues having been settled. This declaration makes sure that the legacy that remains is kept at the forefront of Governments' minds; as I said in my Answer to the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, Poland passed legislation to the contrary in 2020. Of course, it remains at the behest of the Polish Government to look at legislation once again. There is a new Government in place and we will certainly once again make the case to them directly.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-10-25/debates/25CBD991-D7E6-464C-B3D6-95FC8B43990A/PolishJewishHolocaustVictimsStolenProperty>

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Israel

See also “Report Stage: Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill”, and written answers 203670 and 203665, that are included in the Home Affairs Section above.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Prime Minister's Questions

Stuart C McDonald (SNP): ...Two million people just cannot be sustained from 20-odd aid lorries. Utter catastrophe is being unleashed in Gaza. Does the Prime Minister not now see that only a humanitarian ceasefire can bring about the scale of emergency aid that is needed? Of course Israel has a right to defend itself in line with international and humanitarian laws, but we must also speak out when those laws are breached. Surely he agrees that depriving 2 million civilians—a million of them children—of food, water, medicines and fuel is not in accordance with international law. Will he press Israel to restore the supply of these essentials for the sake of innocent civilians and the future of the entire region?

The Prime Minister: It is important that we do everything we can to get humanitarian aid to those who need it in Gaza, which is why, on Monday, we announced a doubling of our international aid to the region and why the Development Minister is actively engaged with our partners on the ground to ensure that that aid gets to those people as quickly as possible.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-25/debates/FF4BEDC7-CB42-473F-BF95-52B8519C4C2E/Engagements#contribution-30A54153-FB41-4BD6-AB47-B39F4FDAF553>

Mhairi Black (SNP): Yesterday, the UN warned that hospitals in Gaza had just 48 hours of fuel left to keep their electricity going. That was 28 hours ago; the electricity runs out tonight. We have a human responsibility to all the people in Gaza, but we have a particular responsibility for UK citizens, some of whom are in those hospitals, with no food, no water, no medicine and no way out. How much worse does the situation have to get before the Prime Minister will join us in calling for a humanitarian ceasefire?

The Prime Minister: From the start, we have said that the first and most important principle is that Israel has the right to defend itself under international law—our support for that position is absolute and unchanged—but we have also said

from the start that we want British nationals to be able to leave Gaza, hostages to be released, and humanitarian aid to get in. We recognise that, for all that to happen, there has to be a safer environment, which of course necessitates specific pauses, as distinct from a ceasefire. We discussed that with partners yesterday evening at the United Nations, and we have been consistently clear that everything must be done to protect civilians in line with international law and to continue getting more aid flowing into Gaza.

Mhairi Black: The growing calls for a ceasefire are also about calming the situation in the broader region, especially the west bank. UNICEF has reported over 2,000 fatalities and over 5,000 injured children since the conflict began, due to unrelenting attacks. If we ignore that, we risk pouring petrol on a fire in a place that only requires a spark to ignite. Can the Prime Minister understand that joining calls for a ceasefire is now the best—and maybe the only—way to stop this conflict escalating beyond all control?

The Prime Minister: We have to remember that Israel has suffered a shockingly brutal terrorist attack. Hamas are responsible for this conflict, and Israel has the right to protect itself in line with international law, as the UN charter makes clear. We will continue to urge the Israelis to follow international law, but we also have to remember that Hamas cruelly embed themselves in civilian populations.

We are doing everything we can to get aid into the region. I am pleased to say that an RAF flight left the UK for Egypt this morning carrying 21 tonnes of aid for Gaza. The relief supplies include more than 75,000 medical kits, solar lights and water filters for families, and warehousing equipment. Our team are on the ground, ready to receive. We will continue to do everything we can to increase the flow of aid, including fuel, into Gaza.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-25/debates/FF4BEDC7-CB42-473F-BF95-52B8519C4C2E/Engagements#contribution-D0F0714E-9B5D-4CEE-AA63-F67FCF056D51>

Colum Eastwood (SDLP): A few short months ago, the world came to Belfast to celebrate the Good Friday agreement. At the heart of that agreement was the realisation that we could not use violence as a tool for revenge or to achieve our political aims. As 1,400 Israelis and almost 6,000 Palestinians lay dying or dead, when will the Prime Minister say enough is enough? When will he call for a ceasefire? When will he tell Israel to stop meting out collective punishment to the people of Gaza, and when will he and other world leaders insist on a political solution that involves a Palestinian state for the Palestinian people?

