



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Debate

Proposed British Jewish History Month

col 526 Nickie Aiken (Conservative): ... That this House calls for the creation of a British Jewish History Month. ...

I thought long and hard about the timing of the debate, particularly after the horrendous 7 October attacks and the rise in antisemitism in this country, with an increase in antisemitism of over 1,300% in London alone in the past year.

We cannot conflate British Jews with the state of Israel; being a British Jew means being a British citizen. That was really brought home to me when I met a group of British Jewish schoolchildren in November ... When I asked the teacher why 10-year-olds were wearing baseball caps, he told me that it was because they had to hide their kippah. I thought, how can we get to a state where British children are hiding their identities? It made me think that we have to celebrate the British Jewish community and thank them for the outstanding contribution that they have made to this country. ...

I know that the Jewish community is interested in its own history—the Jewish Historical Society of England was established in Victorian times—but it is now time for the whole nation to celebrate the history of our Jewish friends and neighbours. The Jewish community is such a small one: 280,000 British citizens identified as Jewish in the 2021 census. That is 0.5% of our population. Compare that with the 6.5% of Muslims and 1.7% of Hindus.

For a small minority, the impact the British Jewish community has made in all walks of life

in this country is outstanding ... Jews throughout the centuries have arrived in the UK fleeing persecution and murder in other countries and have had to rebuild their lives here.

Alex Sobel (Labour Co-op): ... Jews have contributed hugely to this country over many centuries. In fact, over 200 have served in this Chamber ...

col 527 **Nickie Aiken:** ... British Jews have played key roles and made major contributions over centuries in the fields of business, science, the arts and politics. In business, perhaps the most-loved retail brand we have in this country is Marks & Spencer, established by Michael Marks and Thomas Spencer. The largest supermarket in this country is Tesco, founded by Jack Cohen in 1919. ...

In science, Rosalind Franklin was responsible for the discovery of the structure of DNA. Sir Ernst Chain was the co-developer of penicillin. Lord Robert Winston, now in the other place, pioneered fertility treatment that is responsible for goodness knows how many children born in this country and across the world.

In the arts, Michael Balcon co-founded Ealing Studios, which is one of the most important British studios to this day. ... Samuel Wanamaker rebuilt the Globe theatre ...

Actors of stage and screen are absolutely part of our establishment. One of my personal favourites is Dame Maureen Lipman, an outstanding actor but also a campaigner on ensuring that antisemitism is understood. ...

Turning to politics, the first Jewish MP was Lionel de Rothschild, representing part of my seat—the City of London. Lionel first took his seat in 1847, but it was not until the Jews Relief Act 1858 that he was recognised as a Jewish MP. The first Jewish peer was his son Nathaniel. ...

col 528 In my constituency, we have evidence of a Jewish presence since Roman Britain. In Threadneedle Street, the Bank of England stands on the site of the London home of Aaron of Lincoln, a Jewish banker who died in 1186. Those familiar with the city of London will have come across the street called Old Jewry, and the name is hardly a coincidence, because the Great Synagogue of London was based there until it closed in 1272, a few short years before the Jews of England were formally expelled in 1290 by Edward I. It was only in 1656, during the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, that Jews were invited to return. ...

Tens of thousands of Jewish soldiers fought bravely in both the first and second world wars. Five Jewish soldiers have received the Victoria Cross and even now, every year the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women hold a Remembrance Day parade at the Cenotaph on the Sunday after the official Remembrance Day. ...

I want to pinpoint one person who I think has made the most significant contribution in this country over decades: Dame Esther Rantzen. She started so many incredible campaigns and has made a huge impact on my life, starting with her “That’s Life!” programme, where in the early ’80s she highlighted the Ben Hardwick campaign, encouraging more people to consider organ donation. ... Her seatbelt campaign saw the law changed to make sure that children would be wearing seatbelts in the back of cars ...

Perhaps the most significant campaign that Dame Esther has been involved in since is Childline, lifting the lid off the heinous crime of child abuse and giving child victims a voice. ... She has since moved on to the Silver Line, outlining the loneliness that so many older people suffer, and is trying to help to change their lives. ...

col 529 It is perhaps no coincidence that today is Rosh—I am going to get this wrong—[Hon. Members: “Chodesh.”] Rosh Chodesh, the new lunar month. It is an important day of renewal in the Jewish faith and the Jewish month of Shevat begins today. One of the great verses from the 15th day of Shevat, spoken by Moses, goes as follows: “Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past; ask your parent who will inform you, your elders who will tell you.”

It is therefore fitting to debate the merits of a British Jewish history month.

We rightly already celebrate the achievements of many minorities in this country, and continue to educate future generations, through Black History Month, LGBT History Month,

Pride and Islamophobia Awareness Month. ... it is now time we reminded ourselves of the remarkable contribution that the Jewish community has made to our nation, often after suffering the greatest hardships, and to celebrate the value of difference. It is time we used the achievements of the British Jewish community to remind ourselves of the values we all share and remind ourselves that this small minority is British. ...

Fabian Hamilton (Labour): ... I am proud to represent the constituency with the largest Jewish population in Yorkshire, and indeed on the entire east side of the United Kingdom. For over 150 years, Jewish people in Leeds have contributed so much to our city's culture, economy and society. They stood at the frontline of the battle against Oswald Mosley's fascists in the Battle of Holbeck Moor in 1937, and have often been at the forefront of our local political history across the city. ...

I thank in particular the Leeds Jewish Representative Council and the Jewish Leadership Council for their work to strengthen and represent the Jewish community in my constituency, as well as for the fruitful relationship that we have enjoyed for many decades ...

col 530 For more than 100 years, the Leeds Jewish Welfare Board and the Leeds Jewish Housing Association have supported at least 20% of the Jewish community in Leeds, providing mental health support, residential care for people with learning disabilities, practical help for struggling families and much more. ...

My father, Mario Reynaldo Uziell, came to this country in 1934 to escape the increasing persecution of Jews across Europe. At the time, his family lived in the Hague, but they moved very quickly to Paris. They lived in several major cities throughout Europe, and my father himself was born in Vienna. When, at the age of 12, he arrived at Brentwood School—a boarding school in Essex—he could not speak a word of English, but he mastered it very quickly. So much so that, by 1942, when he had been in the country for only eight years and still had Portuguese citizenship, he volunteered for the British Army. However, because his first language was French, the Special Operations Executive nabbed him and said, “You’re a French speaker; we need you to help the resistance in France.” That was dangerous for a Jewish man, but he volunteered to do it none the less. ...

I still have the document that my father signed in 1948 pledging his allegiance to King George VI so that he could become a naturalised British citizen. There is an example of somebody who started his life as a continental Jew speaking French, whose family originated in Bulgaria, the Ottoman empire and Thessaloniki—then known as Salonika, where my grandfather was born—but who proudly became an Englishman. He never had an accent—he learned English early enough to avoid speaking with any accent, unlike both of my grandparents, one of whom had a French accent and the other a German accent. ...

col 531 ... Trude Silman, who is 95 this year ... escaped from Bratislava to come to the city of Leeds, and she became the first woman to qualify with a biochemistry degree from the University of Leeds. ... Arek Hersh ... was in the Polish ghetto in Łódź and was taken to the concentration camps, and was finally released from Auschwitz when he was 16 years old. ... Iby Knill ... wrote two excellent books but sadly passed away just two years ago. Along with the many holocaust survivors, they contribute to our collective knowledge of Judaism here in the United Kingdom. They were proud British Jews. ...

Peter Bottomley (Conservative): ... Were we to be having a debate on the history of Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs in this country, I think we would have the same kind of attendance. What is different about Jewish history is what was put to me by one of my constituents after 7 October: “Why do they keep picking on us?” There are 16 million Jews in the world, of whom about a quarter of a million are in this country. Their contributions have been magnificent, and not just those who are known. ...

col 532 When I went on almost a pilgrimage to Gallipoli to see the graves and names of the people from my constituency who had died, I kept coming across memorials to Jews

who had served in our armed forces. The same thing applies in every walk of life, whether notable or just noticed if we keep our eyes open.

One of the reasons why I have supported the proposals of the national holocaust memorial commission to have a memorial and a learning centre, and the stipulation by the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation that the majority of the money should be spent on education, is that since that proposal first came out, I have gained by knowing how many of my grandfather's extended family died in the holocaust. We thought it was 11, but that figure went up to 60, and it is now well over 100. That is the kind of education that matters. I hope that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren—if there are some—will learn about our history and how inclusive it is, and how it is chance that allows some people to go on and put down roots, while others do not get that chance because of ideology or the murderous habits of too many people.

I also want my children and grandchildren to know about the way Jews have been treated in this country over the past 800 years or so, which has not been good and has not been easy. I remember every time I go to church that Jesus was not a white Englishman who belonged to the Church of England. We have to remember our shared history and try to adjust the way we work together ...

Our future is together, and the sooner we learn what we can about each other and what we share, the better. ...

Ian Paisley (DUP): The motion that has been so ably put before the House today poses the question of the potential merits of a Jewish history month. ... This is not about merit; this is a necessity. We must have such a thing so that we can promote learning ... as well as understanding and historical knowledge, because it is through an understanding of the historic place that the wonderful contribution many Jewish citizens have made across these islands that we will ensure that the hatred and antisemitic attitudes that have prevailed too often will be done away with. ...

col 533 The Holocaust Educational Trust ... has demonstrated how necessary historical knowledge of the torture and persecution of the holocaust is for the children of today. ...

The President of Israel is Isaac Herzog ... His father, Chaim Herzog, who was the sixth President before him, was born in Cliftonville Avenue in Belfast. His father, Rabbi Herzog, who lived in Dublin, was known, believe it or not, as the Sinn Féin rabbi because he was so in favour of the new Dáil Éireann that had been created, and he was recognised as such.

It hurts my heart today to see the horrible attitude that some people—I just say some people—from a republican background now have towards the Jewish people and towards the state of Israel. So strong was the history of the Jewish tradition within the history of the Irish that some of the founding fathers of the Israeli state actually hailed from Ireland, both north and south, and they have made a wonderful contribution. ...

Let us embrace that remarkable history. Rather than hiding it under a bushel, we must let it shine, so that people can understand that the rich tapestry of the Christian, the Hebrew and the Arabic heritage that pertains on these islands is strong and must be encouraged for all to see, so that we can understand our future.

Andrew Percy (Conservative): ... the history of Jews in Britain is wound up in the history of this country, and at times, sadly, it is a complex history. ... People will remember the 1190 massacre of Jews in the City of York, but York has a thriving Jewish community today. The history of Jews in York is also seen in place names such as Jewbury, where my ancestors lived. In more recent decades, the relationship has been complicated. We see it now in the rise in antisemitism, but in my birth city, Hull, we had the battle of Corporation Field in 1936, when Mosley and his British Union of Fascists turned up to be met by a crowd of 10,000 people who, I am proud to say, were mainly there to see them off, and that is indeed what happened. ...

col 534 Today, the Jewish community in Hull is small, but its contribution to Jewish history is significant, especially in the role the city played in the transmigration of Jews fleeing

eastern Europe at the end of the 19th century ... It is estimated that over 2.2 million emigrants passed through the City of Hull in the century before 1914, and 100,000 through our fellow Humber port of Grimsby. Most were passing through on their way to North America or to other cities, such as Leeds and Manchester, but a small number remained in Hull.

At its height, the Jewish population of Hull accounted for 1% of its people, but they had a huge impact on the life of the city. ... Between 1856 and 1983, Hull had two Jewish mayors, seven Jewish lord mayors, and a Jewish leader of the council, who served effectively from 1945 until 1979. ...

