



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

See also Andrew Percy's contribution at Prime Minister's Question Time that is included in the Israel section below.

House of Commons Debates

Third Reading: Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill col 386 The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): ... Inevitably, following on from its introduction, debate around the Bill has occurred in the dark shadow of the events of 7 October and the continuing conflict in Israel and Gaza. ... While there is, I know, a difference of opinion about the appropriateness of the measures we are bringing forward, everyone in this House is committed to ensuring that we act against antisemitism, everyone in this House is committed to ensuring that we can see a peaceful solution to the conflict in the middle east, and everyone in this House is committed to a two-state solution as the means by which we can bring peace to that troubled region.

The Bill upholds a principle that was originally outlined in our 2019 general election manifesto. During the course of consideration of the Bill we have heard from a number of organisations, both in Committee and in broader public debate about the Bill, all affirming its timeliness and importance in dealing with the continuing and growing threat of antisemitism, and upholding the importance of making sure that the UK Government speak with one voice, in a united way, on behalf of all of us, on foreign policy, as a reserved matter for the Government.

In that context, it is important to deal with one or two entirely understandable and legitimate concerns that have been raised about the interplay between the Bill itself and UK Government foreign policy. I know some particular concerns have been raised about clause 3(7). I assure colleagues that the clause does not contravene in any way our foreign policy or inhibit in any way the UK Government's taking action if we believe there is activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories that requires to be called out.

We continue to raise, as the Foreign Secretary has recently, issues of illegal settler activity, and Lord Cameron has been clear with the Israeli Government that the UK Government are in profound disagreement with some of those actions and some of that activity. ... the clause does not prevent the Government establishing sanctions or using travel bans against those who have been linked to blatant human right abuses. It is simply the aim of this legislation to prevent public bodies from adopting their own foreign policy, as such decisions should ultimately be the remit of the Government and this House. ...

col 387 Richard Fuller (Conservative): ... UK foreign policy is clear that illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are against international law. This Bill would provide that, if a pension fund were given an investment policy for expanding, say, an infrastructure fund proposal in the occupied territories, it would have no moral basis for refusing to invest, although that investment would be expanding Israeli policies contrary to UK foreign policy. ...

Michael Gove: It is specifically the case that public bodies, including the local government pension scheme and local authorities, should not be taking decisions that conflict with UK Government foreign policy ... However, it is perfectly open to any representative, including any elected representative, to express their personal disapproval of the activities of the Israeli Government or any organisation that operates within the settlements.

Richard Burgon (Labour): ... last year, the Government stated: "The UK has a clear position on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: they are illegal under international law".—[[Official Report, 23 March 2023; Vol. 730, c. 412.](#)]

To speak plainly, is not the Secretary of State ashamed that, through this clampdown on the democratic right to boycott, his Government are restricting the rights of those who want to take peaceful action against violations of international law, and are in effect siding with those breaking international law?

col 388 Michael Gove: ... absolutely not. There is a clear intention in the Bill, which is to deal specifically with the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign and its attempts to use the legitimacy of local government and other intermediate institutions to undermine the UK Government's foreign policy. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree, the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), and the Foreign Secretary have, from this Dispatch Box and in the other place, been clear with the Israeli Government when they think that it is appropriate to criticise their actions and indeed those of individuals operating within the settlements, but there is an important distinction to be drawn between criticism of the Israeli Government, criticism of the acts of particular individuals and the nature of the BDS campaign itself.

I am grateful to Opposition Front Benchers ... and to Labour Friends of Israel for making it clear that the BDS movement itself is explicitly and regrettably antisemitic. It deliberately sets out to argue that the state of Israel as a home for the Jewish people should not exist.

Tom Hunt (Conservative): ... Israel is pretty much the only country that is targeted in this way despite the fact there are a number of appalling regimes around the world. ...

Michael Gove: ... local government has many important functions. Intervening in foreign policy in a way that can exacerbate community tensions is emphatically not one of them. Secondly, there has been a unique focus on the state of Israel. Of course, there are criticisms that can and should be mounted against the state of Israel, its Government and their activities. However, the BDS campaign singles out Israel for special treatment. We

have not seen attempts by local government to criticise, for example, the actions of Bashar al-Assad in Syria or a variety of other regimes that have been targeting innocent Muslim lives.

Again, one point that was made clearly by the now sadly departed former Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks, was that antisemitism is a virus that mutates over time. In the past, it was directed towards Judaism as a faith. Then it mutated to be directed towards the Jewish people through direct racism. Now antisemitism finds an expression through an attempt to deny the Jewish people the same right of self-determination and the same right to a homeland that we extend to all peoples.

Support for the Bill from Jewish organisations in this country—the Jewish Leadership Council, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and so on—has been clear, but perhaps the most telling are the words of the Community Security Trust, which is there to physically protect Jewish people and communities. The CST is scrupulous in not offering any commentary on matters in Israel and the middle east or on foreign policy—it eschews doing so because it recognises the diversity of views within the Jewish community on some of those questions—but it has said that BDS “has a chilling impact on Jews, a modern reminder of anti-Jewish boycotts. It also serves to legitimise the shunning of Jews from ‘decent’ society. And having been shunned...that’s a half way house to all manner of more abusive and physical outcomes.”

When we have seen a 537% increase in antisemitic incidents, I think it important to bear those words in mind.

col 389 Stephen Crabb (Conservative): ... Is it not the case that ... there have been very few examples of councils looking to use the levers available to them to protest against other international issues? Is that not because the whole BDS movement—in fact, the label “BDS”—has been entirely constructed as a weapon against the state of Israel? When we look at the origins of the movement, we see, unfortunately, that it is riddled from top to bottom with antisemitism.

Michael Gove: I am afraid that my right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. ... the BDS campaign, those who created it and those who run it are very clear that they are singling out Israel. They want to see an end to Israel as a Jewish state. ...

Angela Rayner (Labour): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “That” to the end of the Question and add:

“this House, while opposing any discrimination or prejudice in the economic activities of public bodies, believing that all such bodies must act without bias or selectivity when making ethical decisions on procurement and investment and recognising the impact selective and biased campaigns have had on the Jewish community in particular, declines to give a Third Reading to the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill because it does not effectively address the problem it rightly seeks to solve, is incompatible with international law and UN Security Council Resolutions, risks undermining support for groups around the world facing persecution, includes needlessly broad and sweeping draconian powers while placing unprecedented restrictions on public bodies to express a view on current and proposed policy and represents a major departure from the UK Government’s long-established diplomatic position on the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Golan Heights, in a way that undermines the UK’s future credibility and capacity to support diplomatic negotiations towards a just and lasting peace in Israel and Palestine based on a two-state solution, at a time when consistent support for that objective is more important than ever.”