The Prime Minister: As I said, an important principle is that Israel does have the right to defend itself under international law, to ensure that attacks like this one—which was brutal and horrific for its citizens—cannot happen again. We continue to support that position, but, as I said, from the start we have also wanted to ensure that humanitarian aid can go in and hostages and foreign nationals can come out. We recognise that that means there has to be a safer environment, which of course necessitates specific pauses, as distinct from a ceasefire. We discussed exactly this with our international partners yesterday at the United Nations and will continue to do so. As I made clear on Monday, we have doubled down on our efforts to find a better future for the Palestinian people. That has been a feature of all our diplomacy in the region, and we will continue to give all our efforts to making that happen.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-25/debates/FF4BEDC7-CB42-473F-BF95-52B8519C4C2E/Engagements#contribution-32BF4502-9C9A-4AEF-A049-0E44626D996F>

Yasmin Qureshi (Labour): There is an email in my inbox from a constituent who has family in Gaza. It reads: “My heart can’t handle this anymore. We are being massacred,

relentlessly bombed. Homes destroyed. No water, no food, no electricity.”

Save the Children reports that one child is killed every 15 minutes. As I speak, the lives of 130 babies in incubators are in danger if fuel does not reach their hospital in time. This is collective punishment of the Palestinian people in Gaza, for crimes they did not commit. How many more innocent Palestinians must die before the Prime Minister calls for a humanitarian ceasefire?

The Prime Minister: I welcome the unity across the House on Israel’s right to defend itself in the face of an unspeakable act of terror, but it is also clear that we must support the Palestinian people; they are victims of Hamas, too. Hamas use innocent people as human shields, and we mourn the loss of every innocent life of every people, every faith and every nationality. We are working as hard as we can to get as much humanitarian aid into Gaza as quickly as practically possible.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-25/debates/FF4BEDC7-CB42-473F-BF95-52B8519C4C2E/Engagements#contribution-B23179EE-DB7C-427A-AD53-CA854BB7967E>

Point of Order

John McDonnell (Labour): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The House rises tomorrow for 10 days, I believe. Regrettably and sadly, it may be likely that a ground invasion of Gaza will commence during that period. This not only has consequences for the Palestinians and the Israelis, but could create turmoil and destabilise the whole middle east. I appreciate that it is the Government who determine whether or not Parliament is recalled but, in your conversations with the Government, will you advise them that the House should be recalled to debate such a serious issue?

Mr Speaker: You are absolutely right that it would not be for me under the normal rules, although I recognise the importance of a major escalation and what could happen in the middle east. You are correct that it would be for the Government—not for me, unfortunately—to recall the House. I will work through the usual channels to try to ensure that, quite rightly, we look to see what can be done in what would be special circumstances, because obviously the House will have prorogued. I do not lose sight of what you have said, and I take it on board. I will work with others behind the scenes to see how we would manage such a situation.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I can assure the House that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my office, and other Departments across Whitehall are very aware that this House will want to be kept updated about the ongoing situation. Many right hon. and hon. Members will have constituents directly affected, and we are working with the House of Commons Library to ensure that people are updated about the situation during the recess.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-25/debates/2019EFB6-26C9-4CE5-B711-EE27A2068223/PointsOfOrder>

House of Commons Written Answers

Middle East: Security

Tobias Ellwood (Conservative) [202924] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure regional security in the Middle East in addition to the deployment of Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels to the eastern Mediterranean.

James Heapey: The UK has deployed a significant support package to the region, including RAF surveillance aircraft in addition to the Royal Navy ships. They will be

there to support regional stability and help prevent escalation. Royal Navy ships are configured for a range of scenarios including humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

The UK is regularly engaging at all levels with our Defence partners in the Middle East and will continue to do so as the current situation develops.

We are working with our international partners to prevent this situation spreading and causing wider instability. We remain committed to making progress towards a two-state solution.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-17/202924>

Israel: Judiciary

Flick Drummond (Conservative) [906671] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of proposed changes to the judiciary in Israel on Palestinians in the region.

David Rutley: Israel's constitutional arrangements are a matter for Israelis. In meeting Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Cohen in March and September, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary urged Israel to build consensus and avoid societal division, ensuring that the independence of Israel's judiciary is preserved. Our focus is working with global partners to sustain the prospect of regional peace and stability.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/906671>

The following four questions all received the same answer

Gaza: Hospitals

Stephen Timms (Labour) [203193] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what information his Department holds on who was responsible for the explosion at the al-Ahli Arab Hospital on 17 October 2023.

