



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answers

*The following four questions all received the same answer*

#### Islamophobia

**Afzal Khan (Labour)** [10238] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he plans to develop a definition of anti-Muslim hatred.

**Afzal Khan (Labour)** [10239] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what definition of anti-Muslim hatred his Department uses.

**Afzal Khan (Labour)** [10240] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what progress his Department is making on tackling Islamophobia.

#### Religious Hatred

**Afzal Khan (Labour)** [10241] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which (a) individuals and (b) organisations his Department is consulting on religious hatred.

**Lee Rowley:** Anti-Muslim hatred is abhorrent and has no place in our society. No one should ever be a victim of hatred because of their religion or belief and the Government continues to work with police and community partners to monitor and combat it. We have funded Tell MAMA, a service that supports victims of anti-Muslim hatred, with over £6 million since their inception in 2012.

In light of the rise in anti-Muslim hate incidents being reported, the Government has

increased Tell MAMA's funding to £1 million this year. This funding will provide additional resource to the service they are providing to support victims of anti-Muslim hatred.

The department has given careful consideration to the use of language and definitions. The definition of Islamophobia as proposed by the APPG is not in line with the Equality Act 2010, which defines race in terms of colour, nationality and national or ethnic origins. The term anti-Muslim hatred is a more precise term which better reflects UK hate crime legislation.

The department is seeking the views and perspectives of domestic and international leaders and experts in this field to explore how religious hatred is experienced by British communities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10238>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10239>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10240>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10241>

*Information about the APPG proposed definition of islamophobia, referred to above, can be read at*

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **Marriage**

**Sarah Green (Liberal Democrat)** [10325] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether the Government is taking steps to raise awareness of the legal distinctions between (a) marriage, (b) civil partnership and (c) cohabiting.

#### **Cohabitation: Legislation**

**Sarah Green (Liberal Democrat)** [10325] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether his Department has plans to review or reform legislation on the rights of cohabitating partners.

**Mike Freer:** It is important that people are aware of the legal distinctions between getting married, forming a civil partnership and living together as cohabitants. The Government has already taken steps in this area. The Department for Education's statutory guidance on relationships education includes the need for schools to ensure that pupils are aware of what marriage is, including its legal status and the legal status of other types of long-term relationship. The Government is also reviewing the information currently available to the public on the legal rights afforded to spouses, civil partners, and cohabiting couples.

The Government considers that existing work underway on the law of marriage and divorce, which are directly relevant to issues concerning cohabitants, must conclude before considering any change to the law in respect of the rights of cohabitants on relationship breakdown.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10324>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10325>

#### **Counter-terrorism: Higher Education**

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour)** [9649] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the statutory guidance entitled Prevent duty guidance: for higher education institutions in England and Wales (2015), updated on 31 December 2023,

what assessment he has made of the potential impact of that guidance on (a) academic research, (b) the number of students applying to higher education institutions, (c) students' experience in higher education, (d) freedom of speech and (e) people with protected characteristics.

**Tom Tugendhat:** The updated and refreshed guidance places no additional burdens on the education sector. There are no new requirements as a result of the refresh or additional responsibilities for the sector. The guidance reinforces that settings should understand their Prevent duty requirements as part of their wider safeguarding and welfare responsibilities.

The Prevent duty should not limit academic research but encourage debate, challenge ideas and advance knowledge on contentious topics. The government has legislated to ensure that universities in England are a place where academics, students and visiting speakers can express a diverse range of views without fear of repercussion.

In the most recent published assessment by the Office for Students (OfS) on the implementation of the Prevent programme in the English higher education sector in 2019, they found no cause for concern that free speech was being undermined by Prevent in external speakers' policies and their implementation. The assessment is available here:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/prevent-review-meetings-programme-findings/>

Institutions should encourage students to respect other people with particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. Institutions should also be mindful of their commitments to protecting freedom of speech, provided that the speech is lawful.

A full Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken in line with responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Home Office commissioned an independent research agency to conduct in-depth research with frontline staff, particularly those with Prevent-specific responsibilities, across the key sectors of education, healthcare, local authorities, police and prisons & probation, to make sure that the new guidance is as robust as possible. This consultation covered England and Wales.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/9649>

*The guidance referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance-england-scotland-and-wales-2015/prevent-duty-guidance-for-higher-education-institutions-in-england-and-wales-2015>

*The Equality Impact Assessment referred to above can be read at*

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a796663e5274a3864fd6af9/prevent-review-eia.pdf>

## Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

### **Far-right organiser found guilty of intent to stir up racial hatred through distribution of stickers**

A far-right activist who set up an online library of racist stickers for supporters to download and put up in their area has been convicted.

Samuel Melia, 34, a regional organiser for right-wing organisation Patriotic Alternative, distributed the printable stickers via an online channel with the intent of stirring up racial hatred. Melia set up a group called the Hundred Handers on the social media platform Telegram, which had more than 3,500 subscribers, and members were able to download and then print the stickers. ...

Following a subsequent search of Melia's home, police discovered a book by Oswald Moseley, who founded the British Union of Fascists, a poster of Adolf Hitler and a Nazi emblem.

The prosecution said these were key signs of Melia's ideology and underpinned his desire to spread his racist views in a deliberate manner.

On Melia's digital devices, officers were able to download the archive of more than 200 Hundred Handers stickers, and photographs revealing the stickers had been placed at various locations around the UK. ...

Among further Telegram posts and chats recovered were messages which made clear that Melia expected the stickers to be displayed in public places, and that he had placed stickers in such places himself. ...

