



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): ... Following the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that the Government intend to proscribe Hizb ut-Tahrir under the Terrorism Act 2000, the business on Thursday will now be: Thursday 18 January—A motion to approve the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) Order 2024 ...

Lucy Powell (Labour Co-op): ... There have long been serious concerns about the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which have been exacerbated in the light of Hamas's barbaric terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October. It is right that the Government have looked at the evidence and intelligence on the threat posed by the group, and Labour supports the decision to proscribe it. ...

Those who incite violence and promote or glorify terrorism have no place on Britain's streets. In that context, what progress has been made on proscribing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, either via a statutory instrument, as the Government are using this week for Hizb ut-Tahrir, or by a new process to deal with hostile state actors for which there is wide cross-party support in this House? ...

Penny Mordaunt: First, I thank the hon. Lady for her support for the statutory instrument that we are bringing forward. The Home Office has taken its time to consider the matter, but it is very clear that the activities the group is involved in fall into that category. They need to be dealt with swiftly ...

I will certainly ensure that the Home Secretary has heard the hon. Lady's query about the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Its activities are not restricted to what is happening overseas; it is engaged in activities on British soil against British citizens. I know that there is a great deal of interest in that in all parts of the House. ...

Mark Francois (Conservative): ... it is an open secret that Iran is paymaster to, and helps to train, Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthi rebels in Yemen ... I warmly welcome the decision to proscribe Hizb ut-Tahrir. However, given what I have just said, and given the action that we have taken against the Houthi rebels in order to maintain freedom of navigation on the seas, can the Leader of the House foresee any circumstances in which she could return to the House in the near future to make a similar announcement about proscribing the IRGC?

Penny Mordaunt: ... the Home Secretary and the Government will want to make any future announcements in a timely way while also considering all the effects that such a course of action might bring about ...

Martin Docherty-Hughes (SNP): ... the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps supplies the Houthis, especially with drone materials, and it was also committing international action last night in northern Iraq. Rather than talking of a "timely way," many of us in the Defence Committee would say, "Time's up." ... there is a clamour to proscribe the IRGC at the soonest opportunity.

Penny Mordaunt: ... I will ensure that the Home Secretary has heard what he has said. The actions that he has described are not new; I think that, on average, that organisation has been behind about 500 attacks during any recent year against international shipping and people going about their daily business, and, as I have said, it is also engaged in activities in the UK. ...

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... may I ask the Leader of the House ... if it might be possible to indicate whether the threat from the Real IRA and the connection with the proscribed Hamas can be clarified evidentially, and if so, what measures will be taken to reinforce the action of stepping down hard on the Real IRA and the New IRA?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this important matter. ... it is not a matter for me in connection with the business of the House, but ... I shall ensure that the Home Secretary has heard it.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-16/debates/7DCFC4E2-9C1B-41D7-A32F-1380C3EB3E7D/BusinessOfTheHouse>

House of Commons Written Answer

Antisemitism

Gregory Campbell (DUP) [8932] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much funding his Department plans to allocate to the Jewish Community Police, Crime and Security Taskforce in 2024.

Tom Tugendhat: The Government continues to provide protective security funding to the Jewish community through the Jewish Community Protective Security (JCPS) Grant. This includes £3 million of funding announced by the Prime Minister in October for the Community Security Trust (CST) to provide additional security at Jewish schools, synagogues and other Jewish community sites. This brings total funding for CST, through the Grant, to £18 million in 2023/24, and this will remain at £18 million in 2024/25.

The Taskforce does not have a specific budget allocation and does not currently have any specific costs associated with its work.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-10/8932>

House of Commons Library Briefing

Proscribed Terrorist Organisations

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN00815/SN00815.pdf>

UK Parliament Ministerial Statement

New Overseas Electors Franchise

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Simon Hoare) [HCWS186] ... I am pleased to be able to inform the House that, as of today, the 15-year limit on overseas electors' voting rights is abolished. British citizens living abroad who have been previously registered or previously resident in the United Kingdom can apply to register to vote in UK parliamentary elections.

British expatriates continue to have strong links with the United Kingdom. Decisions on foreign policy, Brexit and trade will directly affect their lives. Now we have left the EU, it is more important than ever to strengthen our ties with the British expatriate community. We want all British citizens abroad to remain part of our democracy, and they should continue to have their say in UK parliamentary elections.