Stephen Timms (Labour) [203193] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what sources of evidence his Department will use to assess who was responsible for the explosion at the Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza.

Claire Hanna (SDLP) [203416] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to independently verify the origin of the explosion on the Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza.

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [203953] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the impact of the explosion at the Al-Ahli Hospital on the capacity of health services in Gaza.

David Rutley: Following a thorough review, we think that it was likely a missile launched from within Gaza to Israel. Any loss of innocent life is a dreadful tragedy, and everyone will be thinking of both them and the families that they leave behind. This incident only reinforces the importance of getting humanitarian relief into Gaza safely and opening the Rafah crossing. Since the Hamas terrorist attacks on 7 October, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have spoken to counterparts from almost twenty countries, as well as the EU, as part of extensive diplomatic efforts to sustain the prospect of peace and stability in the Middle East.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/203193>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/203194>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/203416>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-19/203593>

The following eight questions all received the same answer

Gaza

Beth Winter (Labour) [203138] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to his Israeli counterpart on (a) ending Israeli restrictions on the supply of water, food and fuel into Gaza and (b) rescinding of the evacuation order issued by the Israeli Defence Force.

Beth Winter (Labour) [203140] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to restore water, food, fuel and electricity to Gaza.

Beth Winter (Labour) [203141] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of compliance with international humanitarian law of Israeli Government restrictions on electricity, food, water and fuel in Gaza.

Beth Winter (Labour) [203143] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the provision of humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people within Gaza.

Beth Winter (Labour) [203144] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with (a) the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees and (b) UK humanitarian agencies operating in Gaza on the (i) funding and (ii) other aid that is needed in Gaza.

Beth Winter (Labour) [203145] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with (a) The United Nations Relief and Works Agency and (b) UK humanitarian agencies operating in Gaza on the potential risk of infectious outbreak in Gaza in the context of the restriction on water and fuel supplies.

Beth Winter (Labour) [203146] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with (a) the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and (b) UK humanitarian agencies operating in Gaza on the number of water and sanitation facilities (a) continuing to operate and (b) no longer functioning in Gaza.

Beth Winter (Labour) [203147] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has held discussions with (a) the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and (b) UK humanitarian agencies operating in Gaza on the (i) level of fuel reserves for hospital backup generators in Gaza and (b) implications for continued medical treatment of civilians.

David Rutley: The UK is calling for immediate unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza so that essential aid can reach civilian populations including food, water, fuel and medical supplies. The UK is also calling on all parties to protect border crossings to support safe humanitarian access and mitigate harm to civilians. The FCDO is actively engaging with the international humanitarian system (including Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) UN agencies, Civil Society Organisations) to address the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary continues to engage regularly and closely with his Israeli counterparts, including in relation to ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in Gaza. He has now engaged with representatives from almost 20 countries about the situation in Israel and Gaza.

On the 16 October, the Prime Minister announced £10 million in humanitarian funding for civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) and on 23 October a further £20 million in response to the escalating conflict. This funding will allow trusted partners, including key UN agencies, to provide essential relief items and services. These could include food, water and emergency shelter, depending on the needs on the ground. The UK is also exploring options for moving

humanitarian supplies closer to the region and is liaising with aid agencies in the region to ensure relief supplies can be distributed as quickly and effectively as possible.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-17/203138>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-17/203140>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-17/203141>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-17/203143>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-17/203144>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-17/203145>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-17/203146>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-17/203147>

The announcements referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-10m-humanitarian-aid-for-civilians-in-occupied-palestinian-territories>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-23/debates/018D96AB-5D91-48D7-9809-19A03E54125A/IsraelAndGaza#contribution-61483896-20C4-4BA0-AC5E-163033573EB4>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Gaza: Borders

Joanna Cherry (SNP) [203509] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made representations to the Israeli authorities on lifting restrictions to (a) water, (b) food, (c) fuel and (d) electricity in Gaza.

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [203590] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the impact of Israeli military operations in Gaza on the ability of aid agencies to deliver essential humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza.

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [203591] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the humanitarian impact of the Israeli Government's evacuation order issued on 12 October 2023 to civilians in the north of Gaza.