Nick Price, head of the CPS Special Crime and Counter Terrorism Division, said: "Melia was perfectly aware that the stickers he published on his Telegram channel were being downloaded and then stuck up in public places around the country.

"He also knew full well the impact these racially inflammatory stickers were having, and by attempting to remain anonymous, sought to protect himself and others from investigation.

"He was very deliberate in the manner he wanted to spread his messages of racial hatred, and online messages recovered made it clear that he knew these stickers were being displayed in public and causing damage to public property.

"It is illegal to publish such material intending to stir up racial hatred towards others, and the CPS will not hesitate to bring prosecutions against those who break the law in this way."

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/far-right-organiser-found-guilty-intent-stir-racial-hatred-through-distribution-stickers>

TOP

## Holocaust

**See also the Westminster Hall debate "International Human Rights Abuses: UK Response" that is included in the Israel section below.**

### House of Commons Oral Answers

#### Prime Minister's Questions

**col 288 The Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak):** ... this afternoon I shall be meeting the extraordinary 100-year-old holocaust survivor Lily Ebert. Lily promised that, if she survived Auschwitz, she would tell the world the truth of what happened. Never has such a promise been so profoundly fulfilled. As we prepare to mark Holocaust Memorial Day on Saturday, I am sure the whole House will join me in reaffirming our promise to Lily that we will never forget the holocaust and we will carry forward her life's work for generations to come.

**col 289 Keir Starmer (Labour):** ... Can I join the Prime Minister ... in his comments about Holocaust Memorial Day? "Never again" must be said more defiantly this year, as it is said every year. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-24/debates/7E61064D-D3AF-4AB7-AD75-6D7E193174F9/Engagements#contribution-56B67E1B-A5A5-4243-9832-CA8554E9CDAE>

#### Prime Minister's Questions

**Nicola Richards (Conservative):** Mr Speaker, may I start by thanking you for commissioning the Holocaust Educational Trust's exhibition in Portcullis House, and for

your unwavering personal commitment to holocaust remembrance? As we approach Holocaust Memorial Day, will the Prime Minister join me in commending the Holocaust Educational Trust for its important work, particularly its work with holocaust survivors who, despite living through the darkest moment in human history, continue to share their testimony in the hope of ensuring “Never again.” In the face of the appalling rise in antisemitism that we see on the streets of Britain, will my right hon. Friend join me in encouraging all Members to sign the book of commitment and stand up against antisemitism?

**The Prime Minister:** I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust for its brilliant work, and I thank her for all her work on this issue. I will be signing the book of commitment this afternoon, during my meeting with Lily Ebert, and I encourage Members on both sides of the House to do the same and to reaffirm our shared determination to ensure that the holocaust is never forgotten, and to defeat the resurgence of antisemitism and all forms of hatred in our country.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-24/debates/7E61064D-D3AF-4AB7-AD75-6D7E193174F9/Engagements#contribution-5131AB18-47EE-4ED3-8D0C-1C4466891F14>

## House of Commons Written Answers

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

### **National Holocaust Memorial Centre and Learning Service**

**Peter Bottomley (Conservative)** [9724] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will publish the redacted Holocaust Memorial material subject to the freedom of information request by Dorian Gerhold in December 2018.

**Peter Bottomley (Conservative)** [9985] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will (a) publish a list of the freedom of information requests relating to the proposed Holocaust Memorial and associated learning centre that (i) his Department has not yet responded to and (ii) are waiting for adjudication by the Information Commissioner and (b) order his Department to release all the information requested.

**Simon Hoare:** No Freedom of Information requests relating to the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre are awaiting a response from the Department. A letter from the Information Commissioner about the Department’s handling of a previous request was received on 18 January 2024 and will receive a response shortly.

A great deal of information about the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre has been published as part of the planning application. When Freedom of Information requests have sought information which falls within statutory exemptions, careful consideration is given and the appropriate public interest tests are applied. Some material requested by Doran Gerhold in December 2018 was withheld on this basis: the Information Commissioner and the First Tier Tribunal have each, twice, upheld the Department’s approach.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-16/9724>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/9985>

*The 2018 FoI request referred to above is not currently available online.*

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

### **National Holocaust Memorial Centre and Learning Service**

**Peter Bottomley (Conservative)** [9986] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, when (a) he, (b) Ministers in his Department and (c) officials in his Department last met the architect named as leading the design team for the new



national landmark next to the Houses of Parliament in the press notice issued by the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation and the Cabinet Office published on 24 October 2017.

**Peter Bottomley (Conservative)** [9987] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, when (a) he, (b) Ministers in his Department and (c) officials in his Department last met the architect named as leading the design team for the new national landmark next to the Houses of Parliament in the press notice issued by the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation and the Cabinet Office published on 24 October 2017.

**Simon Hoare:** There have been no officials meetings with ministers from this department. Officials last met on 21 February 2023.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/9986>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/9987>

*The press notice referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/adjaye-associates-and-ron-arad-architects-win-uk-holocaust-memorial-international-design-competition>

## Holocaust Memorial Bill Committee

### Petitions against the Bill: 23 January 2024

#### **Buxton Family and Thomas Fowell Buxton Society [Petitioners]. Submissions by Mr Doctor**

**4 Mr Doctor KC:** ... I am Brian Doctor KC and I appear here on behalf of four groups of petitioners ...

**9** I begin, I hope, by fairly summarising [Mr Katkowski's] argument as it was put to you. He says, 'What is this Bill about? It is to remove a statutory obstruction, which stands in the way of delivering the memorial and learning centre that the Secretary of State proposes in Victoria Tower Gardens'. ...