Improving accessibility, enhancing security

The registration period for overseas electors has been extended from one year to up to three, making it easier for an elector to maintain their registration for longer.

The majority of electors can now also apply for an absent vote—postal or proxy—online. This will be particularly useful to British citizens living overseas, as it will speed up the process for obtaining an absent vote.

In Great Britain, overseas electors' absent vote arrangements will—from now—also be tied to the registration renewal process, meaning that an overseas elector will be able to renew their registration and their absent vote arrangement at the same time. This makes it easier for an elector to maintain their registration for longer, with an absent vote arrangement in place ahead of elections. This means that, when a UK parliamentary election is called, the elector's absent vote can be issued without delay.

As now, the integrity of the registration process will be maintained, with all overseas applicants subject to identity checks when applying to register to vote, or when applying for an absent vote.

In the first instance, this will be matched against Government-held data, with documentary evidence provided as a new step, in alignment with domestic registration. All applicants will also have their connection to a qualifying address verified by electoral registration officers.

In addition, postal vote arrangements will be restricted to a maximum of three years. For proxy arrangements, a fresh signature will be required for identity verification purposes every three years. This is all part of the concerted effort by Government to improve the integrity of our elections.

A more inclusive and representative democracy

Together, these changes will help to ensure that more British citizens resident overseas are able to participate in elections, and maintain a secure and robust electoral system.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-16/debates/24011636000017/NewOverseasElectorsFranchise>

Scottish Government

First Minister @ScotGovFM Meeting with students from Scotland's Jewish Societies, First Minister @HumzaYousaf listened to their concerns around campus safety. The First

Minister reaffirmed @ScotGov's zero tolerance approach to antisemitism and solidarity with Jewish communities in Scotland and abroad. [plus photos]
<https://twitter.com/ScotGovFM/status/1747653819029143845>

TOP

Israel

See also Commons oral answers “Business of the House”, and the Commons Library Briefing “Proscribed Terrorist Organisations” that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Written Answers

Gaza: British Nationals Abroad

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [7719] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent estimate he has made of the number of British nationals in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The safety and security of all British nationals remains our utmost priority and we are doing everything we can to support all British nationals, including dual nationals in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We can confirm that more than 300 people registered with us, including British Nationals and their dependants, have left Gaza with onward support to Cairo. We are working with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities to ensure any remaining British nationals that want to leave are cleared to cross as soon as possible. We are not in a position to comment on specific remaining numbers.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7719>

Arms Trade: Israel

Zarah Sultana (Labour) [9304] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether she has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs on the applicability of Criterion 2(c) of the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria in reference to potential strategic export licenses to Israel.

Greg Hands: The Government continues to monitor closely the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, which includes Criterion 2(c) - the provision not to grant a licence if it is determined there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

Extant licences are kept under careful review and the Business and Trade Secretary has the power to suspend, revoke or amend extant licences as required.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-11/9304>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Israel: Palestinians

Zarah Sultana (Labour) [8211] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the Answer of 13 July 2020 to Question 68798, whether his Department has recorded any incidents on its tracker database of alleged breaches or violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza in the last six months.

Andrew Mitchell: We continue to closely monitor the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including with reference to alleged breaches or violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in Gaza. The UK supports Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas, but we are also clear that Israel must comply with IHL and protect Palestinian civilians in Gaza. We consistently raise this in our engagements with senior Israeli officials, including in the Prime Minister's discussions with Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Foreign Secretary's recent calls with the Foreign Minister and Ron Dermer, the Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8211>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-07-03/68798>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Israel: Gaza

Andy McDonald (Independent) [8440] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department plans to (a) support the request for preventative measures and (b) otherwise participate in the case against Israel at the international court of justice brought by the Republic of South Africa.

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [8588] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will take steps to support the case brought against Israel at the international court of justice by the Republic of South Africa.