... Alderman Sir Leo Schultz ... [was] Labour leader of Hull Council from 1945 to 1979. He was elected to the council in 1926. Prior to that, he had won a scholarship to Oxford, but was told that he could not attend because of his background, so he took his fight into politics. He had the foresight before the war to build bomb shelters, in opposition to the Government at the time, who in the end relented and paid for the shelters to be built. People who were bombed out of their homes on the second night of bombing in 1941, including my grandma, might not have survived were it not for Sir Leo's foresight. ...

Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat): ... as serious as antisemitism is, I do not think it is the sole reason why we should be thinking about a British Jewish history month.

col/ 535 When I started to think about this debate, I did not realise how limited my appreciation was of the contribution that the Jewish community has made to the rich, diverse culture that we enjoy across the UK. Yes, I was aware of most of the entertainment and industrial figures who have already been mentioned. On the political figures, who could not be aware of Manny Shinwell, our Liberal leader Herbert Samuel and others who have graced this place, such as Malcolm Rifkind? ...

I did not know that my own alma mater, the University of Glasgow, was groundbreaking when, in 1787, Levi Myers graduated without having to take a Christian oath. That attracted an influx of students to Scotland. The majority of Scotland's Jewish community continues to live in and around Glasgow. Many of them are descended from those who came here to escape the Russian pogroms in the 1880s. ...

... the history of Jewish communities can be traced back to Edinburgh in 1691, when the minutes of Edinburgh town council recorded the application of David Brown, a professing Jew, to reside and trade in the city, and 1816 saw the founding of the first formal Jewish community in Edinburgh, of around 20 families. In 1825, a tenement in Richmond Court in Newington was acquired and became a synagogue with 67 seats. By 1900, the community had reached around 500. In 1909, the Edinburgh University Jewish society was founded. It is the oldest in Scotland and possibly in Britain, and it is currently the fastest growing.

Sadly, my more recent interaction with the Jewish community has been as a result of the rising tide of antisemitism. I met Rabbi Rose in a pub near that synagogue in Newington to discuss how I can support our local community. I have done a tour of north London with the CST and heard heartbreaking tales from Jewish schoolchildren of the antisemitism they face on an all too regular basis. ...

To return to my original point, antisemitism should be a problem that we overcome, like Islamophobia and every other form of religious, racial or personal discrimination. It should never be the dominant or only factor when we take into account what our Jewish community has contributed to our history, but to do that fully and properly and to value that contribution, we need to set aside some time—a month, each year—to mark it, celebrate it and record it, to ensure that coming generations know about it. ...

col/ 536 **Michael Ellis (Conservative):** ... Recent events alone exemplify why history is so important. ... One of the things that characterises Jewish communities around the world, as well as in the United Kingdom, is hope. Indeed, the Israeli national anthem is called "Hatikvah"—the hope, and it is not an exuberant or jingoistic melody; in fact, it is a rather melancholy, moving tune that somehow reflects its message of hope rather than jubilation, as many national anthems do. ...

Some weeks ago, I spoke about why there was cause for hope, despite the increase in antisemitism, and I would like to continue on that theme. I say to the Jewish people of the United Kingdom, and indeed any listening, that many civilisations who have persecuted the Jews have risen and then fallen; the Jews continue to thrive. One needs only to look at the Arch of Titus in Rome to see how empires come and go and rise and fall. The arch was built 2,000 years ago by the Romans under Emperor Domitian to celebrate the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem—it depicts the plundering of that temple—but, just a few weeks ago, that arch, celebrating the destruction of the Jews, was lit up in the colours of the Israeli flag by the Government of Italy to mark the pogrom of 7 October. ...

We should ignore the haters in communities around the world who have clearly been responsible for the massive increase in antisemitism. We should ignore the haters on university campuses who are bullying Jewish children. I have heard from those young people who are frightened even to go on campus. Eventually, some of those accounts will become widely known, and they will shock the nation. We should ignore those in the international community, and even in the United Nations organisation, where frankly there are blatant examples of antisemitism and where, just before Christmas, Iran was selected to sit on the Human Rights Council.

We should instead celebrate those who are doing so much; those who are agents of peace and reconciliation whom we do not hear enough about. We should applaud men like the Bedouin—not a Jewish man—Youssef Ziadna, a minibus driver who saved 30 lives from the Nova festival in Israel by responding to a call to pick up a customer from that event. He drove into Hamas's attack and drove out with a minibus full of Jewish people. They are alive because of him. We should applaud the hero Rami, whom I met in Israel a few days ago, who saved over 700 lives by driving to and for, into that war zone, to rescue people. We should applaud people such as the Crown Prince of Bahrain, who said: "What Hamas did on 7 October was a war crime and an atrocity, and it is important to get all the...abductees out of Gaza".

It is not easy for some leaders—Arab leaders especially—to say those truths ... Ali Rashid al-Nuaimi, a top Emirati official, said that the Abraham accords "are our future. It is not an agreement between two Governments, but a platform that we believe should transform the region".

col 537 That was an heroic statement. ...

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... Since its inception, the Belfast Jewish heritage project has attracted hundreds of people on its guided walking tours in Belfast city centre. The tour includes familiar sites in Belfast with a Jewish connection, some of which people born and bred in Belfast have no idea about. ...

... a Jewish history month in Northern Ireland would have no shortage of material and stories, and would have a great deal of support from across the community. I can only imagine the scale of replication in other communities across this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as we become aware of how intrinsically linked the people of the Jewish faith are to the fabric of our British culture. ...

col 538 There is also a need for people to understand the connections between us all. ...

As one person who was on the Jewish heritage walk in Belfast put it, it was amazing to have an hour-long history tour of Belfast that was not about Protestants and Catholics.

Sadly, there is good cause to enhance an appreciation and understanding of Jewish contribution to Northern Ireland, as it is not immune from the surge of antisemitic incidents and attitudes recorded by the Community Security Trust. There has been so much, going back to 2014, including attacks by vandals, desecrating headstones and the blue plaque to Chaim Herzog being removed. ... Disgracefully, the disused Jewish section of the city cemetery has been repeatedly desecrated and vandalised. I would welcome a Jewish history month, because it would increase awareness among the general population of the remarkable place of the Jewish community in our society, challenge antisemitic stereotypes and myths, and inject confidence and pride for the Jewish community itself.

The Jewish people are not some sect to be observed, but a part of us—the best of British. That should be understood and emphasised not simply for a month but on an ongoing basis until these people cease to be ostracised or hated simply because they worship God in a different way from someone else. They are a people used to persecution, but that does not make it right. ...

Nicola Richards (Conservative): ... Earlier this week, I led a Westminster Hall debate on the appalling rise of antisemitism we have seen in the UK since the 7 October attacks. That debate was sadly necessary given the circumstances, but I am glad that today we have the opportunity for a much more positive debate to acknowledge the enormous contribution of the Jewish community here in the UK. ...

I wish to open my remarks by recognising the Jewish community in the west midlands, some of whom I met in the weeks following the awful events in Israel on 7 October. Many in the Jewish community have personal connections to those directly affected. Their strength and bravery in the face of terror has been commendable, and today I reaffirm my commitment to stand with the community in their hour of need.

At Singers Hill synagogue in Birmingham, I met Rabbi Jacobs who told me how the Jewish community stood with the Muslim community in the wake of the attacks on innocent Muslims in the days after 9/11.

col 539 The late Rabbi Tann visited the Imam at Birmingham central mosque at the time to show solidarity, leading to the formation of Birmingham Faith Leaders' Group, which continues to this day. Rabbi Tann's gesture was reciprocated in the wake of last year's attacks, with the Imam visiting Singers Hill synagogue for a Friday night service, alongside other faith leaders, to show support for the local Jewish community. ...

Today, we have five active synagogues in the region, all contributing to the community and promoting understanding, tolerance and harmony between people of different faiths in our area. They open their doors to thousands of children each year to learn more about Judaism and, commendably, they organise donations to charities helping to provide for those in need. ...

It is not just religious leaders who do so much for others. Ruth Jacobs is a perfect example of that, through organisations such as the west midlands Jewish representative council, which she chairs, as well as the Nisa-Nashim group, an interfaith forum for Jewish and Muslim women to bridge the divide and discuss their cultural and religious similarities. ...

The King David School in Birmingham is a beacon of light ... It is a Jewish primary school which welcomes all faiths and has a majority of Muslim students. ...

col 540 Chai Cancer Care is a London-based charity that offers 67 specialised support services to cancer patients around the country ... There are many other Jewish organisations that sit under the umbrella of the JLC that all do incredible work, including Jewish Women's Aid, United Jewish Israel Appeal and the Union of Jewish Students. ...

Charlotte Nichols (Labour): ... all too often, public understanding of the Jewish community and the issues that matter to us will be limited to antisemitism and the UK's relationship with Israel, and knowledge of Jewish history will largely be limited to the holocaust. That is not for a second to diminish the importance of those three topics, but to make the case for the fact that Jewish history, Jewish culture and tradition and the Jewish contribution to Britain constitute a much richer tapestry, and we can all benefit from a much deeper understanding of it.

Within the Jewish community in the UK are represented a mixture of different denominations, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, practices, histories and languages—and, of course, two of my favourite features of that Jewish diversity: the food and the old adage of “two Jews, three opinions”. With all this to teach and share, our community, tiny in size relative to the population of the UK and the globe, cannot be expected to undertake our endeavours to bring greater awareness alone. ...

col 541 In the hope that this will be the kind of debate that we will see much more in the future, I will not go through all the APPGs and committees in which I take part through a

Jewish lens, although that would demonstrate the number of areas in the Jewish contribution to British life—of which there are so many, beyond those that are established or widely understood—that a Jewish history month could explore. ...

col 542 Greg Smith (Conservative): ... I am delighted to say that the Jewish population of Buckinghamshire is growing—it grew by 7% between the 2011 and 2021 censuses. ... Notwithstanding the powerful comments that have been made about trying to ignore the haters ... we have to acknowledge that Jewish communities ... are hurting right now. I was privileged to join the south Buckinghamshire Jewish community at a Hanukkah event at Waddesdon Manor in my constituency in December, led by the wonderful Rabbi Neil Janes. His opening words during the short ceremony really shocked me. He said, “We no longer feel confident to gather as a community.” ...

I put my thoughts about the event on social media, as we in this House have a tendency to do, and I said, not unreasonably, that we must defeat antisemitism. It took 45 seconds for one of the haters—whoever debbie.bennett21 is—to write underneath my Instagram post: “Strange words ‘must be defeated’”. What on earth was going through that individual’s mind? ...

A person taking issue with something I said about the conflict between Israel and Hamas—it is perfectly legitimate for someone to take issue with my view on that—asked on Instagram: “Are you married to a Jew?”

Such outrageous behaviour is happening in our country right now, and it has to be stamped out. ...

... one of the most important reasons why we study history is to understand what happened in the past and to ensure that the mistakes of the past, the horrors of the past and the evil of the past are not able to happen again. Yet we see history repeating itself, which is why we simply must have a Jewish history month to celebrate the contribution of all our Jewish communities and everything they have achieved and will continue to achieve.

As Members of Parliament, we all receive very difficult emails. We all have people come to see us at our surgeries in very difficult circumstances, with horrendous stories to tell. It is very rare that those stories reduce us to tears, but I received an email from a Jewish constituent, whose identity I will protect, openly saying: “I have never felt as scared as I do right now to be in the UK... I’ve considered converting... I’ve gone to ground.”