**10** He says ...

**11** ... 'To the extent that any of the petitioners either have or will propose any form of amendment to the Bill that is in front of you, if the result of any such amendments would mean that there would still be a statutory obstruction to building the proposed memorial and learning centre in Victoria Tower Gardens, obviously that would defeat the whole principle of the Bill', he said.

**12** The result is that everything mentioned in the petitions and by the witnesses is, effectively, outside the scope of the Bill and is a matter for the planning process, because they all go to whether or not planning permission should be granted and that, he says, is in the hands of the relevant Minister ...

**13** The result of this argument is not just that there is nothing in the petitions which are really within the scope of the permitted inquiry by this Committee; the effect of this approach is that there is nothing which the Committee could consider, nothing, because any suggestion for any amendment of the Bill would be out of scope. ...

**16** Mr Katkowski often refers to the principle of the Bill, or the instruction, by using the words, 'the Holocaust memorial and learning centre'. So does his instructing solicitors' recent letter ...

**17** ... 'We are writing to you on behalf of the promoter of the Bill to clarify two matters ... You asked why Victoria Tower Gardens is not referred to on the face of the Bill. Mr Katkowski replied that the primary purpose of the Bill is to remove a legal obstruction ... to the building of the Holocaust memorial and learning centre, which is done by clause 2, rather than to authorise its construction. That obstruction is specific to Victoria Tower Gardens rather than any other location. ...

**19** With that summary of the argument against us, we turn to the principle of the Bill itself and test, against the actual principle of the Bill and the meaning of the instruction ... The

place to start, of course, is the wording of section 1 of the Bill ... The title is, 'Expenditure relating to a Holocaust memorial and learning centre'. 'The Secretary of State may incur expenditure for or in connection with the construction on, over or under any land of (i) a memorial commemorating the victims of the Holocaust; and (ii) a centre for learning relating to the memorial', by carrying out work and so on, and the use and operation of the memorial and centre for learning. In that sentence, it means the one that the Bill authorises.

**20** It seems clear enough from the plain English meaning of the words that what is authorised is not the Secretary of State's Holocaust memorial and learning centre, which has been the subject of a planning application, but indeed, as you would expect, a Holocaust memorial and a learning centre that comes eventually to be built with public funds. ...

**21** We then move to section 2, which ... is aimed at saying that if a memorial or a learning centre is put or placed by the Secretary of State, or proposed to be built by the Secretary of State, in Victoria Tower Gardens, no one will be able to raise the fact that it is contrary to, or illegal under, the 1900 Act.

**22** The Bill does not require the building to be built in Victoria Tower Gardens; it is simply providing for the possibility ... that it would be built. Either the memorial or the learning centre might be built in Victoria Tower Gardens and, if that goes ahead, then ... the promoters will not be troubled any longer, by section 8(1) and 8 of the 1900 Act. ... But as Mr Katkowski was himself at pains to state, the Bill does not authorise the building of 'a' or even 'the' Holocaust memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens. ...

**23** Now, I turn to ... the instruction of the House to this Select Committee. ...

**24** ... There are two principles in this Bill. ... 'The Secretary of State' – this is principle 1 – 'may incur expenditure for or in connection with (i) a memorial commemorating the victims of the Holocaust, and (ii) a centre for learning relating to the memorial'. ... It does not refer to 'the' memorial and it does not refer to Victoria Tower Gardens. ...

**25** The second principle of the Bill, set out in paragraph 2(b), section 8(1) and 8 of the 1900 Act, 'are not to prevent, restrict or otherwise affect the construction, use, operation' and so on 'of such a memorial and centre for learning at Victoria Tower Gardens in the City of Westminster'. So insofar as the Secretary of State decides eventually to build them, one or both, in the gardens, it is a principle of the Bill that section 1 and 8 will no longer be able to be used by anybody to argue that they are inconsistent with the aims of the 1900 Act. ...

**28** It is not the location which cannot be questioned; it is the fact of construction, the fact that public money is going to be spent on these two ideas, these two memorials, these two items. That is what the Committee cannot consider and, on this, the petitioners I represent and, as far as I am aware, all the others, none of them challenge that principle. ...

**29** The second item which the House directs the Committee not to consider or hear petitions about is 'whether or not planning permission, and all other necessary consents, should be given for the memorial and centre of learning or the terms and conditions on which they should be given'. ...

**32** ... We are going to seek to persuade the Select Committee to amend the Bill by inserting a clause ... '1(a) Any centre for learning relating to the memorial shall not be built in or at or under the Victoria Tower Gardens'. In other words, the petitioners I represent are not seeking to persuade you where the Holocaust memorial should be placed. They are seeking to persuade you to amend the Bill so that the Secretary of State does not have the option to place the learning centre in Victoria Tower Gardens ...

**36** Now an important point is that not only is the argument I have put forward to you consistent with the plain wording of the Bill, consistent with the wording and meaning of the instruction; it is also completely consonant with the statements that the Secretary of State and the Minister made to the House before it came to give this instruction. ... Edward Leigh asked the question during the debate, 'It is accepted that there is a principle to

memorial, so what about my point on having an overground memorial – like other memorials – but not an underground learning centre. Will the Committee still be able to consider such a detail?’ Ms Buchan was absolutely clear. The Committee can consider the extent and any conditions on the memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens so, yes, that can be considered.