Let me start by making clear that the Labour party completely opposes a policy of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel. ...

col 390 Never has that been as important as it is now, at a time of heightened tensions, fear and distress both at home and abroad.

As such, throughout the passage of this Bill, we have always tried to seek consensus. We

do not think it is wrong for public bodies to take ethical investment and procurement decisions. ... However, there is a difference between applying consistent ethical principles and legitimate criticism of foreign Governments, and what some have tried to do by targeting just one individual state—for example, the world's only Jewish state—or, worse, using the cover of these issues to whip up prejudice or discrimination. That is completely wrong. ...

However, unfortunately, our efforts for consensus have been met with blanket refusal. Four times we have come to this House with an alternative approach, and four times Ministers have led Government Members in voting down every single one of those proposals ...

The Bill contains sweeping new powers that create more uncertainty and run counter to our international obligations: provisions that would ban public bodies from making procurement decisions based on a country's use of forced labour; a completely unprecedented clause that makes it illegal for public bodies, many of them directly elected, to express their view on policy; a new power for the Secretary of State himself to call in and interrogate those he suspects fall foul of the Bill; and, at its heart, a measure that is incompatible with both the Government's own long-standing foreign policy and international law, flying in the face of the UK's obligations. ... Explicitly equating Israel with the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights is an unprecedented step. To my knowledge, this wording has never appeared in British statute before, and it seriously undermines our country's long-standing, consistent and cross-party support for a two-state solution ...

col 391 I have no doubt that this Bill will be scrutinised and challenged if sent to our colleagues in the other place. ...

Kit Malthouse (Conservative): ... This Bill obviously comes at a dreadful time, as we mourn the deaths of so many Israelis in heinous circumstances on 7 October and the deaths of so many Palestinians subsequently, many of whom still lie under the rubble. The fact that we in this House would seek to legislate against non-violent protest in such an illiberal and draconian way seems to me tragic at this particular point in time.

As the Secretary of State knows, there are broadly three areas in which I and other colleagues attempted to amend the Bill and have concerns. The first area is, as the shadow Secretary of State pointed out, the separate identification in the Bill of Israel, and its conflation with the occupied territories and the Golan Heights. We believe that contravenes our undertakings at the United Nations and, indeed, in international law, which of course means that the Bill will spend a lot of time in the courts, if it eventually sees the light of day. At the same time, that is a cause of great dismay to our allies in the Arab world, who of course we need at the moment more than ever to join us in seeking peace in the dreadful conflict taking place in the middle east. That we should undermine our own status as fair dealers, as it were, in that part of the world seems to me an unforced error.

The second area of serious concern is obviously the impact on free speech. ... it seems to me incredible that we are putting elected officials and others in a position where if they just stand up in certain circumstances and say they disagree with the law, they will be committing a criminal act. ...

col 392 The third area is the sheer scale of the Bill's impact and the number of organisations that will be drawn into it. It is not just the local government pension fund, of which I am a member, but also every university in the land and private sector companies that perform a public service of some kind and are contractors to the Government that will be drawn in. That is important because, as the Secretary of State will know, this subject is very litigious. There are lawyers sympathetic to Israel and those sympathetic to Palestine. ... Lawyers on both sides will gear up, and an industry will arise to attack, defend, analyse and scrutinise every decision, and all these bodies will have to take significant internal legal advice to deal with it as well. ...

Finally, my greatest concern is for the impact on British Jewry. As the Secretary of State has said, he is trying to bring this Bill in to deal with the growth in antisemitism in the United

Kingdom, but my view is that the Bill will play entirely into the hands of the antisemites. I imagine that this Bill will be manna to those rotten social media groups and WhatsApp groups that espouse conspiracy theories about Israel and the Jewish community. ...

Chris Stephens (SNP): ... I share ... concerns about using domestic legislation in this Bill to deviate from Foreign Office policy. ...

The Bill, as it is currently constructed, clearly conflates Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights, yet the UK Government's guidance on overseas business risk states: "The UK has a clear position on Israeli settlements: The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights have been occupied by Israel since 1967. Settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

The concern we have is that the Bill is less than subtle as a change, if not to direct policy then certainly in emphasis. Equating Israel and the occupied territories is unique in any legislation, let alone in a statement, and it questions the UK's long-established, cross-party support for a two-state solution based on 1967 borders.

As a party, we believe that the Bill is also an assault on Westminster's devolution settlements, not just for the Scottish Parliament but for the Welsh Senedd. The legislation undermines devolution and restricts the ability of public bodies to make their own moral judgment on matters of human rights and climate consciousness. ...

col 393 **Tommy Sheppard (SNP):** ... Does he think it is particularly distasteful and grotesque that the Bill is coming at this time and that the UK Government's only legislative response to what is happening in the middle east is to try to bring forward proposals to stifle criticism of Israel, when it is clear and there is so much evidence that Israel stands facing charges of breaching international law and breaching the Geneva convention? ...

Chris Stephens: ... I think many Members have a concern about whether it is appropriate to proceed with the Bill at this moment in time. ...

We are also concerned that public bodies will not be able to make decisions about environmental protections. ...

Labour rights would also not be allowed to be considered. ...

I want to make it clear—as I have at every stage of the Bill—that the Scottish National party is concerned that antisemitism is on the rise around the world. We must not look away, and we must call it out whenever we see it. Antisemitism is a truly global and iniquitous poison. The Bill does not address the very epidemic of rising antisemitism that the Government claim they want to tackle. We are also concerned that the Government have ignored the evidence and concerns that many organisations have put forward about the Bill. The Balfour Project, the trade union Unison ... the Union of Jewish Students and Jews for Justice for Palestinians have all provided good evidence on their concerns about the Bill, but I am afraid they have not been taken on board by the Government ...

col 394 The Government have rejected sensible amendments. Some of us have real concerns about clause 3 and very real concerns about clause 4. ...

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): I support the Bill and urge others to do so as well. But I also want to emphasise that I very much respect the views of those who have concerns about how it will operate in practice, and I know that all Members of the House, whatever their views on the Bill, remain committed to a peaceful settlement and a negotiated two-state solution.