She has turned off the ability to be found on social media. That should scare us all. It must put a bounce underneath us to ensure that we defeat antisemitism and enable all Jewish communities, all people of the Jewish faith, to live freely, securely and safely, and to feel welcome, here in the United Kingdom, whether they are British or otherwise.

col 543 Robin Millar (Conservative): ... the British Jewish community has made a remarkable contribution to the prosperity of our nation. In the face, sadly, of growing hostility abroad and, shamefully, here at home, it is high time that we as a nation celebrate its part in our national story. So I wish to ... highlight the remarkable contribution made by the British Jewish community in Aberconwy today—in doing that I wish to thank Professor Nathan Abrams of Bangor University and the team at Llandudno museum for their important work in tracing the history of the Jewish residents of north Wales and Aberconwy; and raise and then quickly dismiss an objection that we can anticipate to founding a British Jewish history month. ...

Sadly, Aberconwy is not without its reminders of a darker past. Conwy’s castle and walls were, of course, built by Edward I, who was notable for both his oppression of the Welsh and his expulsion of Jewish subjects in 1290. ...

... in making the case for celebrating and formally recognising such contributions in Aberconwy and across the UK, we can anticipate an objection, albeit one raised in good faith. In an era of increasingly divisive identitarian politics, it may well be asked: will such recognition encourage British people to think of themselves, and one another, in terms of ethnic or religious group identity, and does this not risk compounding, rather than easing, division? ...

col 544 Our British identity is not totalising; it does not demand the erosion of the regional and religious identities that make up our nation. We are privileged in Britain to inherit a nation that evolved long before liberal nationalist revolutions of the 19th century, when nations such as France, Italy and Germany were engaged in assertive state-led nation building. In contrast, Britain emerged slowly, as networks of kin, friendship and trade bound together the destinies of the peoples of our islands. ...

When a community's story has become intertwined with that of the nation, it becomes part of the story of Britain, and such is the story of British Jews. It is significant and it is part of our story that deserves to be celebrated. In a world in which ethnic grievances are increasingly and easily stoked for political capital, here is a story of resilience and success. The British Jewish contribution to the arts, literature, commerce and science of the UK has enriched and elevated our national life, here and in Aberconwy, and it has improved the condition of humanity the world over. ...

Kirsten Oswald (SNP): ... East Renfrewshire is home to people of all faiths and none, including a vibrant and growing Muslim community, Christian congregations of all kinds, significant Sikh and Hindu communities, a lovely Baha'i community and the majority of Jews living in Scotland. We are so much better for the diversity of people who have made their homes in East Renfrewshire. ...

Some people have referenced the timing of the debate in relation to the challenging times we live in. That may be true to some extent, but it is important to look at the issue through a different prism—that of the history of the Jewish community in its own right. ...

The former Chief Rabbi, the late Jonathan Sacks, wrote about the Jewish communities of Scotland combining a strong loyalty to their Jewish faith and way of life with a deep attachment to Scottish culture and identity. That rings true to me and speaks to the long history of the Jewish community in Scotland. We heard about degrees being awarded in the 1700s, and the first synagogues were opened in Edinburgh in 1817 and Glasgow in 1821.

col 545 Terrible events in Russia and then Germany, in particular, led to mass movements of people and communities forming across Scotland. In 1914, the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council was formed, the only Jewish school in Scotland opened in 1962, and the fantastic Scottish Jewish Archives Centre was founded in 1982, to collect, preserve and display Scotland's Jewish heritage. It is worth thinking about that centre as this debate in a physical form, as it is a phenomenally interesting place.

Throughout all that, every day contributions and less every day contributions have been made, year upon year, to Scotland by our Jewish citizens, whether in medicine, law, education or business. That particular thread in the tartan of Scotland is woven deep and clear. ...

East Renfrewshire resident, the late Ernest Levy, a survivor of Bergen-Belsen, Cantor of the then Giffnock and Newlands synagogue for 40 years, was hugely influential in sharing testimony on the holocaust. He wrote a very important book, launched in the Scottish Parliament, and said at that time that he had never felt so Scottish in his life.

The senior Rabbi of Scotland, Rabbi Moshe Rubin, who has consistently welcomed people of all faiths, warmly extended a welcome to our First Minister, Humza Yousaf, recently, when both men came together at a hugely moving synagogue service, which very clearly demonstrated the importance of common humanity and concern for one another.

East Renfrewshire resident, Henry Wuga, will be 100 years old next month. Along with his late wife, he influenced hundreds of young Scottish people with their tireless focus on holocaust education. Brigadier Monty Cowen is a brave veteran who leads the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and women, alongside doing a great deal of community work. Evie Yedd's work to support our local area in many and varied ways is longstanding. She is the hugely influential leader of the local Jewish Brownie and Guide packs. She makes a profound difference to young lives.

The wide-ranging work of Cosgrove Care makes a positive difference to people with

additional needs, and Jewish Care makes great efforts in supporting our community. There is the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities and the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, which work tirelessly to support, to be a voice and to encourage discussion. They work alongside other groups, including Interfaith Glasgow and the Council for Christians and Jews. That cross-community and cross-faith dialogue is vital. ...

col 546 I will finish by speaking about Calderwood Lodge Primary School, which, 60 years on, is at the heart of our community, on a lovely new campus with its partner school, St Clare's Primary. A Jewish-Catholic joint campus is a unique thing, and that shared ethos of understanding is valuable beyond words. That is exactly what we should be speaking about today. At this school, children of all faiths and none work and play together, learning about respect and friendship, and about enjoying each other's traditions. ...

Liz Twist (Labour): ... On Tuesday, in Westminster Hall, we heard from many Members about shocking incidents of antisemitism on our streets, in schools and on university campuses. That discussion was vital following the rise in antisemitism that we have seen since the abhorrent attacks carried out by Hamas on 7 October.

Today's discussion is similarly vital. Now more than ever, it is essential that we recognise and celebrate the rich contribution of the Jewish community across the whole of British civil society—the whole of British life. ... I wish to thank the Community Security Trust, which works relentlessly alongside the police to gather records of these incidents and to tackle hateful antisemitism. Over the past 40 years, the CST has developed a widely recognised and commended model for combating hate crime, and its work is essential. ... As we have heard, historical records show that there were Jewish people in England at the time of the Norman conquest, but that they were victims of appalling persecution. In 1190, the Jewish community of York were massacred at the site of Clifford's Tower. One hundred years later, Jewish people were expelled on the orders of Edward I—not to return until the time of Oliver Cromwell.

col 547 I talk about these shameful episodes, because it is important that we, in this country, recognise our own history of discrimination, prejudice and violence. It is in the face of this adversity that Jewish communities in Britain have contributed so much to our vibrant and multicultural society, across every region and in every sector. In my local authority of Gateshead, there is a large Charedi community, with one of the largest yeshivas outside of Israel. It is long established in the heart of the town. ...

I want to say a bit about an organisation called Jami, which provides mental health support for the Jewish community in the UK. ... Jami's Head Room café in Golders Green offers open access to mental health support to anyone who needs it. ... I was really impressed by Jami's commitment not only to its own community, but to working in partnership with other communities, organisations and local authorities. ...

More than ever, it is vital to educate people across our communities about the nature of antisemitism and hate crime, and to combat it. Of course that must include a continued commitment to education about the holocaust. Organisations such as the Holocaust Education Trust have done much-needed work to embed learning on the holocaust within our education system and within broader society. ...

Amid the threats of holocaust denial and distortion, it is essential that such work continues. That is why we are proud to support the proposals for a permanent holocaust memorial and learning centre. It would be a fitting tribute to the 6 million Jewish people who were brutally murdered during the holocaust, and a much-needed bulwark against misinformation and conspiracy. ...

col 548 **The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lee Rowley):** ... Britain would not be the country it is today without the enormous contribution made by the Jewish community, and indeed by people of all faiths and ethnicities. It is crucial that we celebrate that contribution. That is why the Government are very supportive of having a Jewish history month ...

The creation of a designated Jewish history month would give us an opportunity as a nation

to celebrate this history and the vibrancy of Jewish culture, traditions, values and the importance of the Jewish community to the fabric of our society today. That could not be more important given the events of the past few weeks. ...

col 549 This is about celebrating Jewish history and culture, as well as ... an opportunity to foster greater community unity and cohesion through inter-faith dialogue and understanding at a time of growing division. ... If this is something that the British Jewish community would encourage the Government to support, we would welcome their thoughts on this motion ...

Having looked at some of the history from Derbyshire, it was heartening to hear that, just 20 years ago, when a small group of people from Derby at the other side of the county found in the archives that the citizens of Derby had paid an amount of money in the 12th century to stop British Jews from living there, they compensated the British Jewish community by the equivalent amount in 2002 so that the edict could be removed. ...

col 550 This Government are wholly committed to honouring, celebrating and safeguarding the security of our Jewish communities. That is a commitment that I know everybody shares, wherever they sit in this place, a commitment that we must work together to uphold and a commitment that is demonstrated by our support for the debate today. ...

col 551 **Nickie Aiken:** ... It is absolutely right that we continue to educate ourselves and future generations on antisemitism and the holocaust, and we will be marking the holocaust later this month, but it is equally important—or perhaps more important—that we highlight and celebrate the achievements and contributions of the Jewish community. The Jewish story in Britain is a positive and a negative one. It is a history of human suffering, of human perseverance and of human strength. Now more than ever, it is important that British Jews know that their incredible contribution to this country is valued and that the history of antisemitism is understood. ...

Mr Deputy Speaker (Nigel Evans): I have been an MP for 31 years, and it was not until one of my researchers asked for time off because there was a Jewish holiday, and then the other one asked for time off for the Jewish holiday, and then the third one came to ask, that I appreciated that all my members of staff were Jewish. I am incredibly grateful for the contribution that they have made to my office personally. ...

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, That this House calls for the creation of a British Jewish History Month.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-11/debates/E6CBFF81-3081-4AEB-B4CD-BB69EDBD0E03/ProposedBritishJewishHistoryMonth>

The earlier debate, referred to above by Nicola Richards and Liz Twist, can be read at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-09/debates/66C0DDE8-B3FD-43F9-AB0F-D841263150F4/AntisemiticOffences>

House of Commons Oral Answers

BBC Current Affairs Coverage: Impartiality

Rob Butler (Conservative) [900897] Whether she has had recent discussions with the BBC Board on the impartiality of the BBC's current affairs coverage.

The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries (Julia Lopez): The BBC has a duty to deliver its impartial and accurate news and current affairs coverage under its royal charter. It is editorially independent, which means that editorial policies are a matter for the BBC, but both the Secretary of State and I regularly meet the BBC's leadership team. We have discussed the important issue of impartiality on multiple occasions. It is also a key focus of the Government's mid-term review of the BBC's governance and regulation.

Rob Butler: As a former BBC journalist myself, I completely believe in its editorial independence from the Government, but, just as strongly, I consider it essential that the BBC, across all its programming and from all presenters, should be absolutely and unequivocally impartial. Given the concerns that we have heard about the current coverage of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the reporting of the resignation of the president of Harvard and examples of where Ofcom has found significant editorial failings, does my hon. Friend agree that the BBC needs to work consistently, constantly and visibly to enforce that requirement on impartiality?

Julia Lopez: ... He is absolutely right: trust is the BBC's currency. That is especially important in relation to its international coverage, particularly during conflicts, so it must use its words with care. With regard to the events in Israel and Gaza, the Government have been clear that the BBC should reflect on its coverage and learn lessons for the future, but, of course, we again emphasise impartiality and the highest editorial standards. That is a strategic priority of the BBC's leadership, and we are talking to them about this in relation to the mid-term review and licensing renewal. ...