**37** ... Sir Peter Bottomley asked him, ‘I ask this explicitly: can either the Secretary of State or the Minister stand up and tell me now that, if someone wants to argue in front of the Committee that it would be better to have the basement box somewhere else and just have the memorial, would that petition potentially be heard by the Committee?’ Mr Gove said, ‘I think it would be a matter for the Committee’ ...

**53** No attempt ... has been made to show what extra value would be contributed to the educational effect of the Holocaust galleries at the Imperial War Museum by an exhibition centre under the Holocaust memorial ... The planning inspector placed considerable weight on ‘achieving a memorial within the lifetime of survivors, so seeking to honour the living as well as the dead, has a resounding moral importance that can legitimately, in my view, be considered a material consideration and a public benefit of great importance, meriting considerable weight in the planning balance in this case’.

**54** Given the planned opening of the Secretary of State’s current plan in apparently 2028, this benefit, this material consideration, must be somewhat in doubt. ...

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**67 Mr Buxton [Petitioner]:** ... My name is Richard Buxton. I am the person who has submitted the petition here on behalf of myself and other members of the Buxton family and also for the Thomas Fowell Buxton Society ...

**71** ... the choice of Victoria Tower Gardens was one that was made, effectively, without consultation. ...

**75** But ... the Government effectively said that it thought it was doing something that would enhance – ‘and a sensitive proposal which would enhance Victoria Tower Gardens’ and, of course, what actually happened was that even the inspector found that it would be harmful to it and, in particular to the Buxton memorial. ...

**79** [The transcript of the public inquiry] sets out Mr Balls describing how Victoria Tower Gardens was chosen. ...

**80** ... it might have been Mr Pickles himself, he says – who suggested, ‘Why don’t we investigate whether the learning centre could be co-located underneath the building?’ And he says, ‘As you can imagine, all the people with building experience said that was a challenge’. And then, I emphasise the words, ‘If this can be done, that’s what we want’ ... And then very shortly afterwards, without apparently any further investigation, the Prime Minister announced that that was what was going to happen. ...

**82** ... Mr Meyric Lewis [cross-examining] on behalf of people at the inquiry ... started to ask about, ‘Well, what harm are these things going to cause to the gardens?’ And it appears ... that Lord Pickles said, ‘I suspect a lot of things weren’t considered, such as’ – and this is an extraordinary justification – ‘our happiness at the prospect of a memorial and learning centre on the site’.

**83** Then ... Mr Lewis starts saying, ‘Where is this documentation? Where is the evidence justifying this?’ And then Lord Pickles said, ‘Well, I don’t recall such a document’. And then Mr Lewis says, ‘Well, let it be produced for the inquiry. And then Lord Pickles says, ‘Well, I’m not sure if it did exist at all’. ...

**84** So ... whether it is Lord Pickles or Mr Balls ... it was only an idea and it was put forward without any foundation whatsoever. It may have been an inspired idea; it may have been a clever idea; but it turns out, as you will hear from other petitioners and myself, to have been totally unacceptable. But for some reason, we do not know what, the Secretary of State has never stepped back and considered whether it was a sensible idea. Instead, he has persisted with something that just will not work and caused everyone to argue ever since. He could have so easily got on with this project without the co-location. ...



**86** Moving on to my family's specific position, we have an unusual and direct interest in the matter because the proposals will directly affect the setting of the Buxton memorial fountain. ... this is not just to my ancestor but to other distinguished people, collectively, who campaigned for the abolition of the slave trade and, eventually, in 1883, the abolition of slavery and Buxton was the person who pushed that Bill through Parliament. ...

**87** To be clear, we, that is the family, do not own the monument. It is the nation's monument but we do regard it with a certain amount of reverence. ...

**88** But more important than the family interest, it will eclipse an important reminder to the evils of slavery and an example to others, including parliamentarians, to follow the brave people like Wilberforce, Clarkson and others in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**89** The memorial is a Grade II\* listed building and it is common ground that the proposal will cause harm to its setting. ...

**90** ... the inspector recognises 'that safeguarding the setting of the existing structure while delivering the Holocaust memorial to its design brief is a difficult challenge ... It would be impossible to escape the sense that the existing structure's open setting would be materially compromised by the presence of the UK HMLC'.

**91** So that is the inspector's conclusion. He says there will be harm to the setting of the Buxton memorial. ...

**99** To re-emphasise, we don't object to a memorial in principle but whatever there is, it must fit the location. The current proposals simply do not. ...

**100** ... if the memorial and learning centre really did have to be built together, they should be scaled down, or perhaps be moved northwards. ...

**102** I would say that, even as the learning centre stands, it's going to be far, far too small to be meaningful, as is obvious from a visit to the Holocaust galleries at the IWM. As planned, it could be no more than a tiny token to the Holocaust. ...

**103** I suppose another possibility ... would be to turn the whole thing round so that the view of the Buxton memorial would only be interrupted by the tapering of the mound over the learning centre. Indeed, Parliament would have a more direct view of the Holocaust memorial, which is often stated to be behind the idea of construction in Victoria Tower Gardens anyway. ...

**106** There is no reason why an appropriate Holocaust memorial could not exist with a memorial to antislavery. Whether or not a learning centre could be is a matter for the engineers and not me but they, I think, under the current proposals, just won't work. All those points would get even more emphasis if, as expected, there would be hordes of people visiting the Holocaust memorial along with the learning centre, effectively as a tourist destination.

**107** And finally, can it be right that this construction project with its vast excavation should mean excluding people virtually entirely from Victoria Tower Gardens, including from appreciating the Buxton memorial, for several years? ...

**133 Mr Katkowski KC [for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities]:** ... So you would wish the Committee to amend the Bill so that any learning centre shall not be built at Victoria Tower Gardens.