I have just returned from a visit to Israel ... and I believe strongly that we should be backing Israel, not boycotting it. It has had to take military action to defend itself from a vile and repulsive terrorist attack in which more than 1,000 people lost their lives.

Last week I visited an exhibition in Tel Aviv about the Nova music festival, where hundreds of young people were gunned down. The displays of shoes, clothes and bags were chillingly reminiscent of Yad Vashem and the piles of belongings taken from Jewish people on arrival at the death camps. We can be in no doubt that the BDS movement is divisive

and damaging: it rejects a two-state solution and consistently opposes efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians together. As the Government have stated again this evening, BDS activities drive antisemitism. I am especially concerned about the impact of Israel boycotts on campus, where anti-Israel hatred so often morphs into racist treatment of Jewish students. It is entirely unacceptable for Jewish students to feel unable to be open about their faith or identity for fear of reprisals and harassment.

Furthermore, foreign policy is the responsibility of Government. It is, and always has been, a reserved power. There is no need or justification for universities, local authorities or other public bodies to run their own foreign policy. If sanctions or boycotts need to be imposed, that is a decision to be made in this House at a national level. ...

col/ 395 Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat): ... Throughout December, alongside the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury, I sought to shed light on the suffering of Christians in Gaza city, who include my own family. ... Although the media attention mitigated the immediate dangers, the plight of Gaza's residents persists—living hand to mouth, drinking unclean water and wondering how on earth the world is letting this happen. I am equally concerned about the impact on the streets in the UK. We are seeing a rise in antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate, which is unacceptable and must be called out.

Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru): ... My own council Cyngor Gwynedd called for an immediate ceasefire last month. Echoing people's concerns, it condemned both Hamas violence and Israel's disproportionate attacks on civilians. The Senedd has also called for a ceasefire. The Bill will restrict members of Welsh democratic institutions from voicing their views ...

Layla Moran: I absolutely agree. The Bill does not respect directly elected bodies and those representatives. The issue is also about the timing. The death toll in Gaza now exceeds 22,000, and over 100 Israeli hostages remain. I do not put those numbers side by side to compare, because every single individual lost or missing is a tragedy. The humanitarian situation has reached new depths. A doctor constituent of mine who is working in Gaza said that he has seen preventable deaths due to staff shortages, and the medical system has totally collapsed. We now have injured with nowhere to go.

Tomorrow, the International Court of Justice will consider South Africa's case on Israel's alleged violations and obligations under the genocide convention. I am sure I need not remind this House that it was precisely local government-led interventions here in the UK—which would be outlawed under the Bill—that pressured the Thatcher Government to add their support to the people of South Africa. Yesterday, the Foreign Secretary said that he did not agree with the ICJ case and "I do not think we should bandy around terms like genocide".

South Africa is not bandying around terms. The ICJ is precisely the court in which those allegations should be looked at. The principle is simple: the UK should not pre-judge the outcome of the legal case. It should back the process and the court itself full-throatedly.

I end by simply saying that the Liberal Democrats will continue to advocate for an immediate bilateral ceasefire, securing hostage release, delivering aid and working towards that precious two-state solution. Our response to this war will be judged by history. In a fractured world where democracies need to be strengthened and the international rules-based order helped, the Bill undermines local government, damages our global standing and divides our streets. ...

col/ 396 Michael Ellis (Conservative): ... This legislation will finally stop public bodies from wrongfully pursuing their own independent foreign policy agenda, which have almost exclusively been the result of divisive, antisemitic partisan campaigns pursued by the antisemitic BDS movement. Of course, as has already been mentioned, that is a movement whose executive board, the BDS national committee, is a coalition of proscribed terrorist groups, including Hamas. ...

The boycott movement has undeniably succeeded, sadly, up to this point in its chilling and

racist effects. Who can forget the loathsome policy—frankly, it was reminiscent of 20th century fascism—of West Dunbartonshire Council in 2011, when its libraries banned new book volumes printed or published in the Jewish state? Yes, it banned Jewish books. Allied Universal, the parent company of G4S, sold a business in Israel following pressure from the movement. In a series of councils across England, Scotland and Wales, including Leicester City Council, Swansea City Council and Gwynedd Council, motions were passed banning imports from Israel. They are inherently discriminatory and a breach of our World Trade Organisation obligations. Those councils are an embarrassment to this country and they should have been ashamed of their racism.

The supreme irony is that Palestinian and Israeli businesses in the region condemn the movement. If anyone takes the trouble to listen to the leaders of those businesses, they are instead seeking bilateralism. Nearly 100,000 Palestinians are employed by Israeli companies. Their workforces receive higher wages and enjoy greater protections than elsewhere in the Palestinian economy and its equivalents across the middle east. Regrettably, the BDS movement strengthens extremists and weakens moderates, which is why it has even opposed peaceful coexistence projects, such as Heartbeat and OneVoice, that bring Israelis and Palestinians together.

Speaking as a former Attorney General, I assure the House that the ban will not apply to individuals or private organisations where they are not carrying out public functions. That is testimony to the Government's respect for freedom of speech.

Richard Graham (Conservative): ... it is also vital that the Bill should not be seen to interfere in any way with British Government policy on the illegal activity by Israeli settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or indeed the sanctions that the Government have already applied against some of them ...

col 397 **Michael Ellis:** ... The Bill will not change the UK's approach to the middle east peace process or its position on settlements, and nor should it ...

The Bill will push back against the malevolent anti-western forces of Hamas. It is those that threaten our way of life and dissolve our security. ...

Claudia Webbe (Independent): ... the Bill is largely an explicit reaction to the success of Leicester City Council in defeating legal attempts in 2018 to force it to end its boycott of goods from illegal Israeli settlements until Israel complies with international law and ends its illegal occupation. Arguably, Leicester's stance has been thoroughly vindicated by events over the last few months, during which Israel has launched what South Africa and many United Nations bodies have called "genocidal acts" on Gaza, which have also killed hundreds in the west bank and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, while protecting Israeli settlers as they beat and even kill Palestinians trying to go about their peaceful lives.

