



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Lords Debate

King's Speech: Science, Innovation and Technology

... col 449 **Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated):** ... I also want to probe proposals to modernise the mission of public service broadcasting to keep up with new technological changes. It is fine to ensure that viewers and listeners have easy access to public service TV and radio content on connected devices, online platforms and smart TVs, but I am concerned that there is a complacency that assumes that simply making PSB content available will deliver what the gracious Speech calls a trusted source of impartial news. ... This ignores the ongoing problems of partiality in PSB news output. Also, public service broadcasters themselves now often use web and online platforms that can mean one-sided material, even misinformation, being available for ever longer. I will give a couple of examples.

col 450 Recently, the grass-roots anti-racism campaign group Don't Divide Us made a formal complaint about a BBC "Newsround" web article published in 2020 entitled "White Privilege: What is it and How Can it be Used to Help Others?" This was no impartial primer. Aimed at children and teenagers, material was presented by Professor Kehinde Andrews, an openly partisan activist and advocate of critical race theory. A highly contested, unscientific and politically divisive concept—white privilege—is presented as a self-evident truth with no counterview—and that was by the BBC. As DDU director Dr Alka Sehgal Cuthbert explains, this controversial ideology impugns "the majority of the British public who happen to be white" for alleged privilege based on their skin colour while "patronising Britain's non-white citizens" as perpetual victims. This politicised narrative is presented as trustworthy fact on a BBC website. How did the BBC respond to concerns? ... It explained that content currently published on a BBC website must be complained about within 30 working days of it being published. So, this partisan material, labelled as PSB for youth, remains online and nothing can be done.

Here is another example. In a very fine speech in this House on Israel and Gaza, the noble

Lord, Lord Wolfson, noted that the BBC “uncritically” repeated Hamas officials’ claims “that Israel had struck the Al-Ahli hospital”—[[Official Report, 24/10/23; col. 592.](#)] in Gaza, and that the claims were presented as fact. When it was clarified that, actually, it was an Islamic Jihad rocket, the defamatory report remained on the BBC website, unaltered. It was viewed by millions and was cited as verified fact by too many at the start of what has become an ever-growing climate of anti-Semitic hatred on our streets.

Mind you, if you watch PSB news, you may not see the scale of this anti-Semitic problem. In coverage of the Armistice demo at the weekend, I got the sense that some journalists from the likes of, for example, Channel 4, were almost relieved to spot familiar bigots in the guise of Tommy Robinson and friends; these were the dangerous thugs that all bien pensants in the media recognise and denounce. However, they somehow managed to miss the racist bigotry aimed at Jews: protesters dressed up as Hamas terrorists; placards featuring swastikas in the Star of David; and those caught on film shouting, “Kill all Jews”, or, “Hitler knew how to deal with these people”. None of this featured in the mainstream news at all, so I am grateful to those citizen journalists and freelancers such as Inc.Monocle—we should all follow him—for filming and photographing so comprehensively that we have material we all need to see. I note that the Met Police is using that material as evidence for its post-event, Wild West-style “Wanted” posters. My question is: why was more of this not on PSB channels?

Also, as a follow-on to the endless arguments I had with Ministers on what is now the Online Safety Act, it is worth noting that those much-maligned platforms are often invaluable for publishing inconvenient truths and proof of why free speech online is so important. Censorship is never the answer to hate. Hamas despises freedom but, for democracies, it is our lifeblood. This is why I am not convinced by the Economic Activity of Public Bodies Bill, which tries to ban boycotts and divestment projects rather than democratically convincing public bodies against treating Israel as a pariah state and using censorious tactics to punish it, Israeli products, Israeli speakers, Jewish shops and so on. *col 451* This is also why we should all be anxious about one of the Secretaries of State associated with these debates, Michelle Donelan, calling on UK Research and Innovation—UKRI—to shut down its equality, diversity and inclusion committee on the grounds that some of its academic members put anti-Israel posts on social media. Although I disagree profoundly with the sentiments expressed by those academics—such as labelling Israel as an apartheid state guilty of genocide, which I find disgusting—I am also disgusted when a Government Minister interferes with academic freedom. ...

Talking of equality, diversity and inclusion, it is a sign of the times that, although I welcome confirmation of the construction of the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre, my first thought was, “They’ll need extra-heavy security because it could be attacked”. My second thought was, “Oh no, I hope the memorial project won’t have an EDI committee or activists might demand that it decolonise the content and rebrand Jewish victims of the Holocaust as colonisers”—a fashionable slander that is very popular in educational and cultural institutions as we speak.

To conclude: sadly, the arts are being poisoned by such intersectional identity politics ...

col 452 **Lord Lebedev (Crossbench):** ... Ten years ago, I told the Leveson inquiry that a free and independent media was essential for Britain today. It has been alarming since then to see the erosion of free speech that is taking place here. ...

... let me say, in the spirit of Voltaire, that I equally support the right of Jeremy Corbyn to his views on Hamas. I may find those views repellent, but I will defend his right to hold them; it is not just the left that is guilty of cancel culture. ...

I am concerned that some of the provisions in the online harms Bill could give further legal basis for a process of censorship and self-censorship that is already under way. When you muzzle, cancel and sack people merely because they champion their honestly held opinions, you are playing with fire. ...

col 474 **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture,**

Media and Sport (Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay): ... A number of noble Lords mentioned the importance of our broadcast media. The noble Baroness, Lady Fox of Buckley, is right to highlight the importance of the BBC's impartiality, but also of the way it describes global events. The attacks by Hamas in Israel since 7 October are terrorist acts committed by a terrorist organisation, proscribed as such in the United Kingdom since 2021 and by a number of other Governments and international organisations. The Secretary of State has been clear how proud she is of our world-leading BBC, but in this case she does not believe it has set the right standard. True impartiality means being grounded in facts. The legal position in the UK on this matter is clear: Hamas members are terrorists. Calling these acts what they are and accurately labelling the perpetrators helps audiences to understand what has happened, what is still happening and its context. That is the point that the Secretary of State has been clear to the BBC about. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-11-14/debates/B1CB0CFD-075F-4443-A4BD-CF234B68DA41/King'SSpeech>

The King's Speech can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-11-07/debates/24D8E0F6-1D2C-45DE-A8C4-F5C7B2477C68/King'SSpeech>

Welsh Senedd Debate

The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2023

580 Julie James (Minister for Climate Change): ... Members will be aware of the ongoing situation in the middle east, and the increased violence and conflict has escalated further, following the events on 7 October. British nationals and those with dual nationality may wish to return to the UK, and some may have already done so. We need to prepare urgently for those who are fleeing conflict, to ensure they arrive to a place of safety and security. The UK Government has decided to disapply the habitual residence test to people with the right to enter the UK from Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza strip, east Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and Lebanon, to allow them to access the support they require immediately after their arrival. People are being evacuated from those affected territories will therefore be able to access financial support, should they need it. Assessment to entitlement will continue as normal, but the need to wait for this support will be waived. The Welsh Government welcomes this decision and, as a nation of sanctuary, we need to act now to ensure we reflect that position fully in Wales. ...

582 ... as in previous similar circumstances, we have acted promptly and introduced the regulations more quickly than normal, due to the extreme urgency the situation necessitates.

583 The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2023 will provide British nationals, others not subject to immigration control or treated as such and anyone with immigration leave and recourse to public funds evacuated from the conflict in Israel, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and Lebanon with eligibility of housing and housing assistance. To be very clear, this provides eligibility for British nationals and other eligible people only who return from the affected territories. ...

588 Huw Irranca-Davies (Labour Co-op, Chair of the Legislation Committee): ... [the Committee] note that no consultation has been carried out in relation to the regulations, and that section 5 of the explanatory memorandum provides the explanation of why. ... our committee is very pleased to expedite the scrutiny of these regulations so that housing

accommodation and assistance are in place for those we can reasonably foresee will need our help in their time of need. ...

589 Mabon ap Gwynfor (Plaid Cymru): ... I welcome that there's an additional class of person, class O, or those who were residing in Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights or Lebanon immediately before 7 October 2023 and who left Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights or Lebanon in connection with the escalating violence there. It's heartening that the Welsh Government has taken the opportunity to offer support to these individuals. ...

Motion agreed

To read the full transcript see

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/13558#A83308>

Welsh Senedd Oral Answer

Sioned Williams (Plaid Cymru): ... Turning now to the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine, which has cost thousands of lives, this conflict is exacerbating, as you know, an already very serious refugee crisis in the region. There are 1.5 million internally displaced people in Gaza, which is more than half of the population, and half of all housing in the besieged Gaza strip has already been destroyed or damaged. Scotland's First Minister, Humza Yousaf, along with City of Sanctuary, has called on the UK Government to welcome Palestinian refugees to the UK and for the international community to commit to a worldwide refugee programme for the people of Gaza. Once the UK has done this, the First Minister of Scotland has said that their country is willing to offer safety and sanctuary to those being forced to flee death, disease and destruction.

Within the nation of sanctuary and asylum-seeker plan, one of the action points is to continue to promote Welsh values of welcoming those fleeing the violence and persecution of war. So, given this, what discussions have you had with the UK Government regarding the creation of a refugee resettlement scheme for those in Gaza who want to and are able to leave? Do you echo the calls of Humza Yousaf? Is Wales ready and willing to welcome all refugees from Gaza and not only those with British passports, especially given the Tory Westminster Government's determination to break international law to enact its cruel immigration policies?

Jane Hutt (Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip): ... It is very important that we continue—and we debated this last week—to do what we can, not just in terms of community cohesion, which I expressed and updated Members on ways in which we're engaging with communities in Wales, but also that we look at what we can do as a nation of sanctuary. Obviously, matters relating to immigration remain the responsibility of the UK Government, and this does include potential refugee resettlement schemes. We're in regular contact with the UK Government to look at the situation and also we recognise that there haven't been any announcements by the UK Government on any resettlement packages for those from Gaza and Israel wishing to seek sanctuary in Wales. But I'm sure that you will be pleased, as we all supported those regulations ... the homelessness regulations, that we're doing what we can to provide support for those who have got status or dual status to come and be supported in terms of housing. ...

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/13559#C540759>

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See also the Lords debate on the King's Speech, and the Welsh Senedd debate and oral answer that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Debate

Debate on the Address: Economic Growth

col 534 Alan Brown (SNP): ... I am listening to [Rachel Reeves'] speech about values. The values of my constituents are such that they are calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Does she support those values?