**134 Mr Buxton:** That would be my first preference but, as a second preference, I think another amendment would be appropriate. ...

**136 Mr Katkowski KC:** ... I simply do not understand how that is not four square contrary to the instruction given to the Committee because, were you to prohibit any learning centre – any learning centre – being built at Victoria Tower Gardens, that patently would undermine the principle of the Bill, which is to clear an obstruction which stands in the way of building a learning centre at Victoria Tower Gardens. ...

**143 Mr Buxton:** I don't believe that that is the case ...

**151 Mr Katkowski KC:** ... the amendment that he, Mr Buxton, wishes ...

**157 Mr Buxton:** 'Shall not cause any degree of harm either actual or to the setting of any

memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens'. ...

**159** ... the concept ... is that any memorial should not cause any harm to the setting of any other memorial. ...

**162 Mr Katkowski KC:** ... let's just understand the consequence of that ... the inspector found that the proposed Holocaust memorial and learning centre would cause some harm to the setting of the Buxton memorial. That was one of his conclusions, wasn't it?

**163 Mr Buxton:** Yes ...

**164 Mr Katkowski KC:** ... in the planning world, any harm that is caused needs to be weighed against any benefits which might arise, and in this particular case, the inspector weighed the harm to the setting of the Buxton memorial against what he regarded as the benefits of the proposal, didn't he?

**165 Mr Buxton:** Yes.

**166 Mr Katkowski KC:** ... and as we know the inspector concluded that the benefits outweighed the harm, amongst other things, to the setting of the Buxton memorial, even though as he said several times over – and you've given the Committee the relevant quotes yourself – he attached considerable importance and weight to the harm to the setting of the Buxton memorial, didn't he?

**167 Mr Buxton:** Yes.

**168 Mr Katkowski KC:** Now, the effect of your amendment would be to block the building of the memorial and learning centre that the Secretary of State proposes, because it's been found that it would cause some harm to the setting of the Buxton memorial. ... You would, in effect, cheat the planning system of its ability to weigh harms against benefits, wouldn't you? ...

**170 Mr Buxton:** What I am suggesting here ... is perfectly possible, providing the Secretary of State rethinks his proposals, to put a Holocaust memorial and possibly a learning centre, but it would have to be some redesign. He's got to have a rethink about it so that it doesn't cause harm. So it is not blocking the proposal for a Holocaust memorial and even with a learning centre. It's just saying that the Secretary of State's got to put his thinking hat on and come up with some other designs.

**171 Mr Katkowski KC:** ... The consequence of your amendment would be to block the memorial and learning centre which the Secretary of State has been promoting for a number of years.

**172 Mr Buxton:** Yes, and I believe it should.

**173 Mr Katkowski KC:** ... a consequence, therefore, would be that you would render the planning process meaningless because it would be impossible for any planning permission for the memorial and learning centre that we propose – we, the Secretary of State propose – to be built in Victoria Tower Gardens.

**174 Mr Buxton:** As I have said, the Secretary of State could rethink his proposal so that it could be built in Victoria Tower Gardens. I have suggested a couple of ways that occurred to me that, with some clever thought, that might be able to happen. ...

**192 Keir Mather (Labour):** ... Mr Buxton. Could I just ask you quickly to explain how you believe there could be circumstances in which the construction of a memorial doesn't contravene the 1900 Act, in that in some regard it would surely prevent access to the gardens for the public, to some extent, during its construction?

**195 Mr Buxton:** Well, I'd have thought if you put up ... a memorial comparable in size to the Buxton memorial, yes of course, it would take up a couple of months of construction work, of building a plinth or something like that. I don't think in terms of access anybody would complain. I think what people are complaining about, and I would say the same, is that you're having this very, very precious park ... and it's going to be excluded to the public for many years as a result of this enormous excavation that is proposed for the learning centre. ...

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**216 Mr Fannon [Petitioner and Witness]:** The Thomas Fowell Buxton Society was inaugurated in 2011 ...

**222** We have an interest in the Buxton memorial fountain because I think it is probably the only memorial in this country which actually celebrates Britain's role in the abolition of slavery. Not only in the British Empire but afterwards, the Government spent a lot of money, something like £20 million, to assist eradicating slavery around the world. ...

**223** So this memorial is more than the people whose names are there. There are lots of people who actually worked to achieve the emancipation. Buxton's team in Parliament were supported by the Anti-Slavery Society, and there are lots of people, people like Zachary MacAulay, for example, and more names come out as we do more research. ...

**226** So I look at the whole thing as a celebration of British people because British people, once they knew about slavery, they reacted, they made these petitions and they supported the antislavery movement and achieved success. So I think therefore that the Buxton memorial fountain is very important and should not be overshadowed by this proposed Holocaust memorial.

**227** It's been said that, 'Oh, they will complement each other' but that's nonsense. It's like an elephant complementing a mouse or something. They just don't fit. They're different styles. They're different everything and there's not enough space. ...

**228** So my case really is that this is very precious because it's the only one, as far as I can see, in the country. Perhaps we need a learning centre with the Buxton memorial. ....

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**276 The Chair (John Stevenson, Conservative):** ... [Mr Doctor,] effectively, your amendment, you're trying to decouple the memorial from the learning centre.

**277 Mr Doctor KC:** What I'm trying to do is to go back to what the commission and the foundation originally said, which was that there would be a memorial and there would be a related learning centre close by or co-located, or words to that effect. ...