David Rutley: The UK is calling for immediate unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza so that essential aid can reach civilian populations including food, water, fuel and medical supplies. The UK is also calling on all parties to protect border crossings to support safe humanitarian access and mitigate harm to civilians. The FCDO is actively engaging with the international humanitarian system (including intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organisations, UN agencies, civil society organisations) to address the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza. On the 16 October, the Prime Minister announced £10 million in humanitarian funding for civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) and on 23 October a further £20 million, in response to the escalating conflict. This funding will allow trusted partners, including key UN agencies, to provide essential relief items and services. These could include food, water and emergency shelter,

depending on the needs on the ground. The UK is also exploring options for moving humanitarian supplies closer to the region and is liaising with aid agencies in the region to ensure relief supplies can be distributed as quickly and effectively as possible.

Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have emphasised the importance of taking all possible measures to protect innocent civilians and underlined the importance of safe humanitarian access to Gaza in their discussions with their Israeli counterparts. On 19 October, the Foreign Secretary travelled to the region where he met leaders in Egypt, Turkey and Qatar and pushed for agreement on humanitarian access to Gaza, the release of British hostages and foreign nationals, and securing safe passage for British Nationals to leave Gaza. The UK will remain committed to mitigating the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and calling for international humanitarian law to be respected, while standing alongside the people of Israel against the terrorist group Hamas.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-19/203509>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-19/203590>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-19/203591>

The announcements referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-10m-humanitarian-aid-for-civilians-in-occupied-palestinian-territories>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-23/debates/018D96AB-5D91-48D7-9809-19A03E54125A/IsraelAndGaza#contribution-61483896-20C4-4BA0-AC5E-163033573EB4>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [203392] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to (a) provide funding and (b) other support to (i) the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, (ii) other UN agencies, (iii) Medical Aid for Palestinians and (iv) other UK-based organisations in responding to the situation in Gaza.

David Rutley: The UK is calling for immediate unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza so that essential aid can reach civilian populations including food, water, fuel and medical supplies. The UK is also calling on all parties to protect border crossings to support safe humanitarian access and mitigate harm to civilians. The FCDO is actively engaging with the international humanitarian system (including Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), UN agencies, Civil Society Organisations) to address the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

On 19 October, the Foreign Secretary was in the region where he met leaders in Egypt, Turkey and Qatar and pushed for agreement on humanitarian access to Gaza, the release of British hostages and foreign nationals, and securing safe passage for British Nationals to leave Gaza. The UK will remain committed to mitigating the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and calling for international humanitarian law to be respected, while standing alongside the people of Israel against the terrorist group Hamas.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/203392>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [203592] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help ensure the

safety of humanitarian workers in Gaza.

David Rutley: The UK is calling for immediate, unimpeded and safe humanitarian access for lifesaving aid to reach civilians. This includes adequate volumes of food, water, fuel and medical supplies as a priority. The safety of civilians and humanitarian personnel is critical to enable aid to reach those who need it most. We strongly condemn all forms of violence and incitement to violence directed towards healthcare workers. The wounded and critically ill in Gaza and the West Bank should be able to access the urgent medical care they need. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv regularly raises the importance of this issue with the Israeli authorities.

The Foreign Secretary continues to engage regularly and closely with his Israeli counterparts, including in relation to ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in Gaza. The Prime Minister has announced £30 million in humanitarian funding for civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in response to the escalating conflict. This funding will allow trusted partners, including key UN agencies, to provide essential relief items and services.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-19/203592>

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

Chris Law (SNP) [203504] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

David Rutley: The UK is calling for immediate unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza so that essential aid can reach civilian populations, including food, water, fuel and medical supplies. The UK is also calling on all parties to protect border crossings to support safe humanitarian access and mitigate harm to civilians. The Foreign Secretary continues to engage regularly and closely with his Israeli counterparts, including in relation to ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in Gaza. He most recently spoke to the Israeli Foreign Minister, Eli Cohen, on 23 October. The UK will remain committed to mitigating the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and calling for international humanitarian law to be respected, while standing alongside the people of Israel against the terrorist group Hamas.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-19/203504>

Gaza: Disability

Cat Smith (Labour) [203334] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to his Israeli counterparts on the welfare of people with disabilities in Gaza.

David Rutley: While the UK has not made specific representations on the welfare of people with disabilities in Gaza, we have been clear about the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza for all civilians there. The UK is steadfast in its position that all states should uphold international humanitarian law and we call on our friends and partners to do so. Israel has the right to defend itself proportionately and its military operations must be conducted in accordance with international humanitarian law. Civilians must be respected and protected. Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have, in their discussions with their Israeli counterparts, emphasised the importance of taking all possible measures to protect innocent civilians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/203334>

West Bank: Violence

Jim Shannon (DUP) [203300] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his counterparts in

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on the escalation of violence in the West Bank.