John Nicolson (SNP): As an ex-BBC reporter, I am in awe of my former colleagues' bravery and impartiality when they cover world affairs. We have all followed with horror the Israeli bombardment of Gaza. Reporters Without Borders says that it appears that Israel is now directly targeting journalists. The Al-Jazeera bureau chief has had three children killed, including his journalist son—what unimaginable pain. Another Palestinian journalist, Ayat Khaddoura, said: "When will this war end? Who will tell the world what we went through and what we saw?"

I bring her question to the House as she is no longer alive to do so. Can the Minister share with journalists across the world how the Government's refusal to call for a ceasefire is advancing the cause of journalistic freedom or peace in the region, and can she tell us who the Government's position has persuaded apart from those on the Labour Front Bench who remain limpet close to the Tory position on Gaza, as on so many other issues?

Mr Speaker: That question was a long way from the impartiality of the BBC. We must ensure that we stick to the subject of the question. ...

Julia Lopez: I simply wish to pay tribute to every journalist who puts their life on the line to bring truth to the public's attention. They play an incredibly important role. We are proud of what the BBC journalists do in particular. They have also done some awesome things in Ukraine. As a Government, we just want to say that we support their work and pay tribute to them.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-11/debates/D7BA97C2-52F8-4B50-8D6C-DCE996EEB6C1/BBCCurrentAffairsCoverageImpartiality>

House of Commons Written Answer

Hate Crime: Sikhs

Nadia Whittome (Labour) [7449] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help provide reassurances to Sikhs on their (a) safety and (b) security in the context of recent steps taken by the Indian Government.

Chris Philp: Hatred towards Sikhs is completely abhorrent and has no place in our society. No one should ever be a victim of hatred because of their race or religion and the Government continues to work with police and community partners to monitor and combat it.

More broadly, we continue to look at tackling all forms of religious hatred. The department is currently seeking the views and perspectives of domestic and international experts in this field to explore how religious hatred is experienced by British communities today. This work will include anti-Sikh hatred.

In 2023/24, the Home Office is providing up to £50.9 million to protect faith communities. This includes £18 million through the Jewish Community Protective Security Grant, £29.4 million through the new Protective Security for Mosques scheme and a scheme for Muslim faith schools, and £3.5 million for the places of worship of other (non-Muslim and non-Jewish) faiths.

The Places of Worship Protective Security Funding (PoW) Scheme provides physical protective security measures, such as CCTV, intruder alarms and secure perimeter fencing to places of worship and associated faith community centres of all other (non-Muslim and non-Jewish) faiths that are particularly vulnerable to religiously or racially motivated hate crime in England and Wales.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7449>

Information about the Jewish Community Protective Security Grant, referred to above, can be read at

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

and

<https://cst.org.uk/security/government-grant>

Information about the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme, scheme for Muslim faith schools, and Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/places-of-worship-security-funding-scheme>

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

CPS authorises charge against man following protest rally in central London

Nick Price, head of the CPS Special Crime and Counter Terrorism Division, said: “Following a review of evidence provided by the Metropolitan Police, we have authorised a charge against a man after a demonstration in central London in November 2023.

“Khaled Hajsaaad, 24, been charged with wearing an item of clothing, namely a green headband displaying the Islamic Shehada, in such a way or in such circumstances as to arouse reasonable suspicion that he is a supporter of a proscribed organisation, namely Hamas, on 25 November 2023.

“He will appear at Westminster Magistrates’ Court on 17 January. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/cps-authorises-charge-against-man-following-protest-rally-central-london>

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Holocaust

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

col 446 **Leader of the House (Penny Mordaunt):** ... This week, I was delighted to welcome holocaust survivor Mala Tribich to the Commons, where she viewed the exhibition in Portcullis House. I encourage all Members to see it. ...

col 448 **Peter Bottomley (Conservative):** My right hon. Friend rightly mentioned the holocaust exhibition, and you, Mr Speaker, will lead the holocaust service in a few days’

time. Recently, I met holocaust survivor Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who said that the proposed memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens was too small for its purpose and too large for the park.

The hybrid Committee will meet on Tuesday and Wednesday next week. Will my right hon. Friend consider talking to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to see whether they could put up scaffolding on a temporary basis to show the amount of space taken by the box of the so-called learning centre, and perhaps some plywood boards to illustrate the 23 fins that are supposed to be there? Then, we could go round the outside of the park to see whether it is visible, and see from inside how much damage it does to that well-loved park.

Penny Mordaunt: I know that my hon. Friend continues to press on this particular project. He will know that I am limited in what I can do to assist him, but I will write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to make sure that he has heard, again, what my hon. Friend has said. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-11/debates/AC204DE3-E888-458C-9E67-DC3DE9393F97/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-C7F654B5-704C-4BB3-998A-5D27ABF15DC1>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Bob Blackman (Conservative) [269] Holocaust Memorial Day – That this House notes that on 27 January 2024 the UK will observe Holocaust Memorial Day on the anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration and death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau; further notes that the UK will come together to remember the 6 million Jewish men, women and children who were murdered and the millions of other victims of Nazi persecution; pays tribute to the Holocaust survivors, including many who share their testimony day in, day out, to ensure the horrors of the past are never forgotten; thanks the Holocaust Educational Trust for its work to educate every person from every background in the UK about the Holocaust and its contemporary relevance; pays tribute to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for organising the national Holocaust Memorial Day event; and urges all Right hon. and hon. Members to observe this day and to pledge to speak out against antisemitism, which in recent months has risen exponentially and which needs to be tackled head on.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61753>

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Israel

See also the Commons debate on a “Proposed British Jewish History Month”, Commons oral answers “BBC Current Affairs Coverage: Impartiality”, and the CPS press release that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Anglican Hospital in Gaza

Desmond Swayne (Conservative) [900778] What support the Church is providing to the Anglican Hospital in Gaza.

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): The House may not be aware that the Anglican Church is one of the largest providers of healthcare and education globally. The al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza is an example of this. Before Christmas, the hospital was severely damaged again and a tank demolished its

front wall. Most of the hospital staff were taken away by the Israeli Defence Force and the Church of England has asked the Government here to inquire about their wellbeing and whereabouts and to request that they be released.

Desmond Swayne: Intimidation by hard-line settlers has prompted the Patriarch to say that clergy are fighting for their lives, and that the Armenian quarter faces a violent demise. Is a Christian presence in Jerusalem still viable?

Andrew Selous: ... He is right: a century ago, a quarter of Jerusalem was Christian; now, just 1% of the population is, and in the Armenian quarter of the old city, the Christian presence has come under intensified threat from intimidation and aggressive property acquisition by settlers. The Church of England is very concerned that the rule of law should prevail in Israel and the status quo be maintained. It is unconscionable that Christians should be driven from the holy land.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-11/debates/E3C4B352-0258-4C76-AD63-531F8FE094C4/AnglicanHospitalInGaza>

Business of the House

col 446 **Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt):** ... I am sure that I speak for the whole House in saying that our thoughts remain with the hostages still kept captive in Gaza—next week sees us pass the 100th day since they were taken—just as our thoughts remain with all the innocent people caught up in those events. ...

col 456 **Gareth Thomas (Labour Co-op):** A ceasefire in Gaza is desperately needed—one that begins with humanitarian pauses and becomes sustained, so that the remaining hostages can be got out and, crucially, aid can be got in. Given that UN agencies are critical to getting aid into Gaza but have secured only half the \$1.2 billion needed to implement their response plan and support the immediate humanitarian needs in Gaza and the west bank, can we have a debate in Government time on what more Britain can do to galvanise international efforts behind the UN's flash appeal to support the Palestinians?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that matter and, in doing so, for providing an advert for that unmet need. He will know that, as well as stepping forward and providing aid to support people both in this particular humanitarian crisis and prior to October, the UK has played a considerable role in not just providing funding but getting others to pledge and deliver finance. I shall make sure that the Foreign Secretary has heard his concerns in that area. I will also write to the international development Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), asking him to contact the hon. Gentleman's office to update him on what more is being done. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-11/debates/AC204DE3-E888-458C-9E67-DC3DE9393F97/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-C7F654B5-704C-4BB3-998A-5D27ABF15DC1>

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Military Aid

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [7392] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when offensive military equipment was last provided to Israel.

James Cartlidge: Information is not held by the Ministry of Defence on the provision of offensive military equipment to Israel. Official statistics on licences granted to Industry for exports to Israel are held by the Department of Business and Trade.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7392>

Israel: Arms Trade

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [7393] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of Israel's compliance with arms licence criteria.

James Cartlidge: All applications for export licences are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria.

We continue to monitor closely the situation in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, and if extant licences are found to be no longer consistent with the Criteria, including where there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law which governs armed conflict, then we are able to revoke, suspend or amend these licences.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7393>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-12-08/hcws449>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Arms Trade: Armed Conflict

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [7725] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps she is taking to ensure (a) transparency and (b) accountability of arms sales to countries involved in conflicts.

Arms Trade: Export Controls

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [7734] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent assessment she has made of the (a) adequacy and (b) transparency of the arms export control regime.

Nusrat Ghani: HM Government takes its export control responsibilities very seriously and we operate one of the most robust and transparent export control regimes in the world.

We rigorously assess every application on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria (the Criteria). The Criteria provide a thorough risk assessment framework and we will not issue an export licence to any destination where to do so would be inconsistent with the Criteria.

We can and do respond quickly and flexibly to changing international circumstances. All licences are kept under careful and continual review as standard. Acting upon advice from other Government departments, in particular the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office regarding the situation in country and the risks this poses with respect to the UK's export control responsibilities. Secretary of State for Business and Trade is able to amend, suspend or revoke extant licences and refuse new licence applications as circumstances require.

We publish comprehensive Official Statistics every quarter about the decisions we make on licence applications including those issued, refused or revoked. This includes data on outcome, end user destination(s), value and licence (product type). This is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-export-controls-licensing-data>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7725>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7734>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-12-08/hcws449>

Gaza: British Nationals Abroad

Patrick Grady (SNP) [7598] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will issue guidance for individuals considering travelling to (a) Israel and (b) Palestine with the intention of fighting in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK recognises the right of British nationals with more than one nationality to serve in the armed forces of their additional nationalities. The Israel Defence Force is a recognised armed force and British nationals can volunteer for service with them. FCDO Travel Advice provides British nationals with information on the risks of travelling or living abroad, including in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories This guidance can be found on Gov.uk. Anyone who travels to conflict zones to engage in unlawful activity should expect to be investigated upon their return to the UK. Decisions on prosecutions are taken independently by the police and Crown Prosecution Service on a case-by-case basis.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7598>

The guidance referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

and

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

Israel: Hamas

Jonathan Gullis (Conservative) [7701] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of comments by Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage General Ezzatollah Zarghami that he (a) supplied rockets for use against Israel and (b) provided training to Hamas in their underground tunnels.