While Leicester and other councils have been shown to be doing the right thing, the Government have found themselves yet again on the wrong side of the issue, backing the oppressor against the oppressed and giving the Israeli regime licence to kill tens of thousands. ... The Bill would prevent Leicester and councils like it from carrying out the will of the voters who elected them, tying the hands of the principled and enforcing the will of a Government who have shown that they prize geopolitical and economic ends above the lives of tens of thousands of innocent children, women, teachers, doctors, aid workers and journalists. ... It is clearly also intended to circumvent the will of the court, given that Leicester comprehensively won its case against those trying to overturn its boycott. ...

col 398 **David Simmonds (Conservative):** There is about £70 billion of local government spending in the UK, which is a very significant economic factor. It is entirely right that ... they are able to ensure that that money is spent in a way that fully expresses their ambitions and the aspirations and views of their local communities. Clearly we need to ensure ... that we have appropriate limits when there are risks that that will stray into causing real, serious division and interfere with what is more appropriately national policy. During my time at the Local Government Association, I engaged in a good deal of effort

working with the local government friends of Israel group and observing the massive amount of BDS lobbying of local councillors. ...

We should not forget ... that we have counterparts in local government who are specifically elected on an international platform. For example, many will recall Justice for Kashmir, later the People's Justice party, which became a significant force in the politics of Birmingham City Council. It was specifically elected on an international law issue. ...

I want to finish by saying that the incredibly bitter divisions that have arisen about the Bill and other issues are not seen and felt by my constituents in day-to-day life. When a local Muslim charity wanted a base, it found one in St John's church. When it wanted to raise funds to purchase its own permanent base, the local synagogue spoke out in support of that. There is a real sense of solidarity among our communities, regardless of faith or any other element of diversity in their backgrounds. We need to ensure that BDS, which solely targets the state of Israel, is restricted from inflicting any further damage on our communities.

col 399 Andy Slaughter (Labour): This is a bad Bill both in intent and in the methods that it adopts, which are harmful to Britain's reputation around the world, to human rights, to the proper conduct of state actors and corporations, to citizens' freedom of speech and to the actions of public and elected bodies. ... It aims to prevent any boycott and to affect the right of public bodies, especially those that are elected, to consider factors beyond commercial procurement and investment decisions, such as ethical factors, which are often also commercially sensible factors. It neuters the exercise of choice by pension funds, employees and citizens. It constricts the freedom of expression of religious groups, trade unions and elected councillors. It proscribes freedom of speech in a draconian way, which sets an unfortunate precedent. ...

The so-called exceptions require actions to be unlawful before action can be taken, but we know how difficult it is for foreign states to have convictions against them in that way. ...

The Bill fails every test. It weakens human rights protections for persecuted groups around the world, from the Rohingya to the Uyghurs. It particularly fails Israel and Palestine. It singles out Israel for special treatment. In the words of Daniel Levy, the respected commentator and former Israeli negotiator ... the Bill demands a lower, not a higher standard of Israel. It does not distinguish between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Singling out Israel and conflating Israel and the OPT breaks the consensus that both main parties have maintained under successive Governments. ...

Why, at a time when Foreign Office guidance advises against investment in settlements, when the Government have rightly spoken out about settlements being reintroduced in Gaza and rightly talked about sanctions against violent settlers, do the Government try to prevent, through the Bill, any action from being taken against settlements that are illegal under international law? A ban on settlement goods or investment in settlements is not the same in any respect as a boycott. ...

col 400 Nicola Richards (Conservative): ... The Bill's intention to promote community cohesion should be endorsed by all Members of this House, especially when antisemitism has sharply risen here in the UK since 7 October, the day that saw the most deaths of Jewish people since the holocaust, in a horrendous massacre committed by the Hamas terrorist group. Jews worldwide have suffered anti-Jewish hatred in response to that slaughter.

Before Israel had even responded, before Israel and its allies could even fathom the full extent of the utter horror sown by Hamas, demonstrators filled the streets of London to celebrate Hamas's attack. Flags flown in solidarity with our ally Israel were vandalised. In the two months from 7 October to 13 December, the CST recorded 2,098 antisemitic incidents here in the UK, dwarfing the 800 incidents recorded in the first nine months of 2023.

Jewish businesses have been targeted, as well as businesses with any small connection to Jewish owners or the Jewish state. Social media is rife with long lists of companies to

boycott, just because the BDS movement does not like the people who run them. Intimidating protests have taken place outside the likes of Zara and McDonald's. Young children have been taunted after enjoying their Happy Meal at the fast food chain and, in one incident, rodents were released into a McDonald's chain in Birmingham ...

Jewish students have been boycotted, with university societies and Sunday league football clubs refusing to play against Jewish players and societies. BDS targets not only businesses but people. ...

The BDS movement is antisemitic. The movement is against peace and normalisation. It calls for the eradication of Israel, the world's only Jewish state. The Anti-Defamation League reports that BDS campaigns frequently include antisemitic tropes of Jewish power and dual loyalty, as well as accusing the Jewish people and Israel of being culpable for crises across the globe. BDS activity advanced by public bodies has legitimised and driven antisemitism in the UK. By exclusively targeting Israel and singling out Jewish people in the UK, it has created divisions that our society needs to be repaired.

This is our opportunity to reassure the Jewish community and show them our support. BDS unfairly targets Jewish businesses and people, as well as Palestinians who work for Israeli companies ... At a time when we strive for peace in the middle east, BDS inflames tensions and rejects co-existence. ...

col 401 Alison Thewliss (SNP): ... According to Liberty: "In practice, a public body seeking to comply with the Bill is likely to take steps to distance itself from anything which suggests that it holds any political or moral views as to the conduct of foreign states, for fear that it could be found to be in breach of the ban or the related prohibition on statements."

This legislation will undoubtedly alter the executive competence of Scottish Ministers and should be opposed by all of those who value devolution.

The provisions in this Bill are disproportionate and, frankly, unnecessary. The Bill hands sweeping powers to the Secretary of State and the Treasury to request information from the devolved Administrations to assess whether a breach of the boycott ban or gagging clause has occurred and to impose a compliance notice. ...

col 402 Miriam Cates (Conservative): ... When I first heard about the holocaust as a child at school, I was shocked. I was shocked at the scale of the evil, the horror of what happened to the Jews and the fact that it could have been allowed to happen. As an adult, I have visited Yad Vashem, Auschwitz and the forests in Poland where thousands upon thousands of Jews, including children, were murdered in cold blood by Nazi soldiers because they were Jews.