Rachel Reeves: We have just had an hour and a half's worth of questions on that issue. ... [see "[Commons Oral Answers](#)" below]

col 548 Harriett Baldwin (Conservative): It has been said that we enjoyed a holiday from history between the fall of the Berlin wall and 11 September 2001, but unfortunately history has now etched two more horrendous dates into our memories: 24 February 2022 for Russia's evil invasion of Ukraine, and 7 October 2023 for Hamas's evil terrorist attack on innocent Israelis. ...

col 564 Stella Creasy (Labour Co-op): ... Everybody in this Chamber wants the bloodshed to stop in Israel and Gaza. Everybody in this Chamber, I hope, stands with people like my constituent whose parent has been kidnapped by Hamas and wants to see them returned and to see the dismantling of Hamas as a terrorist organisation. A humanitarian pause would require the same type of negotiation as a ceasefire. Let us stand together with our international partners and put pressure on those partners who can put pressure on Hamas to get people round the table. Let us challenge Israel to stand up for international humanitarian law, and let us stop the bloodshed. This King's Speech does nothing to achieve that, but it could have done. ...

col 585 Richard Burgon (Labour): ... I will address the crisis in the middle east and the Government's failure to back the growing calls for a ceasefire from the UN Secretary-General and beyond, and I will speak to amendment (b), tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana), of which I am a sponsor.

Already, after just five weeks, more than 11,000 people in Gaza and more than 1,200 Israelis have been killed. It is the duty of everyone in this House to help save life—both Palestinian and Israeli—to help stop the bombing, to help end the suffering, to help free the hostages, to stop the war crimes, and to get the aid that is so desperately needed into Gaza. That means that we have to work for a ceasefire, and that work needs to happen now—there is not a second to waste.

The UN Secretary-General says that the way forward is a ceasefire, and so does the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. In fact, the heads of all major UN agencies are calling for a humanitarian ceasefire, so why do our Government think that they know better than the world's leading humanitarian agencies? President Macron has now called for a ceasefire, so France joins other European nations such as Spain, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland and Ireland, as well as the UN Secretary-General, in that call. Other major nations, such as Brazil, and middle eastern nations including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, are all calling for a ceasefire.

col 586 Securing a negotiated ceasefire—one binding on all sides—is achievable but it requires a huge diplomatic effort. It is time for our Government to add their weight to the push for a ceasefire rather than dismissing out of hand a proposal that has growing international support—especially when polls show that two thirds of the British public want a ceasefire. I am afraid that the Government have instead sought to distort what is being demanded, so let us be totally clear: a ceasefire means that all sides stop firing. That requires negotiation, so our Government should be straining every sinew, using every

possible diplomatic avenue, and talking to Governments of all persuasions—those with sway in Israel, and those with channels to Hamas, such as Qatar—to secure a negotiated ceasefire that is binding on all parties, and bring an end to this crisis.

Of course, securing a ceasefire will not be easy, but it will not happen if Governments do not even bother to try. Once we secure that ceasefire, instead of more bloodshed, more suffering and occupation, let us turn this moment—as difficult as it now seems—into the moment when we secure, alongside Israel, the viable Palestinian state that is so needed for the cause of justice.

col 595 Stephen Farry (Alliance): ... I want to touch upon the situation in the middle east, and in particular the need for a ceasefire. I utterly condemn the actions of Hamas as terrorism. However, we must recognise that Israel's response has been disproportionate, represents collective punishment and sees ongoing breaches of international humanitarian law. We have all been deeply touched by the images we have seen on our televisions, and we know that there is a massive humanitarian crisis ongoing in Gaza.

Hopefully, we all recognise that there is no military solution to the situation. The only way forward lies in both Israel and Palestine having freedom and security, and the reaching of a political accommodation, notably with a two-state solution. Continued death and destruction achieves nothing—arguably, it makes the situation even harder, because it will only compound people's sense of bitterness and feed extremism. It also risks wider regional escalation. A ceasefire, which must include the release of hostages and humanitarian access, requires a collective international effort, as does the renewed peace process that should follow any initial ceasefire. ...

col 597 Alex Sobel (Labour Co-op): ... I want to discuss Gaza, which the King referred to in his Gracious Speech. I, like many others, was at a Remembrance Sunday event at a local church. I was privileged to read Micah 4, which states: "He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig-tree".

Rev. Matt Broughton of St Giles then gave the eulogy. He drew attention to the fact that the same land that is being fought over now was being fought over 3,000 years ago. Micah was under threat of attack and assault, but he could see the need for peace and a peaceful settlement, and the need to turn those swords into ploughshares. He also drew attention to the fact that the only settlement would be through negotiation ...

Although, as Matt Broughton said, now is a time of uncertainty, disharmony and fear, we need to look to the future and think about how we can recreate two states for two peoples. It is incumbent on us, as the UK Parliament, and on the UK Government to join the international efforts that are being made. Pedro Sánchez, the Spanish Prime Minister, has proposed that there should be a peace conference after the conclusion of the conflict. It is important that we create an intergenerational peace for the people of Israel and the people of Palestine. This is not a goal that should be seen as too lofty or too difficult. It is the only way in which we will move beyond the current conflict, and beyond the discussions we are having about the cessation of hostilities or a ceasefire. It is the only way in which we will bring peace to both peoples. Some say that there are not the partners for peace on both sides, but if we are to reach this goal, the international community must make it their top priority to find those individuals who exist in both Israel and Palestine, and promote and support them. ...

col 599 Tahir Ali (Labour): I will speak to amendment (b), tabled in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana), to which I am a signatory. It is a great shame that the King's Speech paid little heed to the immediate need for a ceasefire in Gaza. It is over a month since the dreadful attacks on Israeli civilians on 7 October prompted a massive wave of retaliatory violence in Gaza. Over 11,000 innocent

Palestinians have been killed and over 25,000 injured. The majority of those killed and injured have been women and children, who have long been suffering the inhumane living conditions in Gaza, the largest open-air prison in the world.

Hamas's attack was contemptible and rightly condemned, but the evils committed on 7 October do not justify the disproportionate and unlawful response by Israel. The indiscriminate bombing of hospitals, bakeries and even refugee camps has maximised the suffering of the Palestinian people and driven them out of their homes. The withholding of water, food, fuel and medicine by Israel constitutes collective punishment, which is prohibited under international law. Israel has failed to respond proportionately or lawfully, and it has now killed more civilians than have been killed in all world conflicts over the last three years. It is no surprise that United Nations experts have expressed a grave concern that the people in Gaza are facing imminent genocide. Those experts have also made it clear that Israel's allies bear responsibility for the tragic situation unfolding in Gaza and that without immediate and decisive action, the Palestinian people face either death or complete displacement from their homes.

Given the terrible suffering of the people of Gaza, most of the British public now support a ceasefire—a position that is not reflected by this Government. A ceasefire is crucial to stopping the violence and allowing vital humanitarian assistance to find its way into Gaza. It is also essential to restarting a peace process that would see a secure Israel coexisting with a legitimate Palestinian state. However, on this issue the international community and the UK in particular have failed. Illegal settlers supported by the Israeli Government have, for years, seized land and property from Palestinians in the west bank, undermining the territorial integrity and sovereignty of any potential Palestinian state. Israeli forces have continually attacked worshippers at the al-Aqsa mosque in East Jerusalem, Palestinian families and businesses have been forced out of East Jerusalem, and the blockade of Gaza has continued unabated for many years. There are clearly elements within Israeli politics who have no wish or desire to see Palestinians co-exist alongside Israel, and who have used various means to prevent this from happening.

col 600 In this context, the much-needed leadership of countries such as ours in the peace process has been absent. There is still no indication of when the UK will formally recognise the state of Palestine, despite years of promises. Earlier today, we heard statements about a two-state solution. For a two-state solution there have to be two equal states, both of which have to be recognised. Of the 193 member countries of the United Nations, we are one of 55 that do not recognise Palestine. How can we talk about a two-state solution when we do not even recognise them as equals?

The Palestinian people have been abandoned, and now, in their time of greatest need, this Government cannot bring themselves to call for an immediate ceasefire. That is why, along with my colleagues in this House, I will continue to demand a ceasefire in Gaza. When half a million people taking to the streets to demand a ceasefire has been labelled by some Members as a “hate march,” we realise that humanity has failed. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-11-14/debates/89BEA327-4A7A-47E7-919D-9E8F5CDBCD15/EconomicGrowth>

The King's Speech can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-11-07/debates/24D8E0F6-1D2C-45DE-A8C4-F5C7B2477C68/King'SSpeech>

House of Commons Oral Answers

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

col 507 The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr

Andrew Mitchell): ... The terrible events in Israel and Gaza have underlined the critical importance of British diplomacy and development work. As Israel battles to defeat Hamas, the humanitarian situation remains extremely difficult. As the Prime Minister said last night, Israel must respect international humanitarian law.

With services and communication in Gaza under unprecedented strain, it is difficult to be absolutely certain about how events are unfolding, but the reports we have had from partners make clear the appalling loss of life, including among children and aid workers, and the situation in hospitals in Gaza City, notably Al-Shifa, is now acute. Al-Shifa has hundreds of in-patients and was able to offer a set of services unavailable elsewhere in Gaza. Reports indicate that operations have stopped due to the lack of fuel and supplies, and that premature babies have died due to the lack of electricity. Fuel is urgently needed to power hospitals as well as desalinisation plants to ensure access to clean water. Hospitals should be places of safety, able to treat patients with compassion. It is distressing to see them unable to do so. Every civilian death is heartbreaking, and it is impossible to comprehend the pain and loss that innocent Palestinians are enduring.

As the House knows, since 7 October the Government have been engaging intensively with our close allies and partners in the region. ...

Our goals remain unchanged. As I told the House last week, we are focused on getting life-saving aid to those in need in Gaza; supporting the safe return of hostages and British nationals; backing Israel's right to self-defence; and preventing a dangerous regional escalation.

col 508 Our efforts have contributed to some delivery of aid via the Rafah crossing and to over 150 British nationals being able to leave Gaza safely. ...

As the House knows, we have more than doubled our aid to civilians in Gaza, committing £30 million, and we stand ready to do more. For over a week, British flights carrying aid have been landing in Egypt, with shipments including life-saving items as well as the vital equipment that the Egyptian Red Crescent needs to be able to manage donations from across the world effectively. We are also urging the Israeli Government to increase humanitarian access, including through Rafah and by opening up the Kerem Shalom crossing. At this point we assess that land presently offers the most viable and safe way to get humanitarian aid into Gaza in the quantities needed, but we are also considering air and maritime options, including through our bases in Cyprus.