Andrew Mitchell: Iran poses an unacceptable threat to Israel. We have long condemned Iran's destabilising activity throughout the region, including its political, financial, and military support to several militant and proscribed groups, including Hamas, Hizballah and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Such activity compromises the region's security, its ability to prosper and further escalates tensions. The Foreign Secretary raised Iran's ongoing support to its destabilising proxies and partners with the Iranian Foreign Minister on 31 December. The UK remains clear that Iran must use its influence with groups in the region to prevent escalation, and that Iran bears responsibility for the actions of groups they have supported over many years. We continue to work closely with our partners to hold Iran to account, and we currently have over 400 sanctions in place against the Iranian regime. The UK's new sanctions regime came into force on 14 December and is designed to target Iran and its proxies' hostile activity against the interests of the UK and our partners. Israel has endured the worst terrorist attack in its history at the hands of Hamas. The UK Government will continue to stand with Israel as it faces pressing challenges to its security. We have deployed UK military assets to the region to carry out surveillance and act as a deterrent. On 14 November, the Foreign Secretary also announced targeted sanctions, coordinated with the US, against Hamas leadership (four Hamas leaders and two financiers) to disrupt Hamas operations in Gaza and wherever their leaders base themselves.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7701>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-us-hit-hamas-leadership-with-targeted-sanctions>

Israel: Gaza

Andy McDonald (Independent) [8439] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on Israel's obligations under the Genocide Convention including the duties in relation to incitement in the context of the war in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: UK ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Foreign

Secretary, maintain a regular dialogue with Israeli counterparts on a range of issues relating to the conflict including adherence to International Humanitarian Law. The Government continues to press Israel on the need to ensure its campaign is targeted against Hamas fighters and military objectives and its actions are in-line with IHL. The Government has also made clear that the Israeli Government must investigate war crimes allegedly committed by their nationals or armed forces.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-08/8439>

The Genocide Convention, referred to above, can be read at

https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf

Hamas: Hostage Taking

Apsana Begum (Labour) [7684] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what information his Department holds on the number of Israeli hostages that (a) were taken on 7 October 2023, (b) have died, (c) have been released and (d) remain in captivity.

Andrew Mitchell: Over 240 hostages were taken on 7 October 2023. Israel estimates that there are still 132 hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza, including civilians and military personnel (this includes individuals who are believed deceased but death has not been confirmed). We understand the number of recorded deceased to be at 15. During the humanitarian pause, it is reported that Hamas freed 108 hostages, including 80 Israelis/ dual nationals. Urgent work is continuing at all levels with regional leaders and others to ensure all remaining hostages are safely freed. We are not going to give a running commentary on hostage negotiations, which are highly sensitive and ongoing, but we are involved in intensive diplomatic efforts to secure the release of hostages and working with Israel, the US and others.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7684>

Israel: Hamas

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [7720] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has made an estimate of the number of individuals currently held hostage by (a) Israel and (b) Hamas.

Andrew Mitchell: Israel estimates that there are still 132 hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza, including civilians and military personnel (this includes individuals who are believed deceased but death has not been confirmed). Urgent work is continuing at all levels with regional leaders and others to ensure all the remaining hostages are safely freed. We are not going to give a running commentary on hostage negotiations, which are highly sensitive and ongoing, but we are involved in intensive diplomatic efforts to secure the release of hostages and working with Israel, the US and others.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7720>

Israel: Hamas

Jonathan Gullis (Conservative) [7702] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on reports that the Israeli Defense Forces (a) arrested Hamas terrorists responsible for the killings on 7 October 2023, (b) destroyed Hamas infrastructure and (c) recovered weapons in Jabalya.

Andrew Mitchell: Both the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have been in close contact with their Israeli counterparts since the outbreak of the conflict and routinely discuss the progress of Israel's actions in Gaza in their engagements. They have made clear their strong support to Israel to restore its security and

remove the threat of Hamas, while reiterating that its military operations must be conducted in accordance with International Humanitarian Law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7702>

Hamas: Audio Equipment

Bob Blackman (Conservative) [7549] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of media reports of Hamas's use of (a) children's toys and (b) speakers broadcasting crying sounds in the conflict in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: We are aware of media reports from Israel of a range of tactics used by Hamas during the conflict in Gaza, including the use of psychological warfare, but cannot comment on specific reports. The UK has proscribed Hamas as a terrorist organisation in part since 2001 and in whole since 2021. We are clear that Hamas commits terrorist acts. As the Foreign Secretary has set out, Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas and to eliminate the threat posed. Leaving Hamas in power in Gaza would be a permanent roadblock on the path to a two-state solution. On 13 December 2023, the Government announced new sanctions on the leaders and financiers of Hamas.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7549>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-us-target-hamas-with-new-sanctions-to-isolate-terror-group>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Israel: Hamas

Bob Blackman (Conservative) [7550] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of Israeli Defence Force reports of Hamas using schools as bases.

Gaza: Bombings

Apsana Begum (Labour) [7681] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has made a recent estimate of the number of (a) schools, (b) hospitals and (c) refugee camps in Gaza that have been struck by bombs since 8 October 2023.

Andrew Mitchell: Hamas is putting Palestinian civilians at grave risk by embedding themselves in the civilian population and civilian infrastructure. The UK is aware of reports of Hamas using schools and other infrastructure, such as healthcare facilities, as bases and command nodes.

This does not absolve parties from their responsibility to ensure that their actions are compliant with international humanitarian law, and minimise harm to civilians. The UK is particularly clear that civilian buildings must not be targeted and extra care must be taken in relation to hospitals and other locations such as places of worship.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7550>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7681>

Israel: Palestinians

Andy Slaughter (Labour) [7297] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on allegations that Israeli forces delayed a UN convoy that was evacuating patients from Al Ahli hospital on 9 December 2023.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK is clear that the wounded and critically ill in Gaza should

be able to access the urgent medical care they need, that the safety of humanitarian personnel and healthcare workers in Gaza is critical to enable aid to reach those who need it most. We also want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary continue to make this clear in engagements with their Israeli counterparts. The UK is focussed on alleviating the desperate humanitarian situation and the UK played a leading role in securing the passage of Security Council Resolution 2720, which underlined the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7297>

UNSC Resolution 2720, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

Gaza: Israel

Andy Slaughter (Labour) [7298] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on allegations that Israeli forces detained six staff working with the Ministry of Health and Palestine Red Crescent Society in Gaza on 22 November 2023.

Andrew Mitchell: It is the longstanding policy of successive UK Governments that we do not comment on individual cases; however, we are concerned over reports about Israeli detention practices. The Government is clear that administrative detention 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. This has been repeatedly raised by both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary with Prime Minister Netanyahu. The safety of humanitarian personnel and healthcare workers in Gaza is critical to enable aid to reach those who need it most. The FCDO is actively engaging with international partners and those operating on the ground to do all we can to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7298>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

John Healey (Labour) [8304] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much aid for Gaza has been delivered by the Armed Forces.

James Heapey: There have been four RAF flights to date in support of the FCDO-led humanitarian aid effort. The FCDO is coordinating the UK humanitarian response to ensure lifesaving assistance can reach the people who need it.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-08/8304>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

John Healey (Labour) [8305] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the next RAF aid flight for Gaza will take place.

James Heapey: The FCDO is coordinating the UK humanitarian response to ensure lifesaving assistance can reach the people who need it. The RAF have not yet been asked for further support, but remain ready to support as required.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-08/8305>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

John Healey (Labour) [8306] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the next shipment of aid for Gaza by the Royal Navy will take place.

James Heapey: On 31 December 2023, RFA Lyme Bay delivered 87 tonnes of aid into Egypt. The FCDO is coordinating the UK humanitarian response to ensure

lifesaving assistance can reach the people who need it. The Royal Navy have not yet been asked for further support, but we remain ready to support as required.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-08/8306>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Ian Byrne (Labour) [7443] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will take diplomatic steps to help secure a humanitarian corridor in Gaza to enable the delivery of essential supplies to citizens.

Andrew Mitchell: Getting significantly more aid into Gaza is a clear priority. The Foreign Secretary has appointed a senior official, Mark Bryson-Richardson, as his Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to help drive forward this vital work.

The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance and has already delivered 74 tonnes of aid to Gaza. Earlier this month, a further 82 tonnes of life saving UK aid arrived in Egypt onboard RFA Lyme Bay. UK funding supports the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and other trusted partners to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza. We continue to urge Israel to increase the flow of aid into Gaza and continue to reiterate the urgent need for more humanitarian pauses. We are exploring all methods of delivering humanitarian assistance to Gaza to expand both the capacity and volume of aid arriving in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7443>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Caroline Lucas (Green) [7540] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answers of 24 November 2023 and 11 December 2023 to Questions 2123 and 4902 on Gaza: Humanitarian Aid, for what reasons the daily average of 500 truckloads of humanitarian supplies is not being reached; and what progress he has made in finding other routes for aid to get into Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: Getting significantly more aid into Gaza is a priority. Constraints to the number of trucks entering on a daily basis, include enhanced screening requirements, limited points of entry and insufficient functioning trucks and fuel within Gaza to handle the volume of assistance needed. The Foreign Secretary has recently appointed a Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and who will actively engage with international partners and those operating on the ground to help unblock bottlenecks to delivery.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7540>

The answers referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-11-15/2123>
and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-04/4902>

Israel: Palestinians

Clive Betts (Labour) [7254] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of trends in the number of Palestinians arrested by Israeli security forces in the occupied West Bank.

Andrew Mitchell: We are aware of reports covering Israeli security force actions in the West Bank, including the arrests of Palestinians. As both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have emphasised to Prime Minister Netanyahu, it is critical that Israel acts to reduce tensions in the West Bank to stop the conflict spreading.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7254>

Israel: Palestinians

Clive Betts (Labour) [7255] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the findings set out in the press notice by Amnesty International entitled Israel/OPT: Horrifying cases of torture and degrading treatment of Palestinian detainees amid spike in arbitrary arrests, published on 8 November 2023.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government is aware of reports covering treatment of Palestinian detainees in Israeli military detention. We have made clear our concerns over Israeli detention practices, particularly over the reported use of painful restraints and also the high number of Palestinian children who are not informed of their legal rights, in contravention of Israel's own regulations. We are also concerned about reports covering 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 Government continues to stress that all actions must be in line with International Humanitarian Law in all engagements with Israeli counterparts.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7255>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/israel-opt-horrifying-cases-of-torture-and-degrading-treatment-of-palestinian-detainees-amid-spike-in-arbitrary-arrests/>

Red Sea: Shipping

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [7514] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to support maritime security in the Red Sea.

James Heapey: As stated by the Secretary of State for Defence in his Written Ministerial Statement of 19 December; the MOD has bolstered its contribution to maritime security in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. HMS DIAMOND is in the region in support of Op PROSPERITY GUARDIAN, a US led international operation established to protect freedom of navigation throughout the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

On 16 December HMS DIAMOND shot down an unmanned aerial vehicle in the Red Sea, the first surface-to-air engagement by a Royal Navy vessel since 1991.

On 3 January the UK and 11 other countries issued a statement condemning the unjustified attacks on maritime shipping through the Red Sea.

On 10 January 2023, the UK and US successfully repelled the largest and most complex attack from the Iranian-backed Houthis in the Red Sea to date. HMS DIAMOND and US warships destroyed multiple attack drones deployed by the Houthis with HMS DIAMOND using Sea Viper missiles and guns.

The UK and allies remain committed to the international rules-based order and are determined to hold malign actors accountable for unlawful seizures and attacks.