No one walks away from those sites in any doubt about the potential consequences of antisemitism, but one thing I was sure of before 7 October was that that would never happen again. Surely the world—this country, at least—is alive to the consequences of anti-Jewish attitudes, to the importance of not tolerating antisemitism and to the need for Israel, an Israel that has the same right to exist and to defend itself as any other sovereign nation. But now I am not so convinced that we have learned the lessons of antisemitism. Polling shows shocking levels of support for Hamas among young people here and in the United States. ...

Michael Gove: ... I wish briefly to address one misconception, which is that this Bill acts as an effective restraint—a gagging clause—on free speech. ... As the explanatory notes make clear, individuals are in no way prohibited from expressing their view, however disagreeable we might find it, on the conflict in Israel and Gaza, or from expressing a view, which I would abhor, that the state of Israel should not exist. What is clear is that only public authorities, not individuals, are governed by this Bill. ... It is simply, clearly and tightly drawn in order to ensure that public bodies, public authorities, cannot abuse the position that has been vested in them as corporate bodies to more broadly undermine the foreign policy of the UK or, particularly in this case ... to give succour to an explicitly antisemitic

campaign. ...

col 403 ... the Bill is explicitly about making sure that citizens in the United Kingdom, who have been targeted by explicitly antisemitic campaigns, get the protection for which the organisations that stand up for them have been asking. ...

Bill read the Third time and passed.

To read the full transcript see

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-10/debates/FF477AA1-CD9C-42D9-8F3D-FB81D0609F4B/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies\(OverseasMatters\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-10/debates/FF477AA1-CD9C-42D9-8F3D-FB81D0609F4B/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies(OverseasMatters)Bill)

Inter Faith Network for the UK

col 412 **Holly Lynch (Labour):** ... Here in the UK, we are a religiously diverse country. The Inter Faith Network was founded in 1987 as a way to advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness of both their distinctive features and their common ground, and to promote good relations between people of different faiths in this country. ...

Ruth Cadbury (Labour): ... I am a big fan of Hounslow Friends of Faith because of the work it has done to bring communities together—particularly at times of heightened community tensions that affect our communities ... Does my hon. Friend agree that the success of our local Friends of Faith or equivalent organisations is only possible because there is a robust national organisation that supports them in their work?

Holly Lynch: ... absolutely right ... a really powerful example of where faith communities can work together to deliver truly beneficial projects and initiatives that go deep into communities, perhaps in ways that other statutory agencies cannot.

Seema Malhotra (Labour Co-op): ... for almost four decades the Inter Faith Network for the UK has been dedicated to increasing understanding and co-operation between peoples of different faiths; ...

col 413 **Holly Lynch:** ... She has made a really powerful case for the support that the national network provides to those local community groups, which then facilitate and host the dialogue that is not always easy, but is absolutely vital. ...

The IFN's member bodies include national faith community representative bodies from the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths, such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Hindu Council UK, the Muslim Council of Britain and the Methodist Council, to name just a handful.

Afzal Khan (Labour): ... Two weeks ago, an article in *The Telegraph* insinuated that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up is concerned that the Muslim Council of Britain is a member of the Inter Faith Network. The Muslim Council of Britain upholds British values, and champions mutual respect and tolerance by coming together through inter-faith initiatives. It has long been a trusted group consulted by many Members of this House, although the Conservative Government have consistently rejected Muslim civil society groups. Does my hon. Friend agree that these attacks on the Inter Faith Network and the Muslim Council of Britain are disappointing, and take away from the important work that they do?

Holly Lynch: ... I know that the Inter Faith Network is incredibly proud to host the Muslim Council of Britain among its members. ... it is an incredibly important partner in that dialogue and those conversations, and again, can carry some of those messages deep into communities in a way that some other organisations cannot. ...

As well as those I have mentioned, small but significant faith communities are also represented, including the Quakers, Baha'i, Spiritualists and Pagans. The IFN's members also include national and regional inter-faith organisations, local inter-faith bodies, and

educational and academic bodies with an interest in multi-faith and inter-faith issues ...

col 414 Jim Shannon (DUP): ... Does the hon. Lady believe that the appointment of the special envoy for freedom of religion or belief was a step in the right direction that has achieved a great deal? Does she further agree that more can and should be done to show support for all faiths—all of them—throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and to recognise the sterling work carried out by the faith-based groups ...

Bob Blackman (Conservative): ... there have been criticisms of the Inter Faith Network—not necessarily about its aims, but about the way it has been run. ... I have also heard criticism of the way it is being run. ...

Holly Lynch: ... I do not think it comes as a surprise that there are those who are uncomfortable about inter-faith work ...

I have looked carefully at the way the network is organised and run, and it appears to me to be incredibly diligent. I have touched on its broad membership ... It is in demonstrating the critical mass of those different organisations being brought together that says to me that nobody is doing this work as successfully as the network is. ...

John McDonnell (Labour): What has restored my faith and confidence in the network is how it has responded to some of the criticisms in a very open way and by inviting people into explain their views, rather than getting drawn into what could be sectarian rows or internecine strife on religious and other grounds. ...

col 415 Stephen Timms (Labour): Is it not clear that the kind of dialogue across faith divides that the Inter Faith Network facilitates is more needed at this moment than ever? Unless the Government keep their promise to provide funding for this financial year, we are going to lose that capacity entirely. ...

Holly Lynch: ... We need the work that the IFN does now more than ever. If we lose that—those friendships, the trust born out of that facilitated membership and the programmes, initiatives and dialogue built up over years and years—it will take an awfully long time to rebuild it. ...

The network publishes practical guidance, such as the “Looking after one another: the safety and security of our faith communities” guide, in partnership with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Home Office, the Crown Prosecution Service, the National Police Chiefs’ Council, the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. ... It brings together national faith community bodies to discuss topics such as faith and organ donation, social care and hate crime and to share good practice on working with other faith communities. ...

col 416 Only when we nurture the relationships and friendships between different people do we establish trust and break down barriers.

The international backdrop to this inter-faith work in the UK means, as we have discussed, that it could not be more important. The horror of Hamas’s attack on Israel on 7 October, followed by the utter devastation of Israel’s response upon the people of Gaza, have inevitably impacted on communities here in the UK. Tell MAMA recorded 1,432 anti-Muslim cases between 7 October and 13 December—a sevenfold increase in reported incidents. The Community Safety Trust reports that it has seen an increase in anti-Jewish hate acts of 534% in the same period, compared with the same period last year.