The Government have been clear that all parties to a conflict must afford civilians the protection that is their right under international law. That includes respecting the sanctity of hospitals, so that doctors can continue to care for the sick and injured. Events on 7 October and Hamas's subsequent statements have made it clear that they are a terrorist group who pose an existential threat to the very idea of an Israeli state. Israel has a right to defend itself against this terrorist threat, to restore its security and to bring the hostages home, but there are things that Israel must do as part of its response. We have impressed this on the Israeli Government: they must act within international law; they must take every precaution to minimise civilian casualties, limiting attacks to military targets; and they must stop extremist settler violence in the west bank. At the same time, we should be under no illusions. Hamas have chosen to embed themselves within the civilian population, and their willingness to sacrifice innocent Palestinians in this way only brings home their inhumanity. Alleviating the suffering is our foremost priority. We welcome any initiatives that would allow more aid to be delivered and hostages to be released. We have therefore consistently called for humanitarian pauses. Four-hour pauses in northern Gaza are an important first step, but longer pauses that cover wider areas will be needed. We are discussing with the UN and other partners how best to achieve this. We must avoid measures that serve only to benefit Hamas and allow them to entrench their position. At the same time, we need all parties to the conflict to abide by any pause, allowing sufficient time and security for civilians to move and for aid to be delivered.

Responding to the immediate crisis is critical, but we also need to do more to create a new

political horizon. The whole House knows that only one answer has come close to creating peace in these troubled lands: a two-state solution. ...

col 509 David Lammy (Labour): ... More than 11,000 Palestinians have reportedly been killed, with two thirds of the dead being women and children. This is shocking and devastating. Every civilian death is an equal tragedy. Does the Minister agree that the number of Palestinian civilians and children who have been killed over the past month is intolerable? And does he agree that Israel must make changes to how it is fighting this war, by taking urgent and concrete steps to protect civilian life?

I am gravely concerned by the desperate reports from hospitals in northern Gaza. These hospitals were already overstretched with the wounded, short of fuel and filled with civilians seeking shelter. Doctors are now forced to make impossible choices as they try to care for the wounded and newborns, without power. Some of those newborns have now lost their lives—unbearable.

Medical establishments have special protection under international law. They should never be targeted or used as shields. All parties must follow international law, acting with necessity, distinction, proportionality and precaution. Allegations of breaches should always be treated with the utmost seriousness.

The Minister said last week that the Government support the independence of the International Criminal Court, as does the Labour party, but he failed to answer whether the Government recognise its jurisdiction to address the conduct of all parties in Gaza. ...

col 510 Gaza is in a humanitarian catastrophe. More than 1.5 million people have been displaced, and there are desperate shortages of basic essentials. Does the Minister agree that the short pauses in the north are clearly not enough? Gazans need aid now. They need medicine now. They need water now. They need food now. They need fuel now. A full, comprehensive and immediate humanitarian pause in fighting across the whole of Gaza is needed now to alleviate Palestinian suffering and in order for Hamas terrorists to release the hostages.

Hamas's stated aim is to wipe Israel off the map. They committed the most brutal attack on Jews since the holocaust and now they are using innocent Palestinians as human shields. I would like to register my shock that not every Member of this House can say this truth: Hamas are terrorists.

We must not give up on the narrow openings that keep the prospect of peace alive. That means preventing escalation, condemning violence from settlers in the west bank, condemning rocket attacks on Israel from Iran's proxies in Lebanon and elsewhere, and creating a future where Gaza is not subject to occupation. ...

We must seek a path to a political process that leads to two states, a secure Israel and an independent Palestine.

Andrew Mitchell: ... All deaths of civilians are to be profoundly regretted. He talked about the scenes from the Al-Shifa Hospital, which will have shocked every Member of this House. He, like me, will be aware that 102 humanitarian workers, who placed their lives in jeopardy to support their fellow human beings, have lost their lives. He asks me about the ICC. It is not for me to fetter or speak in the place of its chief prosecutor, but the right hon. Gentleman will know that he has spoken and will do so again.

col 511 The right hon. Gentleman called for the hostages to be released, and I hope that everyone in this House will echo that. He said that Hamas are terrorists and suggested that some do not recognise that. I agree with him and hope that every Member of the House will make it clear that Hamas are terrorists. A dreadful pogrom took place on 7 October, where more Jewish people lost their lives in a day than at any time since the holocaust, and that piece of information is fundamental to our appreciation of the events to which he referred. ...

Alicia Kearns (Conservative): As of today, I am informed that no more aid will reach Gaza, not because it cannot get to the Rafah crossing or because it is piling up in Egypt,

but because the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees has no fuel left and so the aid cannot be redistributed. So although I really appreciate the Government looking at maritime and air efforts, and, crucially, at the need to open a second aid crossing to the west bank, there is no point—it is futile—unless we get the fuel to the UN. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... Fuel is desperately needed today—it is going to run out. The United Nations has been accessing dirty fuel, but now that is at an end and we are incredibly worried about the situation. ...

Brendan O’Hara (SNP): ... The Minister is right to highlight the appalling loss of life in Gaza, particularly among children and aid workers. Sadly, there is little sign of that ending soon as the bombardment intensifies. æ

A couple of weeks ago, I asked the previous Secretary of State whether he had been made aware, or had reasonable grounds to believe, that Israel had breached international humanitarian law in its response to the atrocities of 7 October. He steadfastly refused to answer that question, so I ask the Minister the same question. If he has, what representations has he made to the Israeli Government and what response has he had?
col 512 There can only be a political solution to this crisis, and one has to be found before the entire region is engulfed. That is why a ceasefire is essential: to end the unprecedented levels of killing and destruction, allow full humanitarian access, secure the release of the hostages and find a political solution that does not include Hamas. Four-hour pauses are not the answer. ...

Tomorrow, the House should have an opportunity to show its support for a ceasefire. I and every one of my SNP colleagues will be there to support an immediate ceasefire, and I would expect Labour party Members from Scotland to be in the Lobby with us. Without justice, there can be no peace, this horrific cycle of violence will continue and more Israeli and Palestinian lives will be lost.

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman ... knows our position on a ceasefire—it is a position shared by Members on the Opposition Front Bench—and he also knows the absolute commitment we have to try to drive forward pauses. ...

Robert Mardini, the director general of the International Committee of the Red Cross, has made clear that Gaza hospitals, treating hundreds of wounded people, cannot be targeted under any circumstances. The hon. Gentleman will know that the ICRC is the guardian of international humanitarian law and the Geneva convention, and Robert Mardini has said: “Hospitals are to be absolutely protected at all times.” ...

Liam Fox (Conservative): ... following the unprovoked slaughter of its citizens, Israel has a right to pursue and destroy the terrorist forces. It is terrible that the ordinary citizens of Gaza are paying the price for this, as Hamas would have known, but even if Israel is able to degrade and destroy the Hamas forces, the Hamas mindset will remain—a Hamas mindset that is funded and supported by Iran. Iran does not want there to be peace between Arab states and Israel because the Iranian regime does not want Israel to exist. ...

col 513 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... I hope he will accept that we do not carry on a running commentary on issues such as proscription, but the House and the Foreign Secretary have heard what he said.

Ben Bradshaw (Labour): I am still not clear whether the right hon. Gentleman agrees with Labour that the ICC has jurisdiction over the conduct of all parties in Gaza. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... It is not for Ministers to seek to state where the ICC has jurisdiction; that is for the chief prosecutor. ...

Julian Lewis (Conservative): Whether we like it or not, Israel will carry on fighting until it has established control of the area from which it was attacked. The question that then arises is what happens next. If Israel simply withdraws, Hamas will reappear. At least one moderate Arab state believes that a two-state solution will have to be imposed and policed.

Are the Government giving thought as to who might carry out that job? ...

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. Friend is entirely right about that, and entirely right that Israel has an absolute right of self-defence in this matter. ...

Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat): A lasting peace and a two-state solution is the only way to guarantee dignity and security for both Palestinians and Israelis. Hamas, a terrorist organisation, cannot be part of that, but a month after their contemptable attack on Israel, it is clear that a military solution is not working. It is not removing Hamas, and instead we have the humanitarian catastrophe to which the Minister referred. Does he agree that the way to achieve that peace and a two-state solution is to back a political solution with an immediate bilateral ceasefire, explicitly contingent on both parties adhering to it, so that if one party breaks the ceasefire, a military operation remains on the table?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady is entirely right about the importance of a political solution. She knows the position of the Government and Members on the Opposition Front Bench on the issue of ceasefires ... On the politics, I remind her that the great progress that was made at Oslo, which brought things so tantalisingly close, took place on the back of the first intifada.

col 514 **Stephen Crabb (Conservative):** Every right thinking person wants to see an end to fighting and a durable peace for Palestinians and Israelis, but Hamas have made absolutely clear that there will be no such peace so long as the state of Israel continues to exist. Will my right hon. Friend say a bit more about what has been happening at the Al-Shifa Hospital and other hospitals in Gaza? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... Hamas have made clear that they do not seek a ceasefire and indeed seek to repeat the awful events of 7 October. As far as the Al-Shifa Hospital is concerned, he, like me, will have seen the horrific pictures on television last night, and I referred specifically to the awful effects on babies that were displayed.

Tahir Ali (Labour): Recently, several United Nations experts gave a dire warning to the world, stating they believed that “the Palestinian people are at grave risk of genocide”, and that the time is now “running out” to prevent such a tragedy. Furthermore, they made it clear that Israel’s allies share the responsibility for that and must act now to prevent a genocide from taking place. ...

Andrew Mitchell: We will continue to focus on the importance of humanitarian pauses, but also try to make sure that, when the opportunity of a pause presents itself, we are able to get critical humanitarian supplies to those in desperate need.

Kit Malthouse (Conservative): Away from the horror of Israel and Gaza, there is an unfolding tragedy on the west bank, with the killing of well over 100, getting on for 200, Palestinians by settlers and the Israel Defence Forces. ... If ... the killings continue, would he consider the intervention of a UN peacekeeping force to keep the peace in that part of the world?

Andrew Mitchell: We have condemned the settler violence without qualification. ...

Margaret Hodge (Labour): ... What steps has he taken so far and what further steps will be taken by the new Foreign Secretary to ensure that the hostages are brought home? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we cannot give a running commentary on what we are doing to try to recover the hostages. I hope that she will accept my word that we are doing everything, across Government and internationally, to try to get them home as soon as we can.

col 515 **Mark Pritchard (Conservative):** The director of the FBI has said that Hamas pose the greatest security risk to the United States and the west since ISIS a decade ago. Does the Minister of State agree with that assessment ...

Andrew Mitchell: The threat of Hamas, which my right hon. Friend sets out very clearly, is undoubtedly true. It is part of Israel’s legitimate position that it can exercise its right to self-defence and go after the dreadful terrorists who perpetrated that awful act.

Imran Hussain (Labour): Thousands of innocent men, women and children have been killed and thousands more wounded in this conflict over the past month. ... does the Minister agree that the international community must protect civilians? If he does, why will the Government not join me in pressing for an immediate ceasefire to end the bloodshed ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... I can do no better than repeat what the Prime Minister said last night in his speech at Mansion House. He said that Israel “must take all possible measures to protect innocent civilians, including at hospitals”.