Andrew Mitchell: This development is unhelpful and we do not support it. We recognise that Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law. We do not believe that calling this genocide is the right approach. It is wrong to say that Israeli leadership, and Israel as a country, have the intention to commit genocide. Ultimately, it is for courts to decide on matters of genocide, not for states. We of course respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-08/8440>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-08/8588>

Information about the case referred to above can be read at

<https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192>

South Africa's presentation of its case can be watched at

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

and Israel's presentation of its case can be watched at

<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1c/k1c10lsjoq>

Gaza: Israel

Andy McDonald (Independent) [8743] 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 comments on the destruction of the whole of Gaza by the Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom on 3 January 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: As the Foreign Secretary has said publicly, Israel has the right to defend itself but, in so doing, it must abide by International Humanitarian Law (IHL). We have pressed Israel, including in the Prime Minister's discussions with Prime Minister Netanyahu and in engagements with senior Israeli officials, including the Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom: to ensure its campaign complies with IHL; to allow aid to enter Gaza; to end settler violence and hold perpetrators to account; and to work with the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross to improve the desperate humanitarian situation.

It is vital that all parties ensure that their actions minimise harm to civilians. The UK welcomes the adoption of UNSCR 2720, which calls for expanded humanitarian access in Gaza. The resolution also calls for steps towards a sustainable ceasefire, reflecting the recent calls from the Foreign Secretary. We want to see a peaceful resolution to this conflict as soon as possible and the UK will work with international partners to ensure the implementation of this resolution.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-09/8743>

The Ambassador's comments referred to above can be listened to at

<https://twitter.com/LBC/status/1742628517966229662>

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

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [7733] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will take diplomatic steps with his international counterparts to help secure a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK is committed to a sustainable and permanent ceasefire and is actively engaging international partners to achieve this. This means a ceasefire that will last and prevent another generation of children living under the constant threat of war; Hamas no longer in power in Gaza, being able to threaten Israel with rocket attacks and other forms of terrorism; and the immediate release of hostages still being held. Ahead of a permanent ceasefire, we want to see immediate and sustained humanitarian pauses. This will allow a window for hostages to leave and more aid to enter Gaza - helping to create the conditions for a durable peace. We want to see a peaceful resolution to this conflict as soon as possible and the UK will work with international partners to ensure the implementation of this resolution.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7733>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Rosena Allin-Khan (Labour) [9028] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether any UK aid has been refused entry to Gaza by the Israeli authorities.

Andrew Mitchell: UK funded humanitarian aid supplies destined for Gaza are being delivered to the Strip. However, alongside significant congestion at the Rafah border, some items which Israel consider to be of potential "dual use" - civilian or military, such as solar lights and water filters, have been stopped and returned to Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) warehouses in Al-Arish. The UK is supporting the Egyptian ERCS, who are leading and coordinating the delivery of all national and international aid to Gaza within its auxiliary role to the Government of Egypt. The ERCS is working with other humanitarian actors, including the UN, to improve the tracking system of aid deliveries for this extremely complicated operation. This will help to provide more detail on the goods that have and have not been permitted to enter Gaza. The UK continues to press Israel to increase the flexibility and visibility on goods allowed into Gaza and improved efficiency of screening processes, and the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and I have prioritised getting significantly more aid into Gaza. The Foreign Secretary has recently appointed his Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories 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/2024-01-10/9028>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Alan Brown (SNP) [8039] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2023 to Question 6846 on Gaza: Humanitarian Aid, for what reason he does not hold the information requested; and if he will make it his policy to collect information on the value of stockpiled aid goods unable to enter Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: UK funded humanitarian aid supplies destined for Gaza are being delivered to the Strip. However, alongside significant congestion at the Rafah border, some items which Israel consider to be of potential "dual use" - civilian or military, such as solar lights and water filters, have been stopped and returned to Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) warehouses in Al-Arish. We estimate the value of these items to be about £93,000. The UK is supporting the Egyptian ERCS, who are leading and coordinating the delivery of all national and international aid to Gaza within its auxiliary role to the Government of Egypt. The ERCS is working with other humanitarian actors, including the UN, to improve the tracking system of aid deliveries for this extremely complicated operation. This will help to provide more detail on the goods that have and have not been permitted to enter Gaza. The UK continues to press Israel to increase the flexibility and visibility on goods allowed into Gaza and improved efficiency of screening processes.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8039>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-13/6846>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [7390] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what progress his Department has made on the provision of (a) food, (b) water, (c) electricity, (d) medicine, (e) fuel and (f) other aid to Gaza.