The UK has condemned the attacks and is willing to take the action needed to protect innocent lives and freedom of navigation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7514>

The Ministerial Statement referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-12-19/hcws163>

The Joint Statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-condemning-houthi-attacks-against-commercial-shipping-in-the-red-sea-3-january-2024>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru) [271] Proceedings instituted by South Africa against the State of Israel at the International Court of Justice – That this House recognises the continuing violence in Gaza which has resulted in over 23,000 deaths; welcomes South Africa's request for provisional measures by the International Court of Justice to prevent acts of genocide; urges the Government to carefully consider the application as it upholds its duty to prevent genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention and actively avoid complicity; continues to support those in the UK calling for an immediate ceasefire, the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners and an end to the siege; and calls upon Israel to observe any resulting binding provisional measures aimed at protecting the human rights of Palestinians, including the cessation of fire.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61755>

The Genocide Convention, referred to above, can be read at

https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf

Downing Street

PM call with President al-Sisi of Egypt

... The Prime Minister thanked President Sisi for his continued support on the humanitarian and diplomatic effort in Gaza, including on joint work to secure the release of British hostages and those with links to the UK.

They agreed on the importance of significantly scaling up the aid reaching Palestinians in Gaza to prevent a worsening humanitarian crisis. The Prime Minister said the UK was urging Israel to open more land crossings and to allow in far greater quantities of aid, up to 500 trucks a day.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-call-with-president-al-sisi-of-egypt-11-january-2024>

PM statement on strikes against Houthi military targets

The Royal Air Force has carried out targeted strikes against military facilities used by Houthi rebels in Yemen. ...

Despite the repeated warnings from the international community, the Houthis have continued to carry out attacks in the Red Sea, including against UK and US warships just this week.

This cannot stand. The United Kingdom will always stand up for freedom of navigation and the free flow of trade. We have therefore taken limited, necessary and proportionate action in self-defence, alongside the United States with non-operational support from the Netherlands, Canada and Bahrain against targets tied to these attacks, to degrade Houthi military capabilities and protect global shipping. ...

To read the full statement see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-statement-on-strikes-against-houthi-military-targets-12-january-2024>

Joint statement on strikes against Houthi military targets: Joint Statement from the governments of Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, United Kingdom, and the United States.

... In response to continued illegal, dangerous, and destabilising Houthi attacks against vessels, including commercial shipping, transiting the Red Sea, the armed forces of the United States and United Kingdom, with support from the Netherlands, Canada, Bahrain, and Australia, conducted joint strikes in accordance with the inherent right of individual and collective self-defence, consistent with the UN Charter, against a number of targets in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. These precision strikes were intended to disrupt and degrade the capabilities the Houthis use to threaten global trade and the lives of international mariners in one of the world's most critical waterways.

The Houthis' more than two dozen attacks on commercial vessels since mid-November constitute an international challenge. Today's action demonstrated a shared commitment to freedom of navigation, international commerce, and defending the lives of mariners from illegal and unjustifiable attacks.

Our aim remains to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea, but let our message be clear: we will not hesitate to defend lives and ensure the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways in the face of continued threats.

To read the full statement see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-strikes-against-houthi-military-targets-12-january-2023>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Gazans should not be subject to forcible displacement or relocation from Gaza: UK statement at the UN Security Council

... Firstly, the UK firmly rejects any proposal that Palestinians should be resettled outside Gaza, including proposals from members of the Israeli government. ... Gazans should not be subject to forcible displacement or relocation from Gaza.

Second, the UK is alarmed by record levels of extremist settler violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and its devastating impact. According to OCHA, since 7 October at least 198 Palestinian households, including 586 children, have been displaced following an increase in extremist settler violence and access restrictions. We call on the Government of Israel not only condemn settler violence but also to take direct action against those responsible for it, and hold them accountable, and ensure that Palestinian civilians are protected.

We also continue to call on Israel to cease immediately all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem and its Lower Aqueduct, and to respect in their absolute entirety all legal obligations. We reiterate our longstanding position that settlements are illegal under international law ...

Third, the UK is intensely focused on ensuring more aid gets into Gaza. The current levels are woefully inadequate for the deepening humanitarian crisis. We are deeply concerned that the World Food Programme are reporting that nine out of ten families are going with less than one meal a day.

We want to see a ceasefire, but this must be a sustainable ceasefire. One that will last. A sustainable ceasefire means one in which Hamas no longer poses a threat to Israel's security, aid is delivered without hindrance, and Palestinians can return to the areas of Gaza from which they have been displaced.

Ahead of a permanent ceasefire, we want to see immediate and sustained humanitarian pauses. This will allow for hostages to be released and more aid to enter Gaza. ...

In conclusion Mr President, we call again for the release of hostages taken on 7 October, for measures to allow humanitarian aid in to meet the desperate humanitarian need in

Gaza, for a sustainable ceasefire with a political horizon towards a two-state solution. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/gazans-should-not-be-subject-to-forcible-displacement-or-relocation-from-gaza-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

Israel must act now to let aid through and save lives in Gaza. Britain has a plan to help that happen: article by the Foreign Secretary originally published in The Guardian and the Israeli newspaper Haaretz

It was heartbreaking to read the latest independent assessment of hunger in Gaza. The situation is desperate – and projected to get worse. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 9 out of every 10 Palestinians in northern Gaza may be eating less than 1 meal a day.

With families displaced and sanitation close to non-existent, disease and illness will spread. Almost 40% of Gaza's population is aged under 15. Death and despair haunt these children's lives. ...

Some say we must have an immediate ceasefire. I do not want to see this conflict go on a moment longer than necessary. But this means achieving a sustainable ceasefire, one that will last and prevent another generation of children living under the constant threat of war. That means no more Hamas, and its rocket attacks and commitment to terror.

Given that, I have argued for further humanitarian pauses, to get more hostages out of and more aid in to Gaza.

But what if neither of these things happens soon? How do we avoid hunger turning into famine? How can we alleviate suffering while supporting Israel's right to self-defence?

We need more aid – and fast. In recent days, the [Royal Navy made its first maritime shipment of aid into Egypt](#), sending in more than 80 tonnes of blankets and life-saving medical supplies. And France and Jordan have dropped some aid by air into Gaza. ...

Last week, about 131 trucks were entering Gaza each day via the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings. The figure is creeping towards 200 daily. But even this is nowhere near enough – the number should be close to 500.

We recognise Israel's own pain and anger after the horrors of 7 October, and with hostages still held in appalling conditions. Two British citizens are among them. Of course, Hamas shows no regard for the lives of civilians, Israeli or Palestinian. ...

Yet it will do nothing for those hostages or Israel's war aims if the situation turns into an even greater catastrophe. ...

[As I saw in al-Arish in Egypt](#), too much aid is presently piled up, unable to enter Gaza. I have appointed a representative for humanitarian affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Based on their intensive work, we have identified the bottlenecks and how to unblock them.

Take crossing points. With extended opening hours and capacity at the Nitzana screening facility and Kerem Shalom checkpoint, much more aid could enter Gaza. Opening Kerem Shalom in December helped – opening it 7 days a week would help even more.

Opening more routes for aid to come in and be loaded on to trucks would also be transformative. Ashdod port in Israel is much closer to Gaza than Port Said in Egypt. The facilities for mass delivery are there now, ready to be used.

The new land corridor from Jordan into Gaza – run by WFP, with British backing – has made a first delivery of 750 tonnes of food aid. Both these options could deliver enormous quantities of aid, especially if the Erez crossing at the north end of Gaza was open. ...

More rational and transparent explanations of what is restricted by Israel, and why, will allow governments, aid organisations and the private sector to scale up aid considerably.

Israel could also restore water supply lines, reconnect electricity supplies and let in sufficient fuel to power critical infrastructure such as bakeries.

Finally – and perhaps most importantly of all – we need to help the United Nations, whose brave staff are trying to manage distribution in desperate circumstances inside the Gaza Strip. It is no good getting aid in if it cannot be safely and effectively distributed. ...

The time to act is now.

To read the full article see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/israel-must-act-now-to-let-aid-through-and-save-lives-in-gaza-britain-has-a-plan-to-help-that-happen-article-by-the-foreign-secretary>

Updated Travel Advice: Israel

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

Updated Travel Advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

Houthi attacks on vessels in the Red Sea must stop: UK statement at the UN Security Council

... The United Kingdom and this Council have consistently condemned, in the strongest terms, the illegal and unjustified attacks in the Red Sea by the Houthi militants.

On 9 January, the Houthis attacked UK and US naval vessels. Last night, we took limited, necessary and proportionate action in self-defence alongside the United States, with the non-operational support of the Netherlands, Canada, Bahrain and Australia. The United Kingdom's Royal Air Force carried out targeted strikes against military facilities used by Houthi rebels in Yemen. This operation took particular care to minimise risks to civilians. Since November, the Houthis have launched over 100 drone and missile attacks against vessels from a range of countries, putting innocent lives at risk, threatening the global economy, and destabilising the region. ...

Let me be clear. The attacks by Houthis on vessels in the Red Sea must stop. ...

President, we remain committed to ensuring the freedom of navigation, which is protected by international law, and to defending international trade. It is in all our interests to work together to de-escalate tensions in the region.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/houthi-attacks-on-vessels-in-the-red-sea-must-stop-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

Summary of the UK Government Legal Position: The legality of UK military action to target Houthi facilities in Yemen

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summary-of-the-uk-government-legal-position-the-legality-of-uk-military-action-to-target-houthi-facilities-in-yemen/summary-of-the-uk-government-legal-position-the-legality-of-uk-military-action-to-target-houthi-facilities-in-yemen>

Scottish Parliament Written Answers

Scottish Parliament: Flag of Palestine

Mercedes Villalba (Labour) [S6W-23929] To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether the Scottish Parliament has ever flown the flag of Palestine to mark International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November.

Claire Baker (on behalf of the SPCB [Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body]): According to our records, we have not previously flown the flag of Palestine on 29 November to mark International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-23929>

Scottish Parliament: Flag of Palestine

Parliament will fly the flag of Palestine to mark International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November 2024.

Claire Baker (on behalf of the SPCB [Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body]): The Scottish Parliament has a flag flying policy in place which sets out the circumstances of when flags will be flown. A copy of the policy can be found [here](#). The circumstances in which the flying of flags is appropriate are very carefully set out, as it is essential that the Parliament maintains its impartiality. There are no plans in place to fly the flag of Palestine on 29 November 2024.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-23930>

Scottish Parliament Motion

Maggie Chapman (Green) [S6M-11829] Supporting South Africa's International Court of Justice Case – That the Parliament commends the Republic of South Africa for submitting an application to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an urgent order declaring that Israel is in breach of its obligations under the 1948 Genocide Convention, which defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”; believes that this action is important and will help put a stop to what it sees as the killing of many innocent Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including children, the destruction of their homes, their expulsion and displacement, as well as the enforcement of a blockade on food, water and medical assistance on Gaza; understands that the ICJ has scheduled a hearing for 11-12 January 2024; considers that South Africa is well-placed, given its history of apartheid, to raise this matter in the international community; looks forward to the ICJ ruling, and hopes that it will end what it considers to be the senseless and indiscriminate murder of the civilian population in Palestine, as soon as possible.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-11829>

The Genocide Convention, referred to above, can be read at

https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf

International Court of Justice

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

A recording of the second day, Israel's presentation of its case, is available at

<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1c/k1c10lsjq>

As Israel's Aerial Bombardments Intensify, 'There Is No Safe Place in Gaza', Humanitarian Affairs Chief Warns Security Council

... **Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator**, said that, for nearly 100 days, what has been unfolding in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory is a war conducted with almost no regard for the impact on civilians. In Gaza, the situation remains horrific as relentless Israeli military operations continue, with the tens of thousands of people killed and injured, the vast majority women and children. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, more than 23,000 people have now been killed and more than 58,000 injured since 7 October. A staggering 85 per cent of the total population — 1.9 million civilians — were forcibly displaced, traumatized and forced to flee again and again as the bombs and missiles rained down. ...