Michael Ellis (Conservative): My right hon. Friend and his shadow have spoken of hospitals. I have to tell him that there is now video evidence of suicide vests, rocket-propelled grenades, motorcycles used to kidnap Israelis to Gaza, nappies, and chairs with rope to hold hostages being found in the basement of the Al-Rantisi Hospital in Gaza. The hospital was obviously used by Hamas as a command centre and is believed to have held Israeli hostages. Does my right hon. Friend agree that using hospitals in this way as places to imprison hostages and keep weapons is an outrageous breach of international law?

Andrew Mitchell: Yes.

Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op): ... The clock is ticking. Hospitals are running out of fuel, food and water supplies are almost depleted, and until a large-scale humanitarian operation is in place, many more people will needlessly die. ...

col 516 **Andrew Mitchell:** We are working night and day for humanitarian access. ...

Vicky Ford (Conservative): ... Last week, my right hon. Friend called for Israel to take measures to protect civilians. I said that we needed to see Israel take such measures, but civilians have continued to die, especially in hospitals. Please can he double down on that request to Israel to take measures to protect civilians? ...

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. Friend makes a most important humanitarian point and she may rest assured that the Government are seized of it.

Richard Burgon (Labour): France’s President Macron has called for a ceasefire, joining other European nations such as Spain, Norway, Portugal and Ireland, as well as the UN Secretary-General. Securing a negotiated ceasefire—one that is binding on all sides—will require a huge diplomatic effort, so is it not time for our Government to add their weight to the push for a ceasefire ...

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Member will know that, in order to have a ceasefire, we need both parties to agree to it. Hamas have made it absolutely clear that they are not interested in a ceasefire. They made it clear that they want to repeat the actions of 7 October. ...

Matthew Offord (Conservative): ... Last week, when I was [in Israel], I did see evidence of humanitarian protection by the IDF forces. I also saw videos and photographs of the things that happened in some of the kibbutzim, and they were, quite simply, crimes against humanity. Does the Minister agree that there is no moral equivalence between Hamas and the sovereign independent state of Israel?

Andrew Mitchell: Yes, I completely agree ... I have to say that it would be helpful if all those calling for Israel to protect hospitals would also call on Hamas to vacate the hospitals and stop using civilians as human shields.

col 517 **Alex Sobel (Labour Co-op):** Today, Alon-Lee Green, the director of Standing Together, the largest cross-community organisation in Israel ... said: “What’s going on in Gaza does not only go against the Palestinian interest, it goes also against my peoples’ interest, the Jewish Israeli interest.”

Also today, we had Danny Danon, a Likud member and former ambassador, and Ram Ben Barak, a Yesh Atid opposition member, say that Israel should expel all Palestinians from Gaza. What are we doing to restrain the Israeli Government and commentators?

Andrew Mitchell: We have always made it clear to Israel that we are its closest possible friend, but friends give candid advice ...

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Conservative): ... Will my right hon. Friend ... explain what the British Government are doing in strategic planning to bring about a two-state solution?

Andrew Mitchell: There is an immense amount of work going on about how we get to the point where we can achieve that. ...

Tulip Siddiq (Labour): ... There is a report of a pregnant Palestinian woman who had horrific injuries from shelling and who then had an emergency C-section performed without electricity. I know the Minister will think that that is unacceptable, but what is he actually doing to ensure that hospitals and pregnant women are protected by international law?

Andrew Mitchell: We are speaking out in every way we can to try to protect vulnerable citizens. ... Israel has made it clear that it has clashed with Hamas nearby, but has not fired on the hospitals themselves.

col 518 **Bob Seely (Conservative):** ... both sides have talked about the importance of protecting hospitals, but what can Israel do when those hospitals are being used to store ammunition and hold hostages, when there are military HQs and operational Hamas commands underneath those hospitals, and when Hamas are deliberately denying those hospitals fuel, because they would rather broadcast pictures of very tiny babies dying than try to save them?

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend speaks with great eloquence and passion on this point. I can do no better than to commend the eloquence of his argument.

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour): The short pauses on their own are a first step, but they will not address the grave humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza. ... the aid getting into Gaza is woefully inadequate and that it is simply unacceptable for Israel not to lift its atrocious blockade and siege of Gaza ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... getting aid into Gaza is an absolute top priority. ...

Rehman Chishti (Conservative): ... The Minister has said that the Government welcome any new initiatives for a way forward. May I suggest two? The United Kingdom hosted the Friends of Syria international donors' conference in London, with international partners. Can the United Kingdom look at doing that for Palestine and Gaza? Linked to that, with regard to what happens in Gaza after Hamas is defeated, we have talked about the Palestinian Authority stepping up, but we have not talked about the other scenario. The United Kingdom chairs the Trusteeship Council at the UN, along with France, which looks at transitional arrangements. Will the Government consider that as a way forward? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... The Government will consider every possible way ahead as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

col 519 **Alan Brown (SNP):** ... Since 7 October, only 900 aid trucks have been allowed in. In normal circumstances, the number would be close to 20,000. With fuel running out, is this not now collective punishment? ...

Andrew Mitchell: It is not just a humanitarian pause that is the issue, but how to distribute vital humanitarian supplies safely to people who may be being corralled in small spaces. ...

Flick Drummond (Conservative): UNRWA has announced that it will be unable to collect aid imported from Egypt today because it does not have the fuel for trucks. That also means that water pumping, sewage treatment and other essential services will cease. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... fuel is the most important of many important issues today. ...

Julie Elliott (Labour): ... The IDF has offered incubators to the hospital, but it is not incubators that the hospital needs. It has incubators; it needs fuel. ...

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady will know that Israel did offer fuel yesterday, but Hamas did not allow it to be accepted.

Henry Smith (Conservative): ... in order to enhance Commons scrutiny, will the Foreign Office commit to the Secretary of State's coming before the Foreign Affairs Committee on the same regular cycle that the Foreign Secretary would have appeared at the Dispatch Box for FCDO questions?

Andrew Mitchell: ... We are committed to ensuring that this House can fully

scrutinise everything that the Foreign Office does, and his suggestion about a similar pattern of appearances for the Foreign Secretary before the Foreign Affairs Committee is a good one.

col 520 Diane Abbott (Independent): ... President Macron, the United Nations and all the adjoining Arab countries are calling for a ceasefire ... because short humanitarian pauses will not end the slaughter. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... I draw her attention to the telling arguments that have been made—and not just by the Government but by those on her own Front Bench—about why the humanitarian pauses, rather than a ceasefire, are the right approach.

Stephen Hammond (Conservative): ... aid can only get there, and we can only make sure it gets to the people who need it rather than to Hamas, if those humanitarian pauses are longer than four hours. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we are aware that to achieve a humanitarian pause is the start of progress ...

Stephen Timms (Labour): ... As things stand, will that appalling loss of life not simply carry on? What are the Government doing to bring it to some kind of conclusion?

Andrew Mitchell: ... In north Gaza, all hospitals but one are out of service owing to a lack of power or damage. We are acutely aware of the strain and stress on life. That is why, as I set out in my statement and have argued in some of my responses to questions from across the House, we are doing everything we can to advance respect for international humanitarian law and to bring this dreadful conflict to a close.

Paul Bristow (Conservative): ... in answer to a previous question, [the Minister] acknowledged that the US President said he hopes to see “less intrusive action” at the Al-Shifa Hospital, as patients and staff remain trapped inside, and that hospitals “must be protected”. For clarity, is that also the position of the UK Government?

Andrew Mitchell: Yes. We are extremely concerned that everything should be done to protect life, in the way that the President of the United States set out.

col 521 Mohammad Yasin (Labour): ... More than 11,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed, of whom nearly half were children. That cannot be just. I cannot in all conscience call for anything less than an end to this suffering. Will the Minister pluck up some courage and call for an immediate ceasefire in order to end the humanitarian disaster in Gaza?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman and I share the common aim of ending the suffering ... The argument is about how best to achieve it. ...

Scott Benton (Independent): Although nobody wants to see the conflict continue, does the Minister agree that those who call for an immediate ceasefire must initially acknowledge that Hamas are a terrorist organisation, that they started the conflict through their horrific attack on 7 October, and that terrorist organisations agree to ceasefires only when it suits their military aims, rather than for genuine humanitarian reasons?

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend is wise in pointing out the reasons why the combatants are not seeking to achieve a ceasefire at this time.

Marsha De Cordova (Labour): ... What discussions is the Minister having with the Israeli authorities to ensure that healthcare, aid and fuel can get into Gaza? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... Every sinew of the British Government is bent towards achieving the humanitarian aims that she sets out. I can tell her that, as of the time I came to make this statement, the Al-Ahli Hospital remains the only functioning hospital in Gaza, but it does not have a blood bank or supplies, so the situation is every bit as desperate as she and others on both sides of the House have set out.

Greg Smith (Conservative): In addition to the evidence that we have already heard of Hamas stockpiling weapons and the apparatus of terror in hospitals, including children’s hospitals, the Israeli authorities have also identified the misappropriation of aid, such as oxygen concentrators—meant to aerate the tunnels operated by Hamas—being hidden in

aid trucks. Is that not all evidence that no matter how much our human instincts want to see an end to bloodshed and the loss of life, a ceasefire would only embolden the terrorists, embolden Hamas, and the only way to get peace in the middle east is for the total destruction of Hamas?

col 522 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... the military power of Hamas has to be destroyed. That is what many people believe, and that is what the Israeli Government are intent on doing. I point out to him that the Israel Defence Forces use their power to defend their citizens; Hamas use their citizens to defend Hamas.

Sammy Wilson (DUP): ... As the terrorists are clearly under pressure—they are losing commanders, bases and control—does he agree that now is the wrong time to call for a ceasefire, which would only allow the terrorists to regroup, re-arm and prolong the conflict?

Andrew Mitchell: The right hon. Gentleman ... eloquently explains why a ceasefire is not a practical opportunity.

Diana Johnson (Labour): ... Médecins Sans Frontières has demanded, as a bare minimum, a medical evacuation of patients. What more can the British Government do to make that happen?

Andrew Mitchell: ... the British Government are doing everything we possibly can to advance that humanitarian endeavour.

Sam Tarry (Labour): Clearly, the atrocities of Hamas will in time be considered a war crime, but what we are seeing from the IDF at the moment is so far removed from what can be described as “self-defence”. Israeli Government officials have called Gazans “human animals” and referenced the use of nuclear weapons on Gaza. Netanyahu himself has cited Amalek in the Book of Samuel, which mentions killing and slaughtering every child, animal and person. On top of that, Israeli Ministers have handed out machine guns to people in the west bank. I have not heard a moral case—let alone a logical case—from anybody in this House for not joining all the Arab world, the UN, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope in calling for an immediate ceasefire in order to get hostages out and humanitarian aid in.