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/2023-12-18/7390>

Gaza: Older People

Richard Burgon (Labour) [7372] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help support older people in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK Government has stressed to Israeli leaders that they must take every effort to protect civilians. We recognise that there are certain groups who are uniquely exposed to risks, including the elderly. We are supporting trusted partners to address the needs of these vulnerable groups.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7372>

Gaza: Israel

Dan Carden (Labour) [7644] 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 report by Human Rights Watch entitled Israel: Starvation Used as Weapon of War in Gaza, published on 18 December 2023.

Andrew Mitchell: The FCDO is aware of this report. We support Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas, but it must comply with International Humanitarian Law; we keep under continuous review whether they are abiding by their obligations. The Prime Minister has made this clear to Prime Minister Netanyahu repeatedly and has been in close contact throughout. We recognise that there is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza. We have trebled our aid commitment this financial year and are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings. We have also supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza, with 750 metric tons of life-saving food aid arriving in the first delivery. Israel must also take steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza including allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses, opening more aid routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7644>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-used-weapon-war-gaza>

Israel: Palestinians

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [7721] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK is committed to working with Israel to secure improvements in detention practices in Israel. We have made plain our concerns over continued reports of ill-treatment of Palestinian detainees in Israeli military detention, particularly of children. Reports of the heavy use of painful restraints and the high number of Palestinian children who are not informed of their legal rights, in contravention of Israel's own regulations, are particularly troubling. The UK repeatedly calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and we have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7721>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Jerusalem: Cultural Heritage

Andy McDonald (Independent) [9221] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the attempted Israeli settler takeover of the Cows Garden plot in the Armenian Quarter of Old Jerusalem; and whether representatives from the British Embassy plan to visit the Armenian community in the near future.

Andy McDonald (Independent) [9222] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the (a) reported Israeli settler violence and intimidation against the Armenian community of Jerusalem and (b) attempted takeover of the Cows Garden plot in the Armenian Quarter of Old Jerusalem by Israeli settler organisations linked with Xana Capital.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK is monitoring the situation in the Cow Garden site of the Armenian Quarter of Old Jerusalem and are clear on the need to avoid any further

rise in tensions. The British Consulate Jerusalem will be meeting representatives on this issue in the coming week. The UK's position on the status of Jerusalem is clear and long-standing: it should be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states. The UK is a strong believer in the need to preserve Jerusalem's strong multi-ethnic, multi-faith character. The UK is also a strong supporter of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and an advocate for the integrity of cultural important areas to be respected. The UK continues to take a strong stance against settler violence, and urges Israel to take stronger action to stop settler violence and hold the perpetrators accountable.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-11/9221>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-11/9222>

Israel: Palestinians

Caroline Lucas (Green) [8406] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 27 December 2023 to Question 5833 on Palestinians: Children, what steps his Department is taking to identify people responsible for settler violence.

Andrew Mitchell: We continue to be clear that extremist settlers, by targeting and killing Palestinian civilians, are undermining security and stability when Israelis and Palestinians are desperate for both. We have urged Israel to take stronger action to stop settler violence against Palestinian civilians and to hold the perpetrators accountable. As the Foreign Secretary said on 14 December, we are banning those responsible for settler violence from entering the UK, to make sure our country cannot be a home for people who commit these acts. This involves making use of existing disruptive immigration measures at our disposal.

We are not in a position to comment on individual cases.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-08/8406>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-07/5833>

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

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

House of Lords Oral Answers

Israel and Gaza

Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs what steps he is taking to secure a lasting ceasefire arrangement between Israel and Gaza. ...

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton): My Lords, we support a ceasefire, but this must be a sustainable ceasefire that will last and prevent another generation living under the constant threat of war. That must mean that Hamas is no longer in power in Gaza, able to threaten Israel with rocket attacks and other forms of terrorism. Ahead of a permanent ceasefire, we want to see immediate and sustained humanitarian pauses to allow hostages to leave and more aid to enter Gaza, helping to create the conditions for a durable peace. As I said at the weekend, we would like to see such a pause start right now.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat): ... these Benches have for a number of weeks called for an immediate bilateral ceasefire, beyond a truce, which would allow hostages to

be returned, bombing to stop and, of course, vital lifesaving aid to be secured. Why have the Government failed so far to persuade the Israeli Government to allow much greater access for the humanitarian aid that is needed? There are 1.9 million displaced people, many of whom are now facing famine. We now know that, when it comes to civilian casualties, this is the most deadly conflict in the 21st century. The UK will need to increase its support of humanitarian assistance, but it cut that from £107 million to £12 million between 2019 and 2023. I support the increase in aid but, surely, there will need to be an increase of the cap of 0.5% if we are to do our bit and ensure that aid is increased.