It might be very nearby; it doesn't decouple it because it would certainly –

**280 The Chair:** It decouples it from the purposes of Victoria Tower Gardens.

**281 Mr Doctor KC:** Yes, because it would not be in Victoria Tower Gardens but it could still be related to it. That's a perfectly ordinary meaning of the word 'related to'. It doesn't mean 'on top of'. ...

**282 The Chair:** But by decoupling, you are interpreting the instruction from the House of Commons in a particular way.

**283 Mr Doctor KC:** With respect, no because the House of Commons is saying that the money can be spent on both of them but it doesn't say that they have to be in the same place. It doesn't say that, nor does the instruction. It just says 'wherever they are'. They could be one block away.

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**288 Mr Katkowski KC:** The first point really is just to say, for the record, you understand that the promoter's position is that the amendments put forward this afternoon by the petitioners this afternoon are out of scope; they're not amendments that you could take forward. And the reason that I say obviously relates to the instruction itself.

**289** ... the instruction is crystal clear and I want to add to that that, as you will very well understand, nothing that's said during the course of the debate leading up to the instruction in any way changes the plain meaning and effect of the instruction itself. ...

**291** I do want to add to all of this, though, that there is no need for an instruction to be given to a Committee of this nature, a Committee which is a Select Committee examining a hybrid Bill. Even without an instruction, the fundamental principle which applies to this very form of Committee is that the Committee cannot do anything which will be destructive

of the public policy and principle which underpins the Bill in question. The instruction is explaining that in crystal clear terms, but even without an instruction, it would never have been within your scope to, in any way, undermine or destroy the public policy which underpins the Bill.

**292** Now, in relation to both the instruction and that fundamental principle of parliamentary practice, if you look at the Bill and the two clauses which have been referred to, the first clause and the second clause are very different. The first clause would authorise the expenditure of money by the Secretary of State on a memorial and learning centre anywhere in England and Wales – anywhere, including Victoria Tower Gardens.

**293** The second clause is quite different. The second clause is very, very geographically specific because the second clause seeks to remove an obstruction to building a – and ‘a’ obviously includes ‘the’ – memorial and learning centre in a particular place, and the particular place is Victoria Tower Gardens, so this is the only location which is subject to obstruction in the London Country Council (Improvements) Act 1900, section 8. ...

**294** ... anything which would lead by way of an amendment to continuing an obstruction on building the memorial and learning centre – ‘a’, including ‘the’, memorial and learning centre – in Victoria Tower Gardens would fundamentally run against the public policy and principle of clause 2.

**295** ... At paragraph 8 of the explanatory notes, it says, ‘The Government intends to disapply the relevant sections of the 1900 Act so that they do not constitute an obstacle to construction and operation of the Holocaust memorial and learning centre’. I mean, it couldn’t be clearer. ...

**296** ... amongst the things you are here to do, you are not here to, in any way, undermine the very purpose of the Bill as set out in paragraph 8 of the explanatory notes.

**297** That’s not to say that you don’t have a meaningful purpose and role. ...

**300** So, with that said, and with those points made, I maintain the position of the promoter that the specific amendments which are put forward by these petitioners are patently outside the scope of the business of this Committee. ...

**301** And the amendment put forward by Mr Buxton, that is to say that you can have a memorial and learning centre, but it mustn’t cause any harm to the setting of it, or indeed any other memorial, again, the consequence of that would mean that the promoter could not build the particular memorial and learning centre which the Secretary of State and this Government, and previous Governments, have proposed for a number of years, because as we know from the record, it’s been found that the Holocaust memorial would cause some harm to the setting of the Buxton memorial.

**302** So if you were to write into the Bill that you can’t cause such harm, then you would defeat the principle of the Bill and you would defeat and cheat the planning system ... So, again, that proposal is not within scope either. ...

**304 The Chair:** ... I presume from the promoter’s perspective, you see the memorial and the learning centre to be inextricably linked.

**305 Mr Katkowski KC:** Indeed so, yes. ...

**307 The Chair:** One other issue which I think the Committee has had a degree of interest in is just on the consultation about the site in 2016 and the decision on 13 January.

**309** Could you let us know what consultation was held, if any, at around that time?

**310 Mr Katkowski KC:** ... it was a major topic of discussion at the planning inquiry – ‘Well, how on earth did the proposers of the project land their project at Victoria Tower Gardens?’ ... Victoria Tower Gardens came very late in the day, at the end of the process. ...

**312** We will double check this, but to my memory and recollection, there wasn’t specific consultation at that stage, that is to say when it was decided by the foundation, and then the Government of the day adopted the proposal, that the location should be Victoria

Tower Gardens. To my memory, there wasn't a stage where the Government said, 'We're going to consult the public about this particular location'. What happened was that that consultation, in effect, took place through the planning application process. ...