We know that we have to do more to promote and nurture trust, understanding and respect between different communities, and this feels like a time when we should be supporting, not undermining, inter-faith work. Alongside that, I am aware that the Government last published their four-year hate crime action plan in 2016. It was updated in 2018, but it has not been updated since, nor has a new plan been published. Given these stark increases in unacceptable hate crimes, I would be grateful if the Minister clarified when we can expect some progress on that front. ...

It was a real setback when, on 31 March last year, IFN received a letter from an official at

the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities saying that further funding would not be given from April 2023 onwards. ... However, on 7 July 2023, IFN received a letter from DLUHC saying that following a review by Ministers of funded programmes across the communities and integration portfolio, funding was now being offered to IFN... The letter explained that the money would be for use from July 2023 to March 2024. ... Despite the best efforts of IFN and its allies ... the July 2023 to March 2024 grant funding agreement has not been provided and therefore that funding cannot be accessed. ...

col 417 As we have touched on, the Inter Faith Network has critics. I think that is inevitable—there will always be some who feel threatened by inter-faith work—but I hope that the Government would be proud to support it. ...

Michael Shanks (Labour): ... I am proud to be a trustee of Interfaith Glasgow, which runs a weekend club for refugees in the city. Interfaith Glasgow builds connections between different groups and reduces social isolation. In the long run, it saves the Government money by trying to provide preventive support to people who need it, as well as bringing people together from their various communities. ... such initiatives really bring our communities together and ... now, when our communities perhaps seem more divided than at any time recently ... and the news is often full of negative stories of division between communities, they should be supported in any possible way ...

col 418 **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Simon Hoare):** ... Vital work is done across our communities and societies by so many groups and organisations, including the Inter Faith Network, to build bridges, develop understanding and host and facilitate conversations. ... I commend all those from all faith groups across the United Kingdom who partake in that important work.

The Government are fully persuaded of the importance of developing and maintaining strong relationships across faiths and beliefs. That is crucial to the fabric of our nation. We know full well that faith communities play a key role in society, and not just within their own community, as very often those people involved are motivated to get involved with a whole mesh of community networks and other voluntary organisations. They meet colleagues, develop friendships and get each other involved. That is a vital part of people's identity. We fully support the invaluable work done by people around the country who are inspired and motivated by their faith to do good for others. ...

At a time when people often feel terribly isolated, when the only community they think exists is on the screen that they hold on their hands, those interactions of conversation and common humanity are phenomenally important. ...

col 419 It is crucial that young people see faith not as an abstract thing or something for older people, but as something that unites the generations. Inter-faith activity is important, too, and learning and understanding more about different faiths can help bring about positive change in our society. ...

The conflict between Israel and Hamas and its impact on community tensions in the UK has brought into sharp focus a number of issues. We must continue to encourage—if at any time, certainly now—a greater understanding of different faiths and beliefs to help foster better relationships and eliminate all forms of intolerance or hatred. ...

The Department is ... undertaking a variety of analyses with regard to the network. I hope my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be making an announcement in the not too distant future, but I am afraid I am not able to confirm that this evening. ...

col 420 Let me say, in closing, that the work of the network is understood and the importance of that work is very clear. The network is not the only body that provides forums and organisations to deliver inter-community and inter-faith discussions. There are others, but we hope to be able to make an announcement in due course.

Question put and agreed to.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-10/debates/DDF93113-52B2-4777-91C3-E04D46E1C792/InterFaithNetworkForTheUK>

The Telegraph article referred to above can be read at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/12/30/michael-gove-told-scrap-funding-inter-faith-network/>

“Looking after one another: the safety and security of our faith communities”, referred to above, can be read at https://www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/Looking_After_One_Another_2023.pdf

The Hate Crime Action Plan referred to above can be read at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f8db94a8fa8f56ad07d1152/2016_Hate_Crime_Action_Plan.pdf

and the updated Hate Crime Action Plan referred to above can be read at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5bc0be55e5274a361f835224/Hate_crime_refresh_2018_FINAL_WEB.PDF

House of Commons Written Answer

Police Cautions: Hate Crime

Kevin Brennan (Labour) [7796] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of conditional cautions in relation to hate crime.

Gareth Bacon: National guidance issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Adult Conditional Cautions states that they are not considered suitable for offences involving hate crime. However, there are rare cases when, because of the nature of the crime or the circumstances of the offender, exceptionally a Conditional Caution could be considered. Any such case considered suitable by the police for a Conditional Caution must be referred to a prosecutor and cannot be issued without the expressed authorisation of the Crown Prosecution Service.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/7796>

The guidance referred to above can be read at

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/conditional-cautioning-adults-dpp-guidance>

Scottish Parliament Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

PE2052: Ban child circumcision unless it is medically necessary with no less invasive: Written evidence from the Scottish Government

https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/citizen-participation-and-public-petitions-committee/correspondence/2023/pe2052/pe2052_a.pdf

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Israel

See also the Commons Third Reading debate on the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill, and the Commons debate on the “Inter Faith Network for the UK” that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Prime Minister's Question Time

Andrew Percy (Conservative): "I believe that not all Jewish people are bad."

"Palestinians are dying whilst the Zionists are laughing their lives away."

"How do you send letters believing the western media on how Hamas is a terrorist group? For all I know the only terrorist group is the Zionists."

Those are not my words, but words produced by pupils as young as 11 in schools in this country, one of whom signed off their letter saying that they sought "vengeance", although that word was crossed out. Pro-Palestinian activists were invited to another school in the north-west of England to educate pupils on the history of Palestine, and displayed slides to those students that denied the existence of the state of Israel. We know that other schools have allowed absences for people to attend protests, where, of course, there have been many examples of antisemitism. This is completely unacceptable. Will the Prime Minister look at what is going on in our schools and hold an independent review of how we can do more in our curriculum to educate about the perils of antisemitism?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising what is a deeply concerning issue. As I have said before, there is no place for antisemitism or the glorification of terrorism in Britain, especially not in our classrooms. That is why we welcomed the recent report from Lord Mann, the Government's independent adviser on antisemitism, and in particular his recommendation on how schools can tackle antisemitism. We will continue to work together with Lord Mann on this vital issue. I look forward to hearing further suggestions from my hon. Friend, too.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-10/debates/7CF4D161-1F0D-4005-AC2E-9FDFA07C0CA5/Engagements#contribution-C6662067-9E7A-496B-825B-486AA503F2E4>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/PDF-Antisemitism-Report-2023.pdf>

Prime Minister's Question Time

Rushanara Ali (Labour) [900831] Since the outbreak of war in Gaza, over 23,000 Palestinians have been killed, including 10,000 children, and forced displacement is causing a humanitarian catastrophe. There is intensifying fighting between Hezbollah and Israel, a crisis in shipping security in the Red sea, and the engulfing of neighbouring countries into a regional conflict. De-escalation will occur only when hostilities cease in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary said yesterday that he was "worried" Israel may have broken international law, and the International Court of Justice is opening hearings in The Hague this week in relation to suspected breaches of obligations under the Geneva convention. Will the Prime Minister make public the legal advice that our Government requested and received on suspected breaches of international law by Israel and the implications for UK policy, including relevant arms exports?