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: First, I would say to the noble Lord that we have trebled the amount of aid that we are putting into Gaza. I very much take on board what he says about the pressure we need to put on not just the Israeli Government but other Governments in the region to get more aid in. Right now, as we speak, nine out of 10 people in Gaza are living on less than one meal a day. It is that serious. That is why I have had repeated conversations with the Israelis and set out a whole series of bottlenecks that need to be relieved. We need Kerem Shalom open all the time. We need the Nitzana checkpoint open all the time. I would like to see the port of Ashdod opened in Israel so that aid can get into the country through maritime routes and more swiftly into Gaza.

Crucially, we will not see more aid get to the people who need it unless the United Nations inside Gaza has the vehicles, the people and the fuel to get it around. Those permissions need to be given. I have had these conversations most recently this morning with the new UN aid co-ordinator, who I am confident will do an excellent job. We will keep up the pressure for this, because, as I have said, an immediate pause to help get that aid in and to help get hostages out is essential.

Lord Owen (Independent Social Democrat): Will the Foreign Secretary consider very seriously creating a UN protection force for humanitarian relief? That was done successfully in the winter of 1992 in a very difficult situation, with no ceasefire, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I recommend that approach. Although a ceasefire is essential, it is not in the immediate future very likely, but the humanitarian crisis is getting worse every day. They cannot get relief in without some form of protection from UN forces.

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: I take what the noble Lord says, as a former Foreign Secretary, extremely seriously. What would make a difference is if Israel recognised its responsibilities for making sure that food, medicine and supplies have to be delivered to people in Gaza, and if it recognised that you need the UN staff who have the visas, the equipment and the fuel to help get it around. I will certainly take away the suggestion that the noble Lord makes, but the calculation here is quite simple. Before the conflict, some 500 trucks were going into Gaza every day. I check the figures every single day; we are up to about 150 trucks at the moment. That is not enough. The longer it goes on, the greater the risk of people going hungry and the greater the risk of disease and this humanitarian crisis getting worse. A pause would help, because there is no doubt that it would be easier to get food and other forms of aid in. It would also be very good to make some progress on the hostages, families of whom I met this morning.

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Labour): My Lords, the Foreign Secretary makes an alarming point: that within Gaza nine out of 10 Palestinians are not even getting a single meal every day. The need for a sustained ceasefire is absolutely clear as a first step towards getting humanitarian aid in. The Government confirmed last week that currently there are no plans for RAF aid flights or deliveries by the Royal Navy. Can he say why that is? Surely that would be a good way of getting aid in and trying to get around some of the problems that we have at the moment.

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: We are looking at every single way of getting aid in. Of course, there are maritime options, and we had a ship leaving Cyprus and taking aid to Port Said in Egypt. The so-called over-the-beach option of trying to

land aid in Gaza is extremely difficult for reasons of operational security and other forms of security. On dropping aid by air, the French and Jordanians did so recently, but it was less aid than you would get into one truck. The truth is that the best way to get aid into Gaza is through trucks. As I said, 500 are needed, 150 are happening, and if you opened up Kerem Shalom seven days a week, if you had the Nitzana checkpoint open 24/7 and if you had the people inside Gaza, there would be plenty of aid. There is no shortage of aid and no shortage of countries prepared to make the financial commitment. In the end, trucks are faster, and it is trucks that we need.

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Conservative): My Lords, women and children are always disproportionately affected by conflict. The UK considers itself a global leader on the women, peace and security agenda and holds the pen for this at the UN Security Council. Why are we not hearing from women's groups? After all, they were integral in bringing peace in both Northern Ireland and Liberia.

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: It is very important that we hear from everybody. One of the things that I do with the responsibilities of the aid and development portfolio that is now squarely within the Foreign Office is to make sure that we listen to all the NGOs, all the experts and all the people who can make a difference when it comes to getting aid in and trying to relieve this desperate humanitarian situation.