David Rutley: On 19 October, the Foreign Secretary travelled to the region where he met leaders in Egypt, Turkey and Qatar to help prevent the conflict spreading across the region and to seek a peaceful resolution. He pushed for agreement on humanitarian access to Gaza, the release of British hostages and foreign nationals and securing safe passage for British Nationals to leave Gaza. The Foreign Secretary also discussed the urgent need for the Rafah crossing to open so that lifesaving aid can reach those who need it and for Hamas to release the hostages. Since the Hamas attacks on 7 October, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have spoken to counterparts from almost 20 countries as part of extensive diplomatic efforts to sustain the prospect of peace and stability in the Middle East.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/203300>

House of Commons Library Briefings

2023 Israel-Hamas conflict: UK and international response

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9874/CBP-9874.pdf>

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: A Parliamentary reading list, 2020-2023

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9873/CBP-9873.pdf>

United Nations

Security Council Fails to Adopt Either of Two Draft Resolutions Addressing Conflict and Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

The Security Council ... failed to adopt either of two competing draft resolutions — one from the United States, the other from the Russian Federation — addressing the raging war and humanitarian crisis in Gaza. ...

By the terms of the United States' draft resolution, the Council would have unequivocally rejected and condemned the heinous terrorist attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups that took place in Israel starting 7 October. It would have reaffirmed the inherent right of all States to individual and collective self-defence, adding that in responding to terrorist attacks, Member States must fully comply with all their obligations under international law. By other terms, the Council would have also demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages taken by Hamas and other terrorist groups and called for all measures, specifically to include humanitarian pauses, to allow the full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access.

... **Linda Thomas-Greenfield (United States)** said that her delegation had worked to forge consensus around a strong and balanced text, soliciting input from all Council members. ...

Vassily Nebenzia (Russian Federation) describing an earlier draft put forward by his delegation on 16 October as short, depoliticized and fully humanitarian, said that the United States was trying to push through a new text full of politicized, irrelevant and very dubious provisions. It contained no call for a ceasefire or any condemnation of arbitrary attacks on civilians in Gaza, among other things, he stated....

By the terms of the Russian Federation's draft, the Council would have called for an immediate, durable and fully respected humanitarian ceasefire, firmly condemned all violence and hostilities against civilians and unequivocally rejected and condemned both the heinous attacks by Hamas in Israel starting 7 October and the taking of civilian hostages.

By other terms, it would have called for all measures, such as humanitarian pauses and establishment of humanitarian corridors, necessary to allow humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners full, rapid, safe and unhindered access to all affected areas in Gaza. It would have also urged the immediate rescission of the order for civilians and UN staff to evacuate all areas of Gaza north of the Wadi Gaza and relocate to the south. ...

Lana Zaki Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates) said that the Council knows what the most pressing humanitarian needs are — an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, humanitarian access and adherence to international humanitarian law. The same value must be given to Palestinian lives as to Israeli lives, she said, adding that Gaza is occupied territory, its people cannot be abandoned and the Council must therefore step up. ...

Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom) said that the United States' draft would have had a real impact on the ground by calling for humanitarian pauses and the hostages' release. ...

Gilad Erdan (Israel) ... thanked the United States for its draft resolution and those Council members that supported it. That text clearly condemned "savage genocidal terrorists" and stood up for Member States' right to defend themselves. "How would Moscow react if terrorist death squads wiped out entire neighbourhoods in Moscow?" he asked. "How would Beijing respond if genocidal jihadists murdered or beheaded your babies?" On the other hand, the Russian Federation's text sought to tie Israel's hands and prevent it from eliminating a threat to its existence. Its call for Israel to rescind its call for a temporary evacuation of Gaza only serves to maximize civilian casualties, he added.

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15464.doc.htm>

First Person: Israel's health system responds to October attacks

Healthcare providers in Israel are working around the clock following the 7 October Hamas attacks that killed 1,400 people and injured more than 4,600, according to Michel Thieren, the World Health Organization (WHO) Special Representative in Israel.

Dr. Thieren spent almost two weeks travelling across the country to meet with survivors, authorities and families of more than 200 hostages held captive in Gaza.

WHO offered humanitarian support to Israel's health response immediately after the attacks. At the time, Israel's Health Ministry replied that the system was coping, but that it would not hesitate to ask if assistance was needed. To date, WHO's surveillance system of attacks on healthcare recorded eight attacks on Israeli medical facilities that killed seven people.