**313 The Chair:** ... Could you put that in writing? ...

**315** And also define what that consultation during the planning process was. ...

**317** The timelines and exactly the nature of that consultation would be grand.

**318 Mr Katkowski KC:** ... Of course. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14134/html/>

## UK Parliament Early Day Motion

**Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat) [320] Holocaust Memorial Day 2024** – That this House marks Holocaust Memorial Day, occurring on 27th January 2024; acknowledges that the date coincides with the 79th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi concentration camp; commemorates every victim of Nazi persecution, including the 6 million Jewish people who were murdered during the Holocaust; remembers the victims of the genocides which followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur; notes this year's theme of the 'Fragility of Freedom', which brings into focus that our freedom should never be taken for granted; commends the work of organisations like the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust in raising awareness of the horrors of genocide; further notes with concern the record highs of antisemitism in the UK and around the world; supports the Community Security Trust in their efforts to tackle antisemitism and to protect the Jewish community; welcomes the creation of a permanent National Holocaust Memorial in central London; acknowledges that prejudice and hatred persists in the UK today, including a disturbing rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia, and we all must work together to stamp it out; and calls on all Members of the House to work together to ensure that the horrors of the Holocaust are always understood and never repeated.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61807>

## House of Commons Library Briefing

**General debate on Holocaust Memorial Day 2024**

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2024-0016/CDP-2024-0016.pdf>

## Scottish Parliament Debate

### Holocaust Memorial Day 2024

**12.47 Paul O'Kane (Labour):** ... Now, as ever, it remains incredibly important to come together to pause, reflect and remember the six million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis, alongside millions of others, including Roma and Sinti people, disabled people and LGBT people. We also call to mind the millions of others who lived through and survived the Holocaust but lost everything—family, dignity, health and home.

Now, as in years gone by, we recommit ourselves and our efforts to the statement, "Never again", but we know that, tragically, since the Holocaust, humanity has not lived up to that statement in many places across the globe, including Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. We remember those people today, too.

"Never again" is a phrase that should apply not only to genocide but to the hate and



persecution that surround the horrific acts of mass murder that we have seen. The theme developed by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for this year's commemorations is "Fragility of Freedom". The horrors of the Holocaust—indeed, the horrors of most genocides in humanity's collective history—do not come from nowhere. Acts of targeted mass murder are preceded by an erosion of freedoms in order to control populations and make the terrors that follow easier to perpetrate.

In the lead-up to the Holocaust, Jews and other groups that were targeted by the Nazis had many of their freedoms and rights restricted and removed. The freedom to study, work and live wherever they wanted was restricted. Jews were removed from educational establishments, had their businesses attacked and destroyed and were forced into ghettos. The freedoms of self-identity, religion and marriage were limited, as Jews became a defined class for discrimination under the Nuremberg laws, which restricted whom they could marry. The freedom to engage in leisure and other activities was also restricted, as Jews were banned from cinemas, theatres and sports facilities. ...

Ultimately, the Holocaust and other crimes of genocide result in the loss of that fundamental freedom—the freedom to live. Now more than ever, it is important for survivors and people born after the Holocaust and other genocides to recognise that, just because the atrocities have stopped and society begins to normalise, freedom does not always fully return, and survivors have to live with the reality of what they have experienced. ...

For those who have lived through such times, freedom as it once was does not fully return. People lose livelihoods and homes. They often have no choice but to move to new countries, as so many Jewish people have done. People are restricted by the mental and physical trauma of what they have experienced. ...

The legacy of hate hurts not just those who survived but members of persecuted groups who are born long after. In the context of the Holocaust, Jews in our communities ... still have to face the vile words and actions of antisemitism and Holocaust denialism. For many, the lessons of the Holocaust—the ways in which Jews and others were victimised, othered and expelled—have still not been learned.

It is incumbent on us all, as representatives of the people of Scotland in this Parliament, to stand up and to recommit to combating antisemitism, racism, hatred and attacks on people's freedoms without equivocation. ...

**12.54 Ivan McKee (SNP):** ... About 20 years ago, my wife and I visited Oswiecim in the south of Poland—the site that we know in English as Auschwitz. We took my teenage daughter there to witness the inhumanity that occurred on that site. No one could fail to be moved by the memorials and the industrial scale of the slaughter that took place there and elsewhere, not just in concentration camps but in towns and villages across Europe—events that resulted in the murder of 6 million Jews and millions from other groups in horrific circumstances.

The horrific events of the Holocaust are the most significant example of genocide in modern times, but the act of genocide is, unfortunately, nothing new in human history, and it continues to the present day. It has been estimated that 43 genocides could have occurred between 1956 and 2016, resulting in perhaps 50 million deaths. On this Holocaust memorial day, it is important that we recognise genocides that have taken place in Rwanda, Darfur, Cambodia and, here in Europe, Bosnia in the 1990s. ...

Commemoration means nothing if we do not truly learn lessons and take steps to stand against genocide, wherever it occurs. That is the primary lesson. It can happen anywhere, to any group. ...

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide ...

The International Court of Justice has a key role to play in assessing cases that might constitute the crime of genocide, and it continues that important work to this day.

In combating genocide, we must always be aware of how it starts. Dehumanising language,

comparing whole groups of people to animals and calling for extermination, mass slaughter or collective punishment are signs that we need to be alert to, and we need to expose and combat such behaviour whenever it arises. In Rwanda, the Tutsi people were described as cockroaches. More recently, ethnic groups have been described as human animals. Incitement to genocide is recognised as a separate crime under international law—a crime that does not require genocide to have taken place to be prosecutable. Those who call for the wholesale destruction of a people, their forcible transfer or collective punishment are guilty of that crime. ...

Nothing is more important than the need to expose and root out the signs that lead to genocide. Preventing the recurrence of the Holocaust begins with an understanding that it can happen to any group, anywhere. ...

A recognition that people of any ethnic group are not animals is a good place to start.

**12.59 Jackson Carlaw (Conservative):** ... In “A Village in the Third Reich”—a book that I commend to everybody—you can read about the village of Oberstdorf, one of the world’s first skiing tourist resorts, which benefited from massive international tourism, including Jewish tourism, and about how an insidious little clique in the village imposed the will of the Nazis to ban the Jewish community. There was subtle resistance throughout, but people there found themselves to be persecuted, arrested or shot for any collaboration or effort to save Jewish people. The fragility of freedom. ...