"Now winter has arrived in Gaza, bringing with it bitter cold, exacerbating the struggle to survive," he said, describing as "deplorable" that facilities critical to the survival of the civilian population have come under relentless attack. A total of 134 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) facilities have been hit and 148 UN personnel and non-governmental organization staff have been killed in Gaza. ... As ground operations move southwards, aerial bombardments have intensified in areas where civilians were told to relocate for their safety. "More and more people are being crammed into an ever-smaller sliver of land, only to find yet more violence and deprivation, inadequate shelter and a near absence of the most basic services," he stressed.

"There is no safe place in Gaza," he said, noting that dignified human life is "a near impossibility". Rafah, where the pre-crisis population was around just 280,000 people, is now home to 1 million displaced persons. UN efforts to send humanitarian convoys to the north have been met with delays, denials and the imposition of impossible conditions. The lack of respect for the humanitarian notification system puts every movement of aid workers in danger, as do the wholly insufficient quantities of armoured vehicles. "Corpses left lying in the road; people with evident signs of starvation stopping trucks in search of anything they can get to survive," he said, describing scenes of utter horror in the north. "Even if people were able to return home, many no longer have homes to go to," he said. ...

He went on to underscore that, while there has been some minor increase in the number of trucks entering via Rafah and Kerem Shalom, humanitarian supplies alone will not be able to sustain more than 2 million people. The system for medical evacuation of patients to Egypt is also woefully inadequate in the face of the massive needs. ... Some countries have already offered to host civilians who want to leave Gaza for their protection, he said, emphasizing that any persons displaced from Gaza must be allowed to return. Sounding deep alarm over recent statements by Israeli ministers vis-à-vis plans to encourage the mass transfer of civilians from Gaza to third countries, currently being referred to as "voluntary relocation", he stressed that "any attempt to change the demographic composition of Gaza must be firmly rejected".

"While Gaza is the epicentre of this crisis, let us not forget the 1,200 people killed, thousands injured, and hundreds taken in the brutal attack by Hamas and other armed groups on Israel on 7 October, and the accounts of abhorrent sexual violence," he said, adding that rocket-fire continues into populated areas of Israel, causing more civilian casualties and trauma. Also, more than 100,000 people have been displaced within Israel as a result of the 7 October attack by Hamas and other armed groups and due to ongoing rocket fire from armed groups in Gaza and Lebanon. Expressing extreme concern about the risk of a further regional spread of this conflict, he spotlighted increasing tension and hostilities in the West Bank and an alarming increase in settler violence. ...

Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, described the current conditions in Gaza as “not just a by-product of conflict, but the direct result of the manner in which hostilities have been conducted”. Massive displacement in the enclave commenced on 12 October 2023 with Israel ordering Palestinian civilians north of the Wadi Gaza to vacate their homes and go south. Israel, however, has made “scant provision” to ensure such relocations comply with international law, failing to ensure access to appropriate hygiene, health, safety, nutrition and shelter. ...

More than 90 per cent of the population is now suffering from acute food insecurity — many on the brink of avoidable human-made famine. Starvation of the civilian population as a method of war is prohibited, she warned, pointing to serious concerns about the potential commission of war crimes ... The risk of further grave violations, even atrocity crimes, is real. ...

In that regard, incendiary statements by some members of Israel’s leadership pushing for permanent resettlement of Palestinians overseas have entrenched fears that Palestinians are being deliberately forced out of Gaza. Their right to return to home must be subject to “an ironclad guarantee”. ...

“This current violence comes in the context of decades of human rights violations,” she said, emphasizing the need to address the underlying root causes of conflict, including accountability for violations committed before, on and since 7 October. ... [\[click here to read this speech in greater detail\]](#)

Amar Bendjama (Algeria) stated that what is happening in Gaza “will remain a disgrace on the conscience of humanity”. He asked if it is not enough to kill 10,000 children, injure more than 60,000 people and destroy more than 60 per cent of the buildings in Gaza, and for the entire population to face the risk of famine. The barbaric bombardment of Gaza and targeting of all signs of life is clearly aimed at killing “the hope of returning home in the hearts and minds of Palestinians”, he said. ...

Linda Thomas-Greenfield (United States) observed: “It has been more than three months since Hamas carried out the deadliest attacks against Jews since the Holocaust and set this conflict in motion”. Israel has committed to have the United Nations send an assessment team to north Gaza, she said ... Statements by Israeli officials calling for the mistreatment of Palestinian detainees or the destruction of Gaza are irresponsible, but she also expressed concern over some Council members’ refusal to condemn Hamas. On the unprecedented rise in violence in the West Bank, she noted that Palestinian extremist militants are carrying out attacks against Israeli civilians. Opposing the advancement of settlements in the West Bank, she highlighted her country’s visa restrictions against individuals who are undermining peace there. Further, the Palestinian Authority must make steps towards reform and revitalization, and Israel must release revenues that allow the Authority to pay its security forces. ...

Vassily A. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) expressed concern over the threat of forced transfer of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank ... Given the pace and power of strikes in populated areas, civilian infrastructure in Gaza has been practically destroyed. Further, most internally displaced or forcibly transferred persons have found refuge in UNRWA institutions that — despite their status — have continued to be subjected to Israeli bombings. ... While the 7 October attacks were reprehensible, they cannot legitimize Israel’s subsequent, indiscriminate use of force. ...

Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom) firmly rejected any statements proposing that Palestinians should be resettled outside of Gaza, including from members of the Israeli Government. ... Warning that current aid levels into Gaza are woefully inadequate and deepening the humanitarian crisis, she noted that the World Food Programme (WFP) reports that 9 out of 10 people there have less than one meal a day. She called for a sustainable ceasefire in which Hamas no longer poses a threat to Israel’s security, aid is delivered without hindrance and Palestinians can return to the areas of Gaza from which they have been displaced ... [\[click here to read this speech in greater detail\]](#)

Zhang Jun (China), noting that more than 23,000 people in Gaza have lost their lives, said that hundreds of thousands of people are struggling to survive in makeshift tents. ... Any forced displacement of the Palestinian people must be firmly rejected, he stressed, pointing out that the “voluntary emigration” from Gaza that some Israeli leaders have called for would mean driving 2 million people out. That would constitute an atrocity crime under international law and would destroy the prospect of the two-State solution. ... he underscored that only a ceasefire can prevent greater civilian casualties and create conditions for the early release of all hostages. ...

Adrian Dominik Hauri (Switzerland) condemned the unjustifiable acts of terror committed by Hamas on 7 October, reiterating the call for all hostages still held in Gaza to be immediately and unconditionally released. Noting that, since that day, more than 23,400 people have been killed and more than 59,600 injured — with 85 per cent of the population of Gaza forced to flee — he condemned all statements aimed at expelling civilians from the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He also called for an urgent increase in humanitarian aid into Gaza, warning that famine is already affecting half a million Gazans and observing that the use of starvation as a method of warfare “may constitute a war crime”. On that, he recalled that the International Criminal Court is investigating the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, covering both the events of 7 October and those currently taking place in Gaza and the West Bank.

Nicolas De Rivière (France) ... echoed the call for a lasting ceasefire, adding that this is vital to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the civilians in Gaza. ... Calling for the immediate release of all hostages, he said the Council must condemn the attacks perpetrated by Hamas and other terrorist groups on 7 October 2023. France will continue its work to impose sanctions against Hamas at a European level, he added, also expressing support for the two-State solution, with both States having Jerusalem as their capital. ...

Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, thanked South Africa for its moral leadership with the case it presented before the International Court of Justice against Israel for genocide. The world is watching a Nakba unfold, he said, adding that 70 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza are already refugees who were denied their right of return for decades now. ... Palestinians in Gaza today mourn their loved ones, and mourn their homes, that they built and rebuilt for themselves and their families. “In 100 days, virtually every Palestinian in Gaza has been displaced multiple times, from a home to a UN shelter to a tent — searching for safety everywhere, finding safety nowhere; searching for life anywhere, met by death everywhere,” he said, stating: Israel “killed and maimed our children, our doctors, our journalists, our engineers, our poets, our academics”.

While Israel was hoping Palestinians would leave under the pressure of its bombardments, they have not; now it is hoping they will leave because of the destruction the bombs have left behind, he continued. “Our people have a simple dream, to live in freedom and dignity on their land,” ... Israel wants the Palestinian people to choose between destruction and displacement, between genocide and ethnic cleansing, he asserted, opposing the supremacist, racist and criminal vision that this conflict could end by Palestinians accepting that they have only three options: death, exodus or subjugation. ...

Gilad Menashe Erdan (Israel) said that none of the resolutions adopted by the Council and the General Assembly condemned Hamas for their massacre of 1,300 Israelis. Not a single discussion has been dedicated to advance the release of hostages. During these 100 days, not once did the Council convene to focus on a baby held hostage. ... He recalled that 76 years ago, the Organization represented a moment of justice and morality when the General Assembly decided to establish a Jewish State and an Arab State. Israel accepted the decision, while the Palestinians rejected it and have used every means to annihilate Jews, including by using the United Nations as a weapon. ...

“There is no forced displacement,” he said, citing his Prime Minister’s statement that Israel has no intention of displacing the population. Israel is solely fighting Hamas terrorists, who

use Gazans as human shields. To mitigate civilian casualties, Israel requested the temporary evacuation of civilians. Over 1 million Afghan-Muslims are being forcibly removed from their homes in Pakistan, but the Council has not convened even once to focus solely on defending their rights. ...

In 2023, the Assembly passed more resolutions against Israel than against Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Syria combined. The Emergency Relief Coordinator said that Gaza's humanitarian situation is the worst he has ever seen. But didn't he see the killings by Cambodia's Khmer Rouge and 400,000 Yemenis murdered? ... South Africa's libelous case at the International Court of Justice is the epitome of the UN's dystopian reality. The Convention on the Prevention of Genocide adopted following the genocide of the Jewish people is now being weaponized against the State while serving Hamas perpetrators. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15564.doc.htm>

The Convention on the Prevention of Genocide, referred to above, can be read at

https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf

Following Air Strikes, Secretary-General Urges Adherence to International Law, Avoidance of Acts That Could Exacerbate Situation in Yemen

Noting that air strikes were launched yesterday across multiple parts of Yemen by the United States and the United Kingdom, with the support of other countries, the Secretary-General underscores that UN Security Council resolution 2722 (2024) must be fully respected in its entirety.

The Secretary-General reiterates that attacks against international shipping in the Red Sea area are not acceptable, as they endanger the safety and security of global supply chains and have a negative impact on the economic and humanitarian situation worldwide.

The Security Council demands, in resolution 2722 (2024), that the Houthis immediately cease all such attacks. The resolution must be fully respected.

The Secretary-General calls upon all Member States defending their vessels from attacks to do so in accordance with international law, as stipulated in the resolution.

The Secretary-General further calls upon all parties involved not to escalate even more the situation in the interest of peace and stability in the Red Sea and the wider region.

The Secretary-General stresses the need to avoid acts that could further worsen the situation in Yemen itself. He calls for every effort to be made to ensure that Yemen pursues a path towards peace and that the work undertaken thus far to end the conflict in Yemen should not be lost.

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22103.doc.htm>

The resolution referred to above can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2722\(2024\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2722(2024))

Pointing to “Cycle of Violence”, Senior UN Official Urges Restraint Following Air Strikes in Yemen

... **Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations**, noted that the military forces of the United States and the United Kingdom — supported by Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands — reportedly conducted over 50 air and missile strikes on targets across Yemen on 11 January ... According to the

Houthis, this resulted in five dead and six wounded fighters. ... [The] strikes followed continued Houthi targeting of vessels in the Red Sea, including an attack on 9 January that involved a combination of drones and missiles that were intercepted by United States and United Kingdom naval forces, he recalled.