Lord Grocott (Labour): When the Foreign Secretary said "I am worried that Israel has taken action that might be in breach of international law", did he have in mind the principle of proportionality in armed conflict and whether it is a proportionate self-defence by Israel to have been responsible so far for some 24,000 Palestinian deaths, including 10,000 children?

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: What I meant when I said that was simply that I worry about these things. It is my job to worry. The Foreign Office has a job, which is to look at the legal advice and work out whether Israel is committed to, and capable of complying with, international humanitarian law, and then, based on that judgment, we have to take a series of actions, including looking at things like export licences. We always urge Israel to obey international humanitarian law, and it is important that we do so.

Lord Robathan (Conservative): Is it not the case that there would be an immediate ceasefire tomorrow if Hamas were to release the hostages and lay down its weapons, and if the criminals who did atrocities on 7 October were to go and join their leaders in luxury hotels in the Gulf?

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: My noble friend makes a good point, which is that Hamas could end this tomorrow by saying that it was going to lay down its weapons or leave. Everyone is aware that we want a sustainable ceasefire. That means Hamas not in power and not able to launch rockets and terror, and we have said we want to see an immediate pause so we can get aid in and hostages out. However, in many ways, the very best outcome would be to see whether we could convert that immediate pause for aid and hostages into a sustainable ceasefire without further hostilities. But for that to happen, a series of other things would have to happen: there would have to be immediate negotiations to release all the hostages, the Hamas leadership would have to leave Gaza, and we would have to be clear that there was no more danger of rocket and terror attacks on Israel. We would have to put together something based on the Palestinian Authority, backed by other Palestinians, going back into Gaza. In many ways, that would be the best outcome, but if we call now for an immediate ceasefire with no further fighting when Hamas is still in power, still launching rockets and still capable of launching terror attacks, not only would we not have a sustainable ceasefire and peace but we would have no hope of the thing that I think many in this House would like to see, which is a two-state solution.

House of Commons Library Briefing

An introduction to UK arms exports

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8312/CBP-8312.pdf>

UK Parliament Early Day Motions

Grahame Morris (Labour) [284] Journalists in Gaza – That this House is profoundly shocked and saddened by the deaths of over 85 journalists and other media workers in Gaza since the Hamas attacks of October 7, with many more critically injured, missing or in detention without trial; believes that journalists in Gaza are the only ones standing between the truth and a total media blackout and that, without their work, the world would not bear witness to these atrocities; is alarmed by reports from the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate and the International Federation of Journalists that a further 80 press and media institutions were targeted by Israeli bombing, being totally or partially destroyed in Gaza; calls on the Government to urge the Israeli authorities to desist from targeting journalists or media organisations in these deadly attacks and accept the need to help de-escalate the cycle of violence which has resulted in the mass slaughter of civilians and a humanitarian catastrophe.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61769>

John McDonnell (Labour) [288] Deaths of journalists in Gaza – That this House expresses its extreme concern at the mounting and unprecedented death toll of journalists in Gaza; notes that the independent Committee to Protect Journalists has recorded the death of 82 journalists in this conflict since October 2023; welcomes the support provided by the National Union of Journalists for the efforts of the International Federation of Journalists to promote the safety of journalists; and urges the International Criminal Court to expedite its investigation into the evidence submitted of the systematic targeted attacks on journalists by Israeli forces.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61771>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Foreign Secretary at Davos to reiterate support for Ukraine and call for security and stability in the Middle East

The Foreign Secretary, Lord David Cameron, will call for greater action from world leaders at this year's World Economic Forum in a bid to mobilise international support and cooperation on the world's biggest challenges. ...

While at Davos, the Foreign Secretary will also emphasise the need for security and stability in the Middle East and reiterate the 4 things that must happen for a peaceful solution to the Israel-Hamas war: a Palestinian-led government in Gaza and the West Bank, a concrete plan to help reform and support the Palestinian Authority, a major reconstruction plan for Gaza, and a political horizon towards a two-state solution. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-at-davos-to-reiterate-support-for-ukraine-and-call-for-security-and-stability-in-the-middle-east>

Scottish Government FoI Release

Humanitarian aid funding for Gaza

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202300385674/>

TOP

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>

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>

TOP

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>

**** Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Enhanced Dataset [England]** (closing date 5 March 2024)

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/clinical-audits-and-registries/female-genital-mutilation-datasets/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-enhanced-dataset-overview-of-2024-consultation>

[TOP](#)

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