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman will have heard the arguments for and against a ceasefire ...

Kerry McCarthy (Labour): ... I appreciate what [the Minister] says about trying to do everything we can to get fuel through to hospitals, but at what point do we say, “Enough is enough; Israel will not allow that to happen”, and what can we do to ensure that those babies’ lives are saved?

col 523 **Andrew Mitchell:** It is important not to give up hope. It is important to drive forward in every possible way we can the objectives that the hon. Lady and I share, and we will continue to do that.

Nia Griffith (Labour): ... we were all shocked by the images of babies being huddled together in the hope of keeping them warm enough to stay alive. What more will the Government do ... to ensure that we facilitate the safe delivery of fuel for humanitarian purposes such as keeping life-saving equipment working for people in hospitals in Gaza?

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Independent): ... With one in 200 local Gazan people killed by the Israeli war machine, how much worse does it have to get before this place prioritises life over death and peace over war? The Minister says that Hamas may not want a ceasefire, so why do what Hamas wish? ...

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Member will have heard heavily rehearsed during this statement the arguments for and against a ceasefire, and I fear I cannot add anything to what I have already said on that point.

Zarah Sultana (Labour): ... Since 2015, this Government have licensed more than £472 million of arms exports to Israel, including parts of F-35 stealth aircraft, which are currently raining down bombs on Gaza. Does the Minister know whether British weapons have been used in violations of international law in Gaza, and does he agree that we should not sell weapons for committing war crimes?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Member will know that the President of Israel, President Herzog, has made it clear that his country will abide by international humanitarian law. ... She will also know that, in respect of arms exports in this country, we have the toughest arms regulations anywhere in the world.

Debbie Abrahams (Labour): What assessment has the Minister made of the number of Palestinian civilian deaths that there will be, including babies and children, without a humanitarian ceasefire in the next month?

col 524 **Andrew Mitchell:** I would not necessarily trust the figures that are produced by Hamas, but we do know that an extraordinary number of people have lost their lives ...

Clive Efford (Labour): Before we talk about humanitarian pauses, should we not agree first what we want to achieve by them? Would they not need to be for days or weeks, not just for four hours? ...

Andrew Mitchell: It is not just a question of using the pauses to try to advance humanitarian good ... we have to be incredibly careful that we do not end up creating a false sense of security, as the House will remember happened in Srebrenica, northern Iraq and Rwanda.

Andrew Jones (Conservative): ... Will [the Minister] join me in commending the extraordinary bravery of the aid workers on the ground in Gaza, some of whom have tragically lost their lives, including over 100 UN workers?

Andrew Mitchell: ... I hope a particularly hot place in hell is reserved for those who murder humanitarian workers who have put themselves in harm's way unarmed purely to protect the lives and interests of their fellow humanity.

Florence Eshalomi (Labour Co-op): ... Will the Minister condemn the acts of violence and extremism by Israeli settlers in the west bank, call on Israeli authorities to prevent that settler violence, ensure that there is clear accountability for the perpetrators and condemn this extremist rhetoric?

Andrew Mitchell: ... We will continue to stand up for the rule of law and international humanitarian law on every occasion we are able to do so. ...

col 525 **Jim Shannon (DUP):** ... Can [the Minister] provide an update on what progress has been made on discussions with Jordan, Egypt and surrounding nations to secure the free passage of medical aid? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... Discussions are going on with Jordan and Egypt ...

Stella Creasy (Labour Co-op): ... Those of us who believe that we should be working alongside our international colleagues for an urgent ceasefire as the best way to end the Palestinian bloodshed and the horrors we are seeing in Gaza know that any ceasefire that does not involve the immediate return of hostages and the dismantling of Hamas is unlikely to be sustainable. ... will the Minister urgently arrange a meeting with the Foreign Secretary for my constituent whose father is being held by Hamas, so that she may understand what this Government are doing for UK citizens who have hostage families? ...

Andrew Mitchell: I assume that the hon. Member has spoken to the crisis centre about that particular example. If she has not, I hope she will, and of course, we will afford all support we can to her constituent.

Barbara Keeley (Labour): ... Does the Minister agree that we need humanitarian pauses long enough to ensure that lifesaving aid reaches hospitals, as well as the release of hostages and the safe movement of innocent civilians?

Andrew Mitchell: We will undoubtedly continue to do everything we can to support humanitarian supplies getting in ...

Kenny MacAskill (Alba): ... Hamas today conjured up memories of Christmas truces before the horror recommenced, but this is not soldiers in the trenches; it is 2.2 million people trapped in a tight urban environment, including women and children. Is that not the reason that a humanitarian pause is insufficient and there must be an immediate ceasefire?

col 526 **Andrew Mitchell:** The circumstances that the hon. Member describes are precisely the reason why the British Government put such a high priority on trying to advance those humanitarian aims, some of which, at least, can be advanced through the humanitarian pauses we are so trenchantly seeking.

Kate Hollern (Labour): ... can the Minister tell me what specific steps his Department will take to protect hospitals, deliver humanitarian aid to pregnant women and children and stop premature deaths?

Andrew Mitchell: ... it underlines the effort and importance that the Government attach to trying to drive humanitarian support through these pauses to those who desperately need it.

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op): ... we clearly need a ceasefire, to move to a political process and a political solution. Can the Minister say what steps he is taking to formulate that political solution?

Andrew Mitchell: ... Everyone is focused on trying to bring this dreadful situation to a conclusion and drive towards a political process. ...

Janet Daby (Labour): ... will the Minister condemn acts of violence and extremism by Israeli settlers in the west bank?

Andrew Mitchell: ... the Prime Minister and the Government have condemned settler violence and urged the Israeli Government to crack down on it.

Alison Thewliss (SNP): It is difficult to get aid and medicine into Gaza, but there is no shortage of arms in the region. I have been contacted by many constituents concerned about Britain's role in supplying British-made weapons to Israel. In the absence of the Committees on Arms Export Controls meeting at all this year, what assurances can the Minister give that the weapons we are supplying are not being used in acts of collective punishment?

col 527 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... Britain has the most rigorous arms sale regime anywhere in the world ...

Beth Winter (Labour): On Friday, the Palestine Red Crescent Society said that Israeli forces opened fire on the intensive care unit at Al-Quds Hospital, and Médecins Sans Frontières reported a doctor in Al-Shifa Hospital saying that a sniper attacked four patients inside that hospital. We are seeing babies dying—what is happening is a stain on our collective humanity. I implore the Government please to join the overwhelming majority of the British public, humanitarian organisations and other nations in calling for an immediate ceasefire ...

Andrew Mitchell: I think the hon. Lady should put some greater hope in the achievement of humanitarian pauses, and then the development of those pauses. ...

Alex Norris (Labour Co-op): Will the Minister confirm that it is the Government's position that there should be no compulsion for people to leave their homes in Gaza, and that when people are displaced by fighting, they must be allowed to return home as soon as possible?

Andrew Mitchell: ... it is not for me to give advice from the Dispatch Box to people on the ground there who need to assess their situation for themselves within their community.

Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru): The UN says that telecommunications will begin to fail from Thursday as fuel runs out for the providing companies. Some lives have been saved when people have been telephoned to inform them that their homes are about to be bombed. Can any steps be taken to deliver fuel specifically to telecommunications companies?

Andrew Mitchell: I have also seen those reports—they are extremely worrying, and they intensify the requirement to get fuel into Gaza as quickly as possible.

Helen Hayes (Labour): ... The Minister spoke ... about the offer of fuel made by the Israeli Government yesterday, but the head of one of the aid agencies on the ground in Gaza has explained what that offer was: a few jerry cans left outside the hospital, amounting to half

an hour of generation time. ...

col 528 **Andrew Mitchell:** It is true, I think, that 300 litres of fuel was offered yesterday and it was rejected by Hamas—that is the key point. ...

Rupa Huq (Labour): The new Foreign Secretary called Gaza an open-air prison in peacetime. While we all stood with Israel on 7 October, what are the limits of self-defence—a population forcibly displaced by donkey because there is no fuel, or communications blackouts? ...

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady makes an eloquent plea ...

Andrew Bridgen (Reclaim): While the whole House should condemn unreservedly the atrocities committed against Israeli civilians on 7 October by the terror organisation Hamas, do His Majesty's Government believe that the ongoing response of the Israel Defence Forces remains proportionate, and will they keep the matter under review?

Andrew Mitchell: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to what I said earlier about the work of the Israel Defence Forces, and indeed the training they undergo, which respects international humanitarian law and understands the obligations a military force owes to civilians.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Labour): ... Does the Minister agree that the aid that is getting into Gaza is still completely insufficient, and that it is unacceptable that siege conditions have not been lifted?

Andrew Mitchell: ... it is completely insufficient. ...

Karen buck (Labour): After the terrorist atrocity of 7 October and with an estimated 11,000 Palestinians dead, there is a new fear: that of forced and permanent displacement of the Palestinian people. ... there are pressures on third countries to take the Gazan population as refugees. Can the Minister take this opportunity to say that neither this Government nor the international community regard that as acceptable in any way?

col 529 **Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Lady once again demonstrates the dreadful position that the appalling act perpetrated by Hamas terrorists on 7 October has landed people in.

Alison McGovern (Labour): ... can I ask the Minister to describe the UK Government's diplomatic strategy? ...

Andrew Mitchell: I will be travelling to Egypt tonight, but the discussions that are going on are about the hostages and the humanitarian situation... There are also discussions about the politics and how we move on. ...

Rushanara Ali (Labour): In 2010, the then UK Prime Minister, now the Foreign Secretary, condemned the blockade of Gaza as a "prison camp". The siege conditions have remained ... The reality is that the longer the Gaza war continues, the more palpable is the danger of further contagion not only in the west bank and Jerusalem, but across the region. ... That is why it is imperative for our Government to work with international partners to seek the cessation of hostilities and to work for an enduring humanitarian ceasefire. ...

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Member ... underlines the absolute necessity to get back on to a political track as swiftly as we can.

Patrick Grady (SNP): The Minister continues to say that he wants the Government of Israel to respect international human rights law, but last week he said that the Government could not make a determination whether that was happening. He said it would be for courts and lawyers to determine, so which courts and which lawyers, and how and when should a determination be made about whether Israel is complying with international humanitarian law?

col 530 **Andrew Mitchell:** The point I made last week is that it is not for Ministers to assert what is in effect a legal judgment and that it should be left to the courts. ...