In visits to destroyed and deserted towns, from a hospital in Ashkelon to military bases where victims' remains are stored pending their identification, Dr. Thieren spoke with survivors, health workers and authorities.

He also met with relatives of hostages taken by Hamas, amid continuing repeated calls by WHO and UN partners for their immediate and unconditional release.

As the Israel-Palestine conflict escalates, Dr. Thieren shared an account of what he saw and heard:

"What is so striking is that almost all the people I spoke to, the vast majority of them with severe injuries from gun shots, shrapnel and burns, did not want to talk about themselves at all but about the people they had seen die in front of them.

Almost every one of those survivors had seen someone else die before they themselves were injured. They are absolutely haunted by this. It is dominant in their thoughts.

So many need urgent mental health support.

The fact that so many Israelis are still being held hostage by Hamas means that there is no chance for the wider public to begin the healing process.

It is on their minds 24 hours a day. It has added to the collective psychological burden

witnessed nationwide, triggering an acute need for mental health services. From what I am seeing, mental health problems appear to be rapidly spreading among the country's population. The human suffering is immense. People just don't feel safe anymore, and this is a complete change in their recent history. Doctors and forensic experts are still working to identify the bodies. They are all wrapped in plastic bags. There are obviously adult bodies and children's bodies, but the vast majority of bags are misshapen. Despite Israel having some of the best forensic doctors in the world, only 700 – barely half of the 1,400 victims – have been positively identified so far. This, of course, is incredibly impactful on those that are doing this necessary work. I have visited ghost towns in the south whose populations have been evacuated. There is still the terrible stench of death. I have listened to so many people telling their stories. Survivors, the injured, psychiatrists, doctors, first responders and soldiers – all their accounts are horrific. The shadow of national shock and grief has plunged this country into night.”

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142812>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

John Cryer (Labour) [906669] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to counter the work of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

David Rutley: The UK condemns Iran's hostile activity in the UK and elsewhere. We continue to work in close cooperation with our international partners to ensure that our collective response is robust and deters the IRGC. In July, the Foreign Secretary announced a new sanctions regime that will give the UK new and enhanced powers to counter Iran's destabilising activities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-10-18/906669>

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Other Relevant Information

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

States must address prejudice and discrimination based on religion or belief at all levels – UN expert

Widespread prejudicial attitudes at all levels, along with discriminatory legal frameworks, continue to inhibit enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief across the world, a UN expert said ...

“There is an urgent need for States to recognise and counter discrimination and hatred based on religion or belief at all levels, including parliamentarians, civil servants, law enforcement, and others,” said Nazila Ghanea, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

In her report to the General Assembly, Ghanea highlighted various authorities and other

actors on whom effective enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief depends, starting from the perspective of the rights-holder. ...

The report detailed the role of law enforcement, judiciaries, and parliamentarians, drawing attention to credible reports of their participation in, or refusal to prevent or ensure redress for, discrimination and violence based on religion or belief.

The Special Rapporteur called for effective training of State functionaries, effective oversight and avenues for redress, and the establishment of a national focal point for freedom of religion or belief. She further noted positive examples from which States could learn, such as inclusive engagement with religious or belief communities in urban planning, the establishment of forums for interreligious dialogue at the local level, and programmes for the training of judicial officers on freedom of religion or belief standards.

“Promoting interfaith dialogue, engaging in debate concerning freedom of religion or belief at the international level, and accepting and asserting international human rights norms, are of course important and necessary, but the work does not end there,” Ghanea said.

“The reality of widespread prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes among State functionaries at all levels can essentially render freedom of religion and belief protections a ‘dead letter’,” she said.

The expert stressed that States must reckon with the complexities and challenges of making enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief a tangible reality. “This implies not only bringing the constitutional and legal order in line with international standards, but also carrying out the hard work of changing attitudes, even if it does not seem politically convenient in the short term,” she said. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/states-must-address-prejudice-and-discrimination-based-religion-or-belief>

Freedom of religion or belief (A/78/207)

<https://undocs.org/en/A/78/207>

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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>

Report Stage, House of Commons

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-25/debates/13BE6BE3-E8FB-415F-AC96-7D6FF6979F83/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies\(OverseasMatters\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-25/debates/13BE6BE3-E8FB-415F-AC96-7D6FF6979F83/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies(OverseasMatters)Bill)

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill

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

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3499>

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, the Golan Heights and Lebanon) (Scotland) Regulations 2023

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/sdsi/2023/9780111058343/contents>

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 today**

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 5 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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