The Prime Minister: We continue to call for international humanitarian law to be respected and for civilians to be protected. That is what our current legal assessment says is happening: that, as the Foreign Secretary outlined yesterday, Israel plans to act within international humanitarian law and has the ability to do so. But we are deeply concerned about the impact on the civilian population in Gaza. That is why we have trebled the amount of aid that we provide to the region, and just recently we sent our first maritime shipment of aid to Egypt. A UK military ship delivered over 80 tonnes of new blankets and life-saving medical equipment for Gaza, and we are working with Jordan to find more land routes. We will continue to do everything we can to support the vulnerable people who are being impacted by what is happening on the ground.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-10/debates/7CF4D161-1F0D-4005-AC2E-9FDFA07C0CA5/Engagements#contribution-835F59F3-395A-4AB7-BF3B-83084F204192>

Prime Minister's Question Time

Rosena Allin-Khan (Labour): Every parent's worst nightmare is watching their children starve and suffer, yet in Gaza living hell is being realised, with innocent children eating weeds and 1,000 children having lost one or more legs, with many of them having to have them amputated without anaesthesia or pain relief. I am sure the Prime Minister will agree that this is inhumane, so will he please publicly call for unhindered access for food and medicine to reach Gaza, and tell Israel to stop attacking healthcare facilities?

The Prime Minister: As I have said previously, we are deeply concerned about the devastating impact of the fighting in Gaza on the civilian population, and particularly, of course, children. Too many people have lost their lives already and there is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza. I have stressed those points repeatedly to Prime Minister Netanyahu, and we are doing our bit to get more aid in. As I have said, we have trebled our aid commitment. Earlier this month, we sent in the first maritime shipment of aid into Egypt, which will help, and we are working with the United Nations to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. I agree with the hon. Lady that we want to see more aid going into Gaza to help the most vulnerable people, and we should be proud in this House that the United Kingdom is playing a leading role in making that happen.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-10/debates/D0EFBD53-59C8-4D63-86BA-84B362DA448B/Engagements#contribution-EF3FB1E3-FC73-443E-AA24-89CB368DA818>

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: British Nationals Abroad

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [7722] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how many British nationals are held in Israeli military detention.

Andrew Mitchell: No British Nationals are currently detained in Israeli prisons, including security prisoners.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7722>

Israel: Palestinians

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [8196] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 20 December 2023 to Question 7141 on Israel: Palestinians, what measures his Department plans to use in cases in which UK citizens are believed to be responsible for settler violence.

West Bank: British Nationals Abroad

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [8197] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 20 December 2023 to Question 7142 on West Bank: British Nationals Abroad, whether UK nationals found to have been involved in settler violence in the West Bank will have their citizenship revoked.

Andrew Mitchell: We are not in a position to comment on individual cases, including cases involving British Nationals. We have urged Israel to take stronger action to stop settler violence against Palestinian civilians and to hold the perpetrators accountable. As the Foreign Secretary said on 14 December, we are banning those responsible for settler violence from entering the UK, to make sure

our country cannot be a home for people who commit these acts. This involves making use of existing disruptive immigration measures at our disposal.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8196>

The answers referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-14/7141>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-14/7142>

The Foreign Secretary's statement referred to above can be read at

https://twitter.com/David_Cameron/status/1735240073505800334

Israel: Palestinians

Philipppa Whitford (SNP) [7341] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made representations to the Israeli authorities on the (a) shelling of the maternity department at Nasser Hospital on 17 December 2023, (b) detention of healthcare staff from Kamal Adwan hospital on 13 December 2023 and (c) International Committee of the Red Cross access to those detained.

Andrew Mitchell: We are aware of reports of attacks against healthcare facilities and infrastructure. Healthcare workers, emergency services personnel, civilian buildings including hospitals and medical facilities that are not used for military purposes must not be targeted. We support Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas, but Israel must protect civilians in Gaza and comply with International Humanitarian Law. We are aware of reports over Israeli detention practices. We are particularly concerned over reports about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention, which should be used only where it is justified in accordance with international law. Those under detention should either be charged or released. The UK is committed to working with Israel to secure improvements in its detention practices and repeatedly calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law. The safety of humanitarian personnel and healthcare workers in Gaza is critical to enable aid to reach those who need it most. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary continue to make this clear in engagements with their Israeli counterparts.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7341>

UK Parliament Early Day Motions

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Independent) [265] **Gaza** – That this House believes there should be a weekly vote in the Commons calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, until there is a ceasefire, given the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Gaza.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61749>

Richard Foord (Liberal Democrat) [264] **Occupied Palestinian Territories and arms exports to Israel** – That this House notes with deep concern the number of lives lost in the Israel-Gaza conflict; recognises tensions involving other actors in the wider region; expresses fear for those remaining hostages in Gaza, and for the hundreds of thousands of innocent Palestinians who do not share Hamas' objectives and who need humanitarian aid urgently; reaffirms the belief that we need movement to a political solution that guarantees security for Palestinians and Israelis; further notes with concern possible breaches of International Humanitarian Law by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territories; condemns a failure by all sides to use distinction between combatants and civilians; expresses its concern that UK arms supplied to Israel may have been used to commit breaches of International Humanitarian Law; resolves to improve parliamentary

scrutiny of the UK's control of arms exports; urges the UK Government to introduce a presumption of denial for arms exports to governments listed as human rights priorities in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's annual human rights report; further recognises that the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas are listed within the Occupied Palestinian Territories section of the 2022 FCDO human rights report; calls on the UK Government to use all political and diplomatic powers to halt arms supplied to Hamas from Iran and other actors that are hostile to Israel; and condemns the arming of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah by Iran and other actors that are hostile to Israel.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61746>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64afcae3c033c1000d806244/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2022-foreign-commonwealth-and-development-office-report.pdf>