He went on to state that, subsequent to the adoption of resolution 2722 (2024), on 11 January the Houthis reportedly launched another attack using an anti-ship ballistic missile that they claimed was a “preliminary retaliation” for the killing of Houthi fighters by United States naval forces in an incident reported on 31 December. ...

Vassily A. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) ... The exercise of the right to self-defence does not apply to commercial shipping, he said, noting that freedom of navigation is governed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides for negotiation and arbitration in the event of violations. ... A ceasefire in Gaza is essential to avoid further regional escalation, he stressed ...

Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom) recalled that on 9 January, the Houthis attacked naval vessels of her country and the United States. On 11 January, her country took limited, necessary and proportionate action in self-defence alongside the United States ... This operation took particular care to minimize the risks to civilians. Since November 2023, the Houthis have launched over 100 drone and missile attacks against vessels from a range of countries, putting innocent lives at risk, threatening the global economy and destabilizing the region. ... [\[click here to read this speech in greater detail\]](#)

Linda Thomas-Greenfield (United States) noted that in response to ongoing and escalating Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, the United States and United Kingdom, with support from four countries, conducted a number of joint strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen to disrupt and degrade their ability to continue those reckless attacks. The strikes were necessary and proportionate, consistent with international law and the United States’ inherent right to self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. ... Since November 2023, 2,000 ships have been forced to divert thousands of miles to avoid the Red Sea, affecting 50 nations ...

She called on the Council to make clear that most vessels attacked by the Houthis have nothing to do with Israel, further noting that without Iranian support, the Houthis would struggle to target and attack such vessels. She called on Council members, especially with direct channels to Iran, to pressure that State to rein in the Houthis, further urging the organ to call for the release of hostages and to uphold the free flow of commerce. ...

Zhang Jun (China) expressed grave concern over the launch of strikes against the Houthis by the United Kingdom and the United States. ... China sees the tension in the Red Sea as a spillover from the conflict in Gaza. Calling for the prevention of spillover of the conflict while adding fuel to the fire by provoking military confrontation is self-contradictory and irresponsible. The Middle East is already on the brink of extreme danger, he warned, declaring: “The last thing we need at this stage is reckless military adventurism, and the first thing we need is calm and restraint.” ...

Vanessa Frazier (Malta) said that the conflict in Gaza, the deteriorating situation in the West Bank, hostilities along the Blue Line and episodes of insecurity in Syria and Iraq paint a troubling picture; so does the rapidly deteriorating maritime security situation in the Red Sea. The Houthi attacks against commercial shipping in the Red Sea are in violation of international law. ...

Amar Bendjama (Algeria) expressed concern over the ongoing military operations and airstrikes in the Red Sea region ... In the current context, “the need for a ceasefire in Gaza has never been more urgent”, he stressed, adding that this is the only way to ease tensions in the region and avoid a spillover with catastrophic consequences. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15565.doc.htm>

The UNSC Resolution 2722, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2722\(2024\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2722(2024))

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Israel-Occupied Palestinian Territory situation, 100 days on

This Sunday will mark 100 days since Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups launched their horrific attack on Israel, in which 1,200 people, mostly Israelis, were killed and around 250 taken hostage.

Over these past 14 weeks, as Israel has pursued a massive and destructive military response, more than 23,000 Palestinians have been killed, some two-thirds of them women and children. Civilian infrastructure in Gaza, including homes, hospitals, schools, bakeries, places of worship, water systems, as well as the UN's own facilities, have been widely damaged or destroyed.

As UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk has repeatedly urged, there must be an immediate ceasefire – on human rights and humanitarian grounds. ...

On the conduct of hostilities, we have repeatedly highlighted Israel's recurring failures to uphold the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law: distinction, proportionality, and precautions in carrying out attacks. The High Commissioner has stressed that breaches of these obligations risk exposure to liability for war crimes, and has also warned of the risks of other atrocity crimes. ...

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) must take immediate measures to protect civilians fully in line with Israel's obligation under international law. Ordering civilians to relocate in no way absolves the IDF of its obligations to protect those who remain, regardless of their reasons, while carrying out its military operations.

Hundreds of Palestinians have reportedly been arbitrarily detained in several unknown locations, both within and outside Gaza – in many cases amounting to enforced disappearance. Some of those released have alleged ill-treatment and torture at the hands of the IDF. ...

It is a desperate scenario in northern Gaza, where people face dire shortages of food, water and other basic necessities. ...

The situation in southern Gaza is becoming untenable, with over 1.3 million internally displaced people crammed into Rafah, which before the current escalation of hostilities had 300,000 inhabitants.

Meanwhile, Palestinian armed groups have continued to launch indiscriminate rockets towards Israel, with some intercepted. According to the Israeli authorities, around 136 people are still being held in Gaza by Palestinian armed groups.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the UN Human Rights Office has verified the deaths of 330 Palestinians, including 84 children, from 7 October 2023 to 10 January 2024. Of these, 321 were killed by Israeli Security forces, eight killed by settlers and one either by Israeli forces or settlers. In parallel, entire herding communities have been forcibly displaced due to settler violence, which may amount to forcible transfer. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2024/01/israel-occupied-palestinian-territory-situation-100-days>

UN human rights experts welcome start of ICJ genocide hearings in The Hague, reiterate call for ceasefire

UN human rights experts ... welcomed the start of hearings before the International Court of Justice ("ICJ") of a case brought by South Africa concerning allegations that Israel is committing acts of genocide against the Palestinian people. ...

South Africa on 29 December 2023 asked the ICJ to urgently issue provisional measures ordering Israel to immediately suspend its military operations in and against Gaza and to protect residents from acts of genocide, alleging breaches by Israel of the 1948 Convention

on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the “Genocide Convention”). The Genocide Convention defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”. ... South Africa’s filing also alleges that Israel is inciting genocide and has failed to prevent genocide.

“ICJ decisions are final, binding, and not subject to appeal. Adherence to any order the Court may make by the parties involved is imperative for protecting the rights of Palestinians and reinforcing the primacy of international law,” the experts said.

“We commend South Africa for bringing this case to the ICJ at a time when the rights of Palestinians in Gaza are being violated with impunity. We call on all States to cooperate with the Court as it interprets the Genocide Convention and to respect the role of the ICJ as an independent court of law.”

The experts also welcomed the statements of support by many States for South Africa’s action in bringing the case to the Court, as well as the principled stand taken by individuals and organizations worldwide that have expressed support for the submission of the case by South Africa. ...

Both South Africa and Israel have ratified the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, as have 151 other States. ...

“The ICJ has in the past made clear that obligations under the Genocide Convention are of an *erga omnes* nature, meaning that any and all countries have a stake in preventing genocide wherever it is at risk of occurring. This plainly means that uninvolved countries have standing to bring a case like South Africa’s to the ICJ,” the experts explained.

In its application to the Court, South Africa cited numerous statements by UN Special Procedures mandate holders, including the experts’ repeated calls for international action to prevent genocide in Gaza. The mandate holders’ statements reference evidence of genocidal incitement by Israeli Government officials, including a stated intent to “destroy the Palestinian people under occupation”, and calls for a “second Nakba” in Gaza and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. These comments by Israeli officials have been made amidst the extensive use by Israel of powerful, often unguided weaponry in Gaza with inherently indiscriminate impacts, severe restrictions on the entry of lifesaving humanitarian aid, and attacks on health care services, all of which have resulted in a devastating death toll, including large numbers of women and children, the forcible transfer of more than half of Gaza’s population, and extensive destruction of life-sustaining infrastructure. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/un-human-rights-experts-welcome-start-icj-genocide-hearings-hague-reiterate>

The Genocide Convention, referred to above, can be read at

https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf

ASG Brands Kehris briefs Security Council on situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory

... The devastating situation and immense suffering we are seeing in Gaza are preventable and foreseeable, and has been warned about for many weeks.

The horror of the 7 October attacks – for which there must be accountability – will not be forgotten.

For Palestinians, the threat of forced displacement carries particular resonance – it is seared into Palestinian collective consciousness by what they refer to as the Nakba (“catastrophe”) of 1948 when millions of Palestinians were forced from their homes.

Since October 7, approximately 1.9 million Palestinians – nearly 85 per cent of Gaza’s population – have been displaced, for many people now on multiple occasions. Some have

followed Israeli orders to leave certain areas, others fleeing for fear of also falling victim to violence and severe deprivation should they remain. Families have been separated, tens of thousands killed, and many thousands more seriously injured or remaining missing. Over a hundred thousand people have also been internally displaced in southern Israel as a result of the conflict in Gaza, as well as in northern Israel. Reportedly, Israel has put in place provisions for their displacement in satisfactory conditions. ...

What has happened in Gaza is not just a by-product of conflict, but is the direct result of the manner in which hostilities have been conducted. ...

While Israel stated that its evacuation orders have been for the safety of Palestinian civilians, it appears that Israel has made scant provision to ensure such relocations comply with international law ... Such compelled evacuations, failing to meet the necessary conditions for lawfulness, therefore potentially amount to forcible transfer, a war crime. ... OHCHR has documented how many civilians have sought in vain to find locations safe from Israel's massive bombardment and other military operations that have been continuing across the Gaza strip, including in places specifically protected under international humanitarian law such as hospitals and schools. ...

Compounding a 17-year blockade imposed by Israel, Israel is failing in its obligations, including as an occupying power, to facilitate entry of sufficient aid and essential commercial goods into Gaza to meet the basic subsistence needs of the civilian population. ...

More than 90 per cent of the population is now suffering from acute food insecurity, and many are on the brink of avoidable human-made famine. We recall that starvation of the civilian population as a method of war is prohibited. ...

As OHCHR has recently documented and reported, since 7 October, violence by Israeli settlers and Israeli security personnel has also dramatically increased in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, leading to the displacement of many communities within an increasingly coercive environment, possibly constituting forcible transfer. ... The risk of an expanded and intense conflict in the West Bank cannot be ruled out.

Incendiary statements by some members of Israel's leadership pushing for permanent resettlement of Palestinians overseas have entrenched fears that Palestinians are being deliberately forced out of Gaza and will not be able to return. This must not be permitted.

Palestinians' right to return to their homes must be subject to an ironclad guarantee – even if needed humanitarian corridors are opened to allow Palestinians, especially the sick, persons with disabilities, older persons, and pregnant women and children, to flee including to Israel and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israel, as the occupying power, must support their return by restoring essential services and facilitating the necessary reconstruction of Gaza, particularly given that the scale of destruction and presence of unprecedented levels of explosive remnants of war, mean there are major practical obstacles to the near-term return home of most of those already displaced.

Excellencies, we need an immediate ceasefire on human rights and humanitarian grounds and the unconditional release of all hostages, as indispensable first steps towards a durable solution. ...

We must also look towards what comes next. This current violence comes in the context of decades of human rights violations. For any enduring solution to this crisis, the underlying root causes must be addressed – and this includes accountability for violations committed on and since 7 October, and in the many years before. Ensuring justice and that the rights of all peoples – both of Palestinians and Israelis – are respected and protected is the only basis on which an enduring peace can be built. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/01/asg-brands-kehris-briefs-security-council-on-situation-israel-occupied-palestinian-territory>

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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>

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>

Bill as introduced

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0039/230039.pdf>

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

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