Ian Byrne (Labour): The call for a ceasefire is backed by multiple United Nations agencies, 700 NGOs, Pope Francis, more than 250 British lawyers, the 120 countries that voted in favour of a UN General Assembly motion and 76% of the public, and yesterday the Archbishop of Canterbury said that "the call for a ceasefire is a moral cry".

What will it take for the newly installed Secretary of State to heed these international calls and to support an immediate ceasefire?

Andrew Mitchell: ... the reasons set out by both Government and Opposition Front Benchers about why that is not a practical approach should be listened to with care. ...

Jim McMahon (Labour Co-op): ... will the Government finally meet the shadow Foreign Secretary's request for an international aid co-ordinator to be appointed to make sure that aid really reaches where it is needed?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the co-ordination of aid, but principally we need to get it into the country. ...

Emma Hardy (Labour): ... this is not a natural disaster, and aid and supplies can be switched back on. Does the Minister agree that it is unacceptable for Israel not to lift its siege conditions?

Andrew Mitchell: ... we work with so many others, to try to bring an end to this dreadful situation.

col 531 **Jonathan Edwards (Independent):** Avi Shlaim is an Arab Jew, who was born in Baghdad, served in the Israel Defence Forces and is a retired professor of international affairs at the University of Oxford. He probably knows more about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than most of us, and he says: "revenge is not a policy."

Do the British Government reject the position of the Israeli Government that they should have overall security control of Gaza after current military operations?

Andrew Mitchell: I think we can all agree that revenge is not a policy, but given the appalling events of 7 October, I want to emphasise that the Israeli Government have an absolute right to self-defence.

Joanna Cherry (SNP): ... our constituents can see this terrible situation unfolding on the television every evening, and that is why they are writing to us in their thousands about it. What they want to know and what I want to know is this: how many more innocent people have to die before the UK Government will support a call for a ceasefire from both sides?

Andrew Mitchell: The Government and, indeed, Labour Front Benchers have explained why calls for a ceasefire do not work at the moment. We have explained the Israeli Government's right to self-defence, but also that Hamas have made it clear that not only do they not want a ceasefire, but they want to repeat what happened on 7 October. ...

Jeff Smith (Labour): ... Does the Minister share my worry that the way the war on Hamas is being prosecuted—the constant bombing, the scale of the loss of life and suffering—runs the risk of radicalising people and driving them into the arms of Hamas and other terrorist extremists? ...

Andrew Mitchell: The British Government have many friends and a brilliant diplomatic network in the region, and we express ourselves without fear or favour ...

col 532 **Gavin Newlands (SNP):** ... With reports of hospitals being bombed, IDF snipers firing into Al-Shifa and civilians, including children, being fired on while trying to evacuate under white flags, I repeat: what will it take for the Government and Opposition Front Benchers to call acts such as this what they are—war crimes?

Andrew Mitchell: I have set out very clearly during this statement and in responses to Members across the House the absolutely essential nature of the progress we seek to make. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-11-14/debates/4BF63167-F3AC-45A2-8157-CAC58055E3AC/IsraelAndTheOccupiedPalestinianTerritories>

House of Commons Tabled Amendments to the King's Speech

Amendment (b)

Zarah Sultana (Labour): At end add 'but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to include measures to ensure the Government upholds international humanitarian law and protect civilians in Israel and Palestine; utterly condemn Hamas' appalling killing of Israeli civilians and taking of hostages; agree with the United Nations Secretary-General that these crimes do not justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people; express alarm at the Israeli military's total siege and bombardment of Gaza and the resulting high number of deaths and at an increase in Israeli army and settler violence in the West Bank; believe that the urgent priority must be to stop civilian deaths and suffering; welcome the growing calls for a ceasefire, including from the United Nations Secretary-General, the First Minister of Scotland, the mayors of London and Greater Manchester, and 76 per cent of the UK public, according to opinion polls; and therefore call on the Government to urgently press all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of hostages, an end to the total siege of Gaza to allow full access to medical supplies, food, fuel, electricity and water, and a guarantee that international humanitarian law is upheld.'

<https://commonsbusiness.parliament.uk/Document/82775/Html>

Amendment (h)

Stephen Flynn (SNP): At end add, 'but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to include measures that would require the Government to uphold international law and protect all civilians in Israel and Palestine; unequivocally condemn the horrific killings by Hamas and the taking of hostages; reaffirm that there must be an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people; call for the urgent release of all hostages and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population; note the growing calls for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire from the United Nations and its aid agencies; and therefore call on the Government to join with the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire.'

<https://commonsbusiness.parliament.uk/Document/82775/Html>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UK Development Minister arrives in Egypt in push for more critical lifesaving aid for Gaza

UK Minister for Development and Africa Andrew Mitchell is in Cairo today for discussions on how to get significantly more aid into Gaza.

The Minister will discuss how to enact humanitarian pauses in the fighting as soon as possible so that aid, including fuel, can be delivered for hospitals and other needs and hostages can be released.

Minister Mitchell will also meet with the Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS), the agency responsible for shipment of humanitarian goods across the Rafah border, as well as the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC) in Egypt, Elena Panova, and OCHA.

UK Development Minister, Andrew Mitchell, said: ... The UK has more than doubled our aid commitment to the Palestinian people this year and we call on all parties to allow the humanitarian pauses necessary to ensure this aid reaches those in need in Gaza.

The UK recently allocated £30 million in additional aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories – [more than doubling the existing aid commitment for this year](#) (£27 million).

This will allow trusted partners, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and others, to provide Palestinians with essential humanitarian relief items and services such as food, water and shelter.

Three UK flights have already landed in Egypt carrying over [51 tonnes of aid since the crisis began](#), including lifesaving items such as wound care packs, water filters and solar powered lights.

The government has so far ensured over 150 British nationals and their dependants have safely left Gaza and the FCDO is using all channels available to it ensure any remaining registered British nationals are able to cross the Rafah border as soon as is possible. Royal Navy vessels are in the Middle East to deter further escalation.

The government continues to call on all parties to allow the humanitarian pauses necessary to allow more aid of this kind to enter Gaza. The Prime Minister has been clear that Israel's forces must act within international law and stop extremist violence in the West Bank. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-development-minister-arrives-in-egypt-in-push-for-more-critical-lifesaving-aid-for-gaza>

Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

Gaza (Humanitarian Aid)

Stephanie Callaghan (SNP) [S6O-02717] To ask the Scottish Government, regarding its humanitarian aid funding, whether it will provide an update on any further action it can take to help provide support to those affected by the conflict in Gaza.

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): We unequivocally condemn the abhorrent terrorist attacks committed by Hamas. However, in exercising its right to defend itself, Israel must abide by international humanitarian law. The civilian populations in Gaza and the West Bank cannot and must not be held responsible for crimes committed by a terrorist organisation.

Last week, we announced a further £250,000 contribution towards the United Nations flash appeal in response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, in addition to the £500,000 that we committed last month.

Stephanie Callaghan: Scotland will always be a welcoming place and a compassionate sanctuary for refugees. Given the harrowing and inhumane conditions that we are witnessing in Gaza, and the immediate and growing need for support—particularly when the UK Government's stance on an immediate ceasefire is conflicting—can the cabinet secretary provide an update on what further steps the Scottish Government can take to welcome Palestinian refugees in Scotland?

Angus Robertson: The First Minister has been clear that we stand ready to welcome refugees in Scotland, should that be required, and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice wrote to the former Home Secretary to request a meeting to discuss plans. I reiterated those calls in my recent appearances before the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. We wait to hear from the new Home Secretary what approach he plans to take.

Carol Mochan (Labour): It is estimated that 50,000 pregnant women are trapped in Gaza, with around 5,000 due to give birth during the next month, and without clean water, medicine and humanitarian aid those women and their babies will be at risk, which is devastating. What discussions have been had with relevant aid organisations regarding the specific challenges that pregnant women face, and in future discussions regarding humanitarian aid, will the cabinet secretary raise the specific needs of that key, vulnerable group whenever he has the opportunity?

Angus Robertson: I agree entirely ... Our main interlocutors in relation to aid in

Gaza are the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which is the UN agency that deals with the Palestinian authorities.

Of course, we believe that a ceasefire is absolutely key to being able to ensure that the humanitarian support manages to get in and to deal with the very specific challenges that the member has raised, as well as many others. Unfortunately, the civilian population is suffering grievously in Gaza. Everything needs to be done to help and support them, while acknowledging, as I have already, our condemnation—no doubt across the chamber—and our opposition to the terrorist atrocity that Hamas visited on innocent Israeli people in October.

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15545&i=132643#ScotParlOR>

Scottish Parliament Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Evidence session: Gaza

... **The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** ... I start by reiterating the Scottish Government's condemnation of the appalling attacks that were carried out by Hamas on 7 October. That barbaric attack was the single biggest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. We must all acknowledge the trauma that that outrage has caused not only for the nation of Israel and Israelis but among Jewish communities in Scotland and around the world. Among the victims was Bernard Cowan, an innocent Scot from Glasgow, and I extend my heartfelt condolences to his family and to the families of all his fellow victims.

Our condemnation is clear: Hamas missile attacks on Israel must stop and Hamas must release immediately and unconditionally all hostages. As we have repeatedly stated, Israel clearly has a right to self-defence, and Hamas and organisations like it cannot be a part of Gaza's future. We must be clear: Hamas is not Gaza, and Gaza is not Hamas. All Israelis and Palestinians have the right to live in peace and security. ...

Israel must act in a manner that is consistent with international humanitarian law, which prioritises the protection of civilians. The situation that is now unfolding in Gaza is disastrous. More than 1.4 million people have been displaced. ... Water, food, fuel and medical supplies are restricted. The trickle of aid through the Rafah crossing is nowhere near enough, and the World Health Organization has warned of an imminent public health catastrophe.

All the while, fatalities continue to mount. ... The head of UNICEF has said that "more than 420 children are being killed or injured in Gaza each day".

A tragedy is unfolding before our eyes. That is why the First Minister has written to political leaders across the United Kingdom to emphasise that we must do everything within our powers to stop it. ...

For those Gazans who want to stay, humanitarian aid will be vital, and we have already pledged £500,000 to UNRWA, to support its flash appeal. ...

It is imperative that humanitarian agencies are able to safely deliver aid into Gaza in the quantities that are needed. ...

My colleague Shirley-Anne Somerville, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, has written to the Home Secretary to formally request that the United Kingdom Government use the already established UK resettlement scheme to work with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to establish a route to safety for the most vulnerable Gazans ...