Welsh Senedd Statement of Opinion

Peredur Owen Griffiths (Plaid Cymru) [OPIN-2024-0378] Supporting International Efforts to Halt the Violence in Gaza – This Senedd:

1. Recognises the continuing violence in Gaza which has resulted in over 22,000 deaths.
2. Welcomes South Africa's request for provisional measures by the International Court of Justice to prevent acts of genocide.
3. Urges the UK Government to uphold their duty to prevent genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention and actively avoid complicity.
4. Continues to support those in Welsh society calling for an immediate ceasefire, the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners and an end to the siege.
5. Calls upon Israel to observe any resulting binding 'provisional measures' aimed at protecting the human rights of Palestinians, including the cessation of fire.

<https://record.senedd.wales/StatementOfOpinion/378>

International Court of Justice

Proceedings instituted by South Africa against Israel: Request for the indication of provisional measures

A recording of the first day, South Africa's presentation of its case, is available at

<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k11/k11gf661b3>

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk / Ha'aretz

Concern About Palestinian and Israeli Human Rights Is Not a 'Blood Libel'

The shocking cruelty of the attack launched from Gaza by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups October 7 has created intense and continuing trauma across Israel.

The scale and brutality of the killings; the accounts of torture and sexual violence; the abductions of 250 people – many of them still held captive by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad; some of them small children and vulnerable older people; all refused access to international monitors – all these are appalling.

The horror of that attack is apparent. These are breaches of international humanitarian law. Across the United Nations and the world they have been repeatedly and utterly condemned.

In the three months that have followed, that horror has intensified, inflicted on the people of Gaza through a campaign of overwhelming force that has been tainted by [grave breaches of international law](#).

One percent of the 2.2 million Palestinians in Gaza have been killed, according to the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry including [thousands of children and other civilians](#). A further 2.3 percent of Gazans have been wounded, many of them permanently. The entire civilian population is traumatized. ...

Eighty-five percent of Gaza's people have been forced to flee, as a result of the Israeli Defense Force's use of wave after wave of explosive weapons with indiscriminate effects, in populated residential areas and strikes on civilian infrastructure specifically protected under international humanitarian law that serve as shelters for many fleeing civilians, such as hospitals, schools and mosques. ...

At the same time, Hamas and Islamic Jihad have continued indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel, reportedly at times shielding themselves in protected civilian locations which is also a breach of international humanitarian law.

The protection of civilians across the Gaza Strip is, in effect, non-existent, and the toll of unbearable pain and trauma will increase further, as Israel's intense military operations continue.

Humanitarian aid, which should be pouring into Gaza ... can only trickle in from Rafah in Egypt; only one Israeli entry-point, Kerem Shalom, is allowed to open – and that, infrequently. Half of Gaza's people are starving, and people are on average reduced to 1.5 liters of water a day – one-tenth of the minimum requirement in emergency conditions.

Sewage systems no longer function, and disease is spreading quickly. The few remaining medical teams must amputate the limbs of wounded children without anaesthetic, and face their probable slow deaths from infection, for lack of medicine.

Repeated requests by my office for access to investigate and document the events of October 7 inside Israel have not received a response. But throughout this crisis, my office has, to the best of its ability, maintained its [rigorous and impartial reporting on the impact on human rights](#) – including the human rights of Israelis.

Regrettably, some Israeli officials have responded by trying to discredit human rights concerns, including lately by claiming that they constitute "blood libel" – the most poisonous and murderous form of antisemitism.

Antisemitism is a dangerous scourge and must be countered vigorously. But it is not antisemitic to urge respect for the law, and to condemn its gross violations.

It is not a blood libel to deplore the failure to hold to account Israeli soldiers and armed settlers who have killed [hundreds of Palestinians](#) in the West Bank since October 7, or the prolongation of a war whose conduct has raised grave international humanitarian and human rights law concerns.

Political instrumentalization of the very real scourge of antisemitism must end. ...

The insistence on massive violence against Palestinians, against a backdrop of constant discrimination and humiliation, will not lead to peace – neither in Israel, nor in the wider region, where any spill-over of this war could prove devastating.

I also fear such policies will have an increasingly corrosive impact on Israeli institutions and society. And while these policies do not *justify* any violence against Israeli civilians, they fail to fulfil a fundamental promise made by every state to its people: that it will ensure their enduring safety and security. ...

To discredit human rights is a disservice to Israel's people. ...

To read the full article see

<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-01-10/ty-article-opinion/.premium/concern-about-palestinian-and-israeli-human-rights-isnt-a-blood-libel/0000018c-ea41-d0e9-a3de-fecd536b0000>

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Other Relevant Information

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Human rights implications of the development, use and transfer of new technologies in the context of counterterrorism and countering and preventing violent extremism

<https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/52/39>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3567>

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3539>

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

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

Third Reading, House of Commons

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-10/debates/FF477AA1-CD9C-42D9-8F3D-FB81D0609F4B/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies\(OverseasMatters\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-10/debates/FF477AA1-CD9C-42D9-8F3D-FB81D0609F4B/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies(OverseasMatters)Bill)

Bill as brought to the Lords

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/53574/documents/4223>

First Reading, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-01-11/debates/20AE177D-4E73-4D1B-97BF-8E41B5F1ADED/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies\(OverseasMatters\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-01-11/debates/20AE177D-4E73-4D1B-97BF-8E41B5F1ADED/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies(OverseasMatters)Bill)

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

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

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3535>

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3521>

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3564>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3596>

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 today

Super-complaints: eligible entity criteria and procedural requirements [Online Safety Act] (closing date 11 January 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/super-complaints-eligible-entity-criteria-and-procedural-requirements>

** closes tomorrow

Death certification reform and the introduction of medical examiners [England] (closing date 12 January 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/death-certification-reform-and-the-introduction-of-medical-examiners>

** closes tomorrow

Changes to medical certification of cause of death and the role of medical examiners [Wales] (closing date 12 January 2024)

<https://www.gov.wales/death-certification-reform>

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