Finally, all parties recognise the value of having strong and supportive communities and the importance of community cohesion. Although Police Scotland has not reported a rise in hate crime in response to the events in the middle east, we must all remain vigilant. There is no space in Scotland for antisemitism or Islamophobia. We must be alive to

discrimination and racism in all its forms, and must ensure that there is one Scotland where people of all faiths and none live in peace and harmony and where everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

The Convener (Clare Adamson, SNP): ... What engagement have you or the First Minister had with the Prime Minister about the two key asks of an immediate ceasefire and the opportunity to support refugees ...?

Angus Robertson: The First Minister has spoken in person to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and Lord Ahmad, who is Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and United Nations ...

There has been correspondence with the UK Government, and there has been correspondence between the Scottish Government and the Israeli embassy and with the Palestinian representative office in the United Kingdom. The Scottish Government's positions in relation to the unconditional condemnation of Hamas, the right of Israel to self-defence, the support of international humanitarian law, the call for a ceasefire and the call for the support of international organisations to provide necessary aid to the people of Gaza have all been communicated to all those who I mentioned, and we will continue to do so. ...

Kate Forbes (SNP): ... Have you, or has the Government, had any conversations with ambassadors, consuls general and so on from the respective states?

Angus Robertson: The First Minister wrote to the ambassador of Israel on 11 October and wrote to the Palestinian representative to the UK on 13 October. Channels of communication remain open. ...

Kate Forbes: I will also extend the convener's question about refugees. The organisation Sanctuary Foundation ... was instrumental in helping with the Ukraine resettlement programme ... It is extremely keen to recognise the First Minister's leading role in welcoming refugees from Gaza and to participate practically in turning that theory into reality. ...

Angus Robertson: ... It is absolutely right that we have initiated contact with the UK Government to begin the process of thinking—and we hope, in time, talking, too—about how we might be able to help. However, I reflect that the experience of people in Gaza, not just now but historically, is that their movements have been very restricted in times of peace, and that is the case now in times of war. ...

It is right that we think about everything that we can offer. In addition to people seeking refuge, should they be allowed to leave, a great number of people have suffered injury in Gaza, where hospitals are overwhelmed and have been threatened with closure and, in many cases, ordered to evacuate. Therefore, there might also be a role for us and others to offer help and support to people who require medical treatment—from the national health service but also from military

Donald Cameron (Conservative): ... I acknowledge your earlier statement and your unequivocal condemnation of the terrorist attacks that were carried out by Hamas. However, I want to ask about the situation in Scotland. I think that it was Monday when the Prime Minister chaired an emergency meeting of COBRA in response to concerns that the conflict might increase the terror threat in the UK. To the extent that you can say, have you had discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs or Police Scotland about any increased terror threat in Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I have not been privy to those conversations ... that is not my direct area of responsibility. ... operational matters for the police and the security services are for Police Scotland and the security services. ...

We must do everything that we can to support Scotland's Jewish community and to work with our Muslim community, especially people of Palestinian descent. It is very important that we do everything that we can to ensure that, although what is happening in the middle east is a tragedy, it does not lead to a worsening of community relations here.

Donald Cameron: On that, it is fair to say—I think that you acknowledged this in your statement—that both Jewish and Muslim communities in Scotland will be feeling particularly vulnerable. If I could ask for a bit more detail, what in particular is the Scottish Government doing to support them?

Angus Robertson: The first step is to have intense points of contact with both communities. As members will be aware, the First Minister has visited the synagogue in Giffnock and has also been to a number of mosques. Initiatives are being supported via Interfaith Scotland to bring together not just the Jewish and Muslim faith leaders but those of Christian and other denominations. ...

As I have raised with my colleagues, I am mindful that various faith communities' high and holy days are approaching in the weeks and months ahead. We must ensure that our communities are able to celebrate important days in their religious calendars without any fear or concern. ...

Keith Brown (SNP): As well as being as vigilant as ever for any rising incidence of antisemitism or anti-Islamic sentiment, we should acknowledge the fact that, by and large, people in Scotland have not gone down that route. We should be quick to condemn, but we should also praise.

Even from a distance, though, to see the Hamas attack in which more than 1,000 people were killed in the first week of October, and then to see that more than 8,000 people in Gaza were killed, was horrifying. I recall, in particular, the incident about which it was reported that although one Hamas commander was killed so were 400 ordinary people and many others, including children, are still lying under rubble. My concern now is Hezbollah's threat to start attacking tomorrow if there is not a ceasefire ...

Angus Robertson: ... you are right to point to the risks of escalation in Lebanon and Israel. The feeling is that, every day, the shooting between Hezbollah and the Israeli Defense Forces is ratcheting up. Yesterday, the Yemeni armed forces launched missiles in the direction of Israel, and other organisations in and around Israel will be close to the Iranian Government. ... The Scottish Government does not have a direct locus in that: foreign affairs, defence and security are matters for the United Kingdom Government. ...

Neil Bibby (Labour): ... On the number of families in Scotland affected by the current conflict, what dialogue has the Scottish Government had with the British Government to estimate, as far as is possible in a very difficult and challenging situation, how many UK nationals from Scotland are currently in Israel and Gaza? ...

Angus Robertson: ... The UK Government has an idea of the total number of UK passport holders in Gaza, but, because we do not record residency as a matter of course, there is not a definitive answer to that question. ...

Mark Ruskell (Green): I return to the issue of escalation. ... we are also aware from an increasing number of news reports of the illegal displacement of Palestinians in the west bank, and there could be an unfolding humanitarian crisis there in time. What is your assessment of that? ...

Angus Robertson: Mr Ruskell is absolutely right to say that we should not lose sight of the very testing and difficult circumstances in the west bank, which is occupied Palestinian territory. That does not just concern the displacement of Palestinians; it has involved the deaths of Palestinians in recent days. The circumstances for people there are extremely difficult.

The Scottish Government's position remains as it has always been: the west bank and the Gaza strip form the basis of Palestinian territories that we believe should be part of a two-state solution—a solution that can help to provide both security for the people of Israel and independence and security for the people of Palestine. We will use whatever influence we can. ...

We should not lose sight of the fact that, notwithstanding the very understandable focus on Gaza, the challenges for people in the west bank continue to be

substantive. The Israeli authorities, as the occupying power, have a responsibility to ensure the life, liberty and security of Palestinian people in the west bank, not just of Israeli citizens. We will definitely continue to monitor that.

Mark Ruskell: A number of communities across Scotland have formal civic links with communities in Palestine. I have noted that Dundee is twinned with Nablus and that Glasgow is twinned with Bethlehem, while Stirling has had an informal twinning with a refugee community in Jerusalem. To what extent can those informal and more civic links be used to address the humanitarian crisis that could unfold?

Angus Robertson: The situation in Gaza is obviously very different from that in the west bank, in that there is a war currently going on in Gaza and the ability to get any supplies into Gaza is extremely restricted. ...

Mr Ruskell has named a number of towns, cities and communities in the west bank, which are in a different situation: they are not in the same war situation as Gaza at the present time. I am sure that communities in Scotland that have links there will be thinking a lot about what they can do ... I encourage local authorities that have links with communities to avail themselves of the likes of UNRWA, the United Nations agency with responsibility for supporting Palestinians in the near east, as a primary point of contact. Many other organisations also have an established track record of working in the west bank and, in the past, in Gaza.

Mark Ruskell: ... I think that it was Ivan McKee who, in 2021, restated Government guidance at that time in relation to public procurement. That followed on from a report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which identified about 100 companies with activities relating to illegal Israeli settlements in Palestine, and the implications of that for seeking peace. Can you confirm the current status of that guidance?

Angus Robertson: I am not aware that there has been any change in the guidance, but if it would be helpful to Mr Ruskell, I will ensure that I forward on to him—through you, convener—the current status of that. As I have just said, however, I am not aware of there having been any change in that guidance. ...

Alexander Stewart (Conservative): ... The UK Government announced an increase in aid to help, and that has been confirmed. It would be useful to find out what the Scottish and UK Governments are doing to try to increase aid in order to provide support during the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding in the region.

Angus Robertson: As I confirmed in my opening statement, in addition to our already-announced commitment of £0.5 million of support for the people of Gaza through UNRWA, the amount of money has been raised, and the total now stands at £750,000. ...

Alexander Stewart: ... Many individuals and organisations—and, as we have heard, areas in Scotland that are twinned with affected areas—want to provide support ... However, as with all these things, there are also some individuals and organisations that could be problematic, and advice needs to be given as to how that can be managed. There is an element of that, and it needs to be captured to ensure that we do not end up supporting those organisations, even without meaning to, by ways and means that could be misconstrued in some ways. ...

Angus Robertson: I think that we can rest on the fact that the likes of the United Nations and the IFRC have impeccable track records and the strongest infrastructure on the ground. ...

Kate Forbes: If anything is true of this particular situation, it is that it is phenomenally complex. I think that all of us have been hugely devastated by the scenes that have unfolded; the thought that there are still Israeli children in captivity in Gaza right now—given concerns about their welfare, their care and their separation from their family—is just horrendous. ...

If anything is to emerge from the current horror, it is the resolution of hostilities once and

for all. ...

In the light of that, we can recognise that, as a devolved Government, we still have a power of intervention, as the people of Scotland look to us for leadership and to navigate the challenges. That leads us to a question.

In making statements or calls for action, what expertise can the Scottish Government call on, and what intelligence can it draw on? Are there people situated in Scotland who are experts in this field, and who can inform the calls from the Scottish Government, and therefore the First Minister and the cabinet secretaries, for particular interventions or actions?

Angus Robertson: There is a lot in Ms Forbes's questions. First, on her observations about parents and children, the situation is heartbreaking, as is the feeling of powerlessness. I think that we have to ask ourselves how many children have to die before it stops, because it cannot go on forever. ...

We might think back to situations such as those in South Africa or Northern Ireland in which resolution was thought to be impossible or unimaginable, or very far off. Indeed, I think back to efforts in the 1990s regarding the middle east. Again, that was thought to be unimaginable at the time. ...

What can a small country of 5 million people in northern Europe do in such a circumstance? First, one should be conscious that one has agency. We might think of some of the most testing conflicts in which there have been peace processes—I am thinking, for example, of the role of Norway or of Finland ...

The member asked about people and about capability. We need to be conscious that we have people with very significant experience in this area ... We have very deep and capable academic expertise in the relevant area. Recently, the Scottish Council on Global Affairs, which involves internationally well-respected academics in the field of international relations in peace and security, was founded.

A wide sector of organisations wish to be supportive and helpful. That can only work if the people who are involved in a particular conflict realise that the time has come for peace. Prime Minister Netanyahu does not think that; he thinks that now is “a time for war”—that is how he put it, quoting the Bible. We can wish and call for peace and ceasefires; however, unfortunately, if those calls are ignored, the killing, the dying and the loss of children to lots of parents will continue. Those people deserve better.

Donald Cameron: ... the First Minister said ... that the Scottish Government stands ready to welcome refugees from the region. Does the cabinet secretary have any further detail on what preparations are being made here? ...

Angus Robertson: The offer of help and support for potential refugees from the conflict was outlined in a detailed letter from Shirley-Anne Somerville to the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, with a view to initiating such conversations...

One of the big differences between this conflict and the conflict in Ukraine is that, in Ukraine, people who were living in non-occupied territories had a way out. That is not the case for people in Gaza—they are not able to leave. Nobody, therefore, anticipates any sudden and dramatic movement of people. In fact, over the years and decades, Governments in the region have been clear that they do not want the displacement of Palestinians outside the west bank and the Gaza strip. ...

In the immediate period, given the scale of casualties and the inability of the health system in Gaza to deal with them, it has to be a priority for everybody to try to help and support, in the first instance, the Egyptian authorities and health system to treat the most seriously injured casualties who cannot be treated in Gaza. ...

The Convener: The Parliament's support for the people of Gaza is long standing. Back in 2009, when tensions were high yet again, the Government provided £400,000 to Libya and Gaza for water security. ...

In our long-standing relationship with Malawi, there are great civic links with organisations

within the community. ... Does the Government have such a network for Gaza? ...

Angus Robertson: ... We all appreciate that, because of the extreme nature of the circumstance and the extreme distress in which people in Gaza find themselves, it is primarily UNRWA, the UN agency, that has the capability. We should put on the record that UNRWA is also having to pay an incredibly high price for its efforts on the ground. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/CEEAC-02-11-2023?meeting=15523&iob=132454>

The First Minister's letter, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/israel-gaza-first-minister-letter-to-uk-government/>

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice's letter, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/israel-gaza-conflict-letter-to-uk-government-about-gaza-refugee-scheme/>

Ivan McKee's restatement of procurement guidance referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-00207>

Scottish Government

First Minister and STUC call for ceasefire in Gaza

The First Minister and Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) have jointly called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and Israel ...

The meeting was an opportunity for the Scottish Government and STUC to re-iterate solidarity with the Jewish and Muslim communities in Scotland, and commit to working in collaboration to ensure that antisemitism, Islamophobia, or any form of hatred or prejudice has no place in Scotland.

First Minister Humza Yousaf said: "We unequivocally condemn the terrorist atrocities committed by Hamas almost six weeks ago, and call for all hostages to be immediately, unconditionally, and safely released.

"What we are witnessing in Gaza is a humanitarian disaster. More than 11,000 men, woman, and children have lost their lives, and almost 1.6 million have been displaced. The people of Gaza are in desperate need of water, shelter, food, and safety.

"We must stand together and united, join with international organisations and aid agencies like the United Nations and World Health Organisation, and continue to lend Scotland's voice to the growing international calls for an urgent ceasefire.

"The way forward is clear, and I hope that others across Scotland will add their voices to our calls – which build on Scotland's proud history of supporting and promoting peace across the world.

"Working in solidarity with trade unions and others to combat antisemitism, Islamophobia, and all forms of hatred in Scotland is crucial, and I am absolutely committed to sending a clear message that hatred or prejudice directed at any community has no place in our modern Scotland."

Commenting, STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer: "The STUC is unequivocal: there must be an immediate ceasefire.

"We reiterate our utter condemnation of the Hamas attack on innocent Israeli citizens and call for the release of all hostages without delay."

"However, just as there can be no historical justification for such acts, neither is there any justification for the indiscriminate killing of innocents who are subject to terror and barbarism whilst the world looks on. ...

"Collective punishment is a war crime. International law must be upheld. Peace must

reign. However distant it may seem, a political solution can be found that guarantees peace and statehood for all peoples in Israel and Palestine."

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.scot/news/first-minister-and-stuc-call-for-ceasefire-in-gaza/>

United Nations

Secretary-General Calls for Immediate Humanitarian Ceasefire in Gaza

...The Secretary-General is deeply disturbed by the horrible situation and dramatic loss of life in several hospitals in Gaza.

In the name of humanity, the Secretary-General calls for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

<https://press.un.org/en/2023/sqsm22033.doc.htm>

First Person: UNICEF chief in Gaza bears witness to grave violations against children

Catherine Russell visited Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis in the south of the besieged enclave on Wednesday.

"Today I visited the Gaza Strip to meet with children, their families, and UNICEF staff. What I saw and heard was devastating. They have endured repeated bombardment, loss and displacement. Inside the Strip, there is nowhere safe for Gaza's one million children to turn.

The parties to the conflict are committing grave violations against children; these include killing, maiming, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access – all of which UNICEF condemns.

In Gaza, more than 4,600 children have reportedly been killed, with nearly 9,000 reportedly injured.

Many children are missing and believed buried under the rubble of collapsed buildings and homes, the tragic result of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Meanwhile, newborn babies who require specialized care have died in one of Gaza's hospitals as power and medical supplies run out, and violence continues with indiscriminate effect. ...

During my time in Gaza, I also met with UNICEF staff who are continuing to deliver for children amidst the danger and devastation.

They shared their own heartbreaking stories with me of the impact of the war on their children, of family members killed, and of how they have been displaced many times over. ...

UNICEF and our partners are doing everything we can, including bringing in desperately needed humanitarian supplies. But diesel fuel has practically run out, causing some hospitals and health centers to stop functioning. Without fuel, desalination plants cannot produce drinking water and humanitarian supplies cannot be distributed. ...

I once again call on all parties to ensure that children are protected and assisted, as per international humanitarian law. Only the parties to the conflict can truly stop this horror. ...

To read the full statement see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143617>

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator - Full Transcript of Press Encounter, 15 November 2023

... First of all, to facilitate the agencies' efforts to bring in a continuous flow of aid convoys safely. The key word here is "continuous." Aid needs to be reliable, on the day, on the next day, on the next week. People need to know that there will be aid coming tomorrow or the next day. They need to know that they have time to consume these supplies because more is coming at the next moment.

Number two: Crucial, crucial for the logistics – is to open additional crossing points for aid and commercial trucks to enter into Gaza, including Kerem Shalom from Israel. Now, much has been made of the importance of the need to provide opportunities for commercial aid to get into Gaza. ... it's particularly important in Gaza because of the total dependency of a population which cannot move outside the territory. ...

Next, allow the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations access to fuel. ... fuel is the driver of so many aspects of the humanitarian response. It's the driver of desalination. It's the driver of electricity. It's the driver of effective hospitals. It's the driver of trucks that will go from Rafah on entry to the distribution points. The 24,000 litres – most welcome, no question about it – is not enough to provide the fuel that we need daily to get to the whole of Gaza. My understanding is that to cover the whole of the Gazan territory and therefore all of the people in need, we would need about 200,000 liters a day. ...

Number five: Allow us – humanitarian organizations – to expand the number of safe shelters for displaced people in schools and other public facilities across Gaza. ... it could take an agreement with the Palestinian Authority to use PA schools to expand shelters for those fleeing south. ...

Improve a humanitarian notification mechanism. ... for many, many years, the humanitarian community has used a notification system, a humanitarian notification system, to deconflict specific places which are protected, either protected under humanitarian law – like hospitals, schools and other places – or to tell the parties this is where we will be moving, from A to B to C, to deliver aid. We notify the parties, whether it's in Ukraine, or Gaza or elsewhere, of what our plans are, so that they are on notice not to attack us, to allow what humanitarian law again requires: the safe passage of humanitarian assistance.

Number seven: Part of the approach, in the south, is to set up, establish and work from relief distribution hubs. ...

Number eight: Fundamental – allow civilians to move to safer areas and to voluntarily return to their residences in the north, if they so desire. The freedom of movement of civilians in war is a fundamental privilege and requirement of international humanitarian law. ...

Number nine: Funding, boring as it is, \$1.2 billion of an emergency appeal for the operation. I think we are into [\$132] million so far. ...

Finally: Implement a humanitarian ceasefire. There has been a huge, huge discussion, particularly in the Security Council and elsewhere, on the difference between truces and hudnas and pauses and ceasefire. I have spent 50 years dealing with different words to describe something which is essentially very, very simple: Silence the guns. Stop the fighting to allow the people to move safely. Do it for as long as possible. Allow them to move safely on their own, not hindered and not pushed. And silence those guns long enough to give the people of Gaza a breather from the terrible, terrible things that have been put on them these last few weeks. This is very, very important. ...

Q: ... In your plans, you are not talking about hostages, so what are the chances that Israel will agree with that and what will be the risk if Israel disagrees with everything because of that?

Under-Secretary-General Griffiths: ... the release of the hostages is not part of a

humanitarian plan – it’s an obligation on all those involved. I am one of those who had the misfortune or privilege, depending on how you look at it, of seeing some of those videos of what happened on that day of October 7th. And I have always spoken publicly about the fact that these hostages need to be released unconditionally, not conditional on some quid pro quo – unconditionally, all of them and out.

And so I don’t include it in the plan, because that would look as if it’s a condition, and I don’t think it should be conditional. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/martin-griffiths-under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-full-transcript-press-encounter-15-november-2023-geneva>

TOP

Other Relevant Information

Council of Europe

Rise in hate speech and hate incidents

“The alarming rise in antisemitic incidents across Europe in recent weeks poses a grave threat to all our member States. Attacks on synagogues, schools, community centres and on the physical integrity of our Jewish fellow citizens directly challenge our values and freedoms.

“I welcome the determination of our member States’ governments to put an end to these intolerable incidents on European soil. Until our Jewish fellow citizens feel safe again, until their daily lives are no longer marked by fear and apprehension, we must continue and intensify our efforts. I therefore call on the national authorities to step up their fight against antisemitism. We offer them our unwavering support in this endeavour and express our full solidarity with the victims.

“The Council of Europe will continue to be at the forefront of the fight against antisemitism and all forms of hatred, including anti-Muslim hatred, in the spirit of the Declaration of the [4th Summit of Heads of State and Government](#). Our conventions, institutions and monitoring mechanisms are and will remain at the service of our member States and all Europeans in combating hatred and any form of ethnic or religious discrimination and in defending our values as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights.”

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/rise-in-hate-speech-and-hate-incidents>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

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

The Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023 [Draft]

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2023/9780348253191/contents>

**** The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2023**

<https://senedd.wales/media/3gegvezxn/sub-ld16131-e.pdf>

Welsh Senedd debate

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/13558#A83308>

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

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

Scottish Parliament

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

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

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 2 days**

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/>

**** closes in 2 days**

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/>

**** closes in 2 days**

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>

**** Strategic Equality Plan 2024 to 2028: proposed principles of approach and objectives [Welsh Government]** (closing date 12 February 2024)

<https://www.gov.wales/strategic-equality-plan-2024-2028-proposed-principles-approach-and-objectives>

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