Primo Levi said: “It happened, therefore it can happen again.”

The fragility of freedom. ...

**13.04 Michael Marra (Labour):** ... The Holocaust is history’s greatest horror. It was both the confluence of ancient hatred and industrial modernity and the fullest expression of nationalism, which was given form by an efficient and ruthless state that tore down the doors of family, faith and fraternity and replaced the human dignity of the soul with collated lists of category, of statistics and of method and calculated means. That project begat the most notorious statistic of all—6 million dead.

In 1949, Theodor Adorno said: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”

Where could beauty be found in a world that is capable of such horror? Was it not trite to find form? Was it not whimsy to seek prose? ...

It was in Amis’s “The Zone of Interest” that I first encountered this quote from W G Sebald on the Holocaust: “No serious person ever thinks of anything else.”

Amis wrote of the exceptionalism of the Third Reich: it is our duty as elected politicians to see glimpses of it everywhere. Does our state stray too far? Will artificial intelligence make racism ever more efficient? Is our justice blind? Are we truly free?

On Tuesday night in this Parliament, the German consul general recalled the first expulsion of the Jewish Poles in 1938, in what is known as the Polenaktion. She was discharging the most solemn duty of the German state. She also told us of the hundreds of thousands of Germans who, in recent days, had gone on to the streets of their cities and towns to stand in the face of rising fascism, the far right, nationalism, ethnic hatred and economic alienation, and of time looping and history repeating itself. Never again. Never again.

We speak today in the livid aftermath of the largest and most deadly assault on Jews since the Holocaust. On 7 October, Hamas slaughtered the innocent and raped and tortured 1,269 Jews because they were Jews. It did so in the hopeful knowledge of the horror that would be visited upon innocent Palestinian people.

History tells us that we cannot give up on peace, no matter how forlorn or how remote a prospect that may feel. That is our remembrance.

**13.09 Ross Greer (Green):** ... We are all familiar with how the Nazis went about systematically dehumanising Jews, Slavic people, Roma, LGBT people, disabled people and others, and with the importance of media support to their success in doing that ...

We are a century on from the start of the Nazis’ rise to power, but have we really learned the lessons of the darkest period in human history? A century ago, the owner of *The Daily*

*Mail* aligned himself with Hitler and ran the headline, “Hurrah for the blackshirts”. ...

Today, we see dehumanising language being used against the desperate and vulnerable people who are crossing the English Channel, against trans people, against Palestinians and against other marginalised groups.

The Holocaust did not start with gas chambers, the Rwandan genocide did not start with machete-wielding gangs, and the Bosnian genocide did not start with the massacre at Srebrenica. They started with dehumanising language and misinformation, with extremists pushing the limits of debate, and with efforts made to suppress the voices of the groups that were being targeted. Can we really say that the 21st century United Kingdom is doing all that it can do to live up to the commitment that the Holocaust must never happen again? ...

Across Europe, the far-right surge that appeared to have subsided a few years ago has begun again. ... fascists have just won a shock victory in the Netherlands on a platform that demonises Muslims in exactly the same way as the Nazis’ early platform demonised Jews. Sweden’s centre-right Government is entirely dependent on fascist members to stay in office, and Italy’s Prime Minister leads a party that traces its lineage straight back to Mussolini.

Germany has just been rocked by revelations that senior figures from the AfD party attended a meeting with neo-Nazis that included a presentation on how they could go about deporting people who are not ethnically German ...

When you treat fascism as simply another political view, you have conceded legitimacy that it does not deserve and should never have. Its ideas become an acceptable part of mainstream discussion when inciting genocide is not an acceptable or legitimate point of view, and believing that you can win the argument by giving those people a platform for debate and then challenging them misunderstands the problem.

Fascism is not rational. Fascists and others who advance dangerous and lethal agendas are not interested in winning the debate. They just want to implement their wicked world view ...

Today, we remember the victims of humanity’s worst crime, when 9 million people, including 6 million Jews, were slaughtered in the Holocaust. We must think seriously about how we turn our determination never to allow that to happen again into a practical reality. It is not enough not to be a racist or a fascist; we must all be active anti-racists and anti-fascists. That is the only way in which our statements of “Never again” can truly mean something.

**13.14 Alex Cole-Hamilton (Liberal Democrat):** ... the Nazis engaged in the most horrific and barbaric acts. There was the mechanised slaughter of 9 million people, 6 million of them Jews—a genocide that killed two thirds of Europe’s Jewish population. Entire communities, huge segments of entire races and, indeed, anyone who the Nazis declared to be either deviant or defective were rounded up and shipped to camps such as Auschwitz and Belsen to be murdered. ...

Monsters are real. They might wear business suits or military uniforms, but we see the evidence of their works in the bleaker chapters of human history, and today we mark the darkest chapter of all. The horrors of the Holocaust are a grim and tragic reminder of what can happen when we fail to recognise and challenge those monsters, and when we turn a blind eye to them. Horrific acts of this kind are enabled by the passivity of those with the power and the agency to act and to stop them, but who choose not to.

Elie Wiesel, a survivor of Auschwitz, warns us against that when he tells us: “We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” ...

We should acknowledge that the Nazi regime was made possible only by the blind capitulation of thousands of otherwise normal people. The Nazis were successful at mass murder because they desensitised it, normalised it and buried it under the drudgery of bureaucracy. ...

I have previously told the story of when I spent some time in hospital, and a man in the bed opposite volunteered his belief that the Holocaust was a hoax. In the argument that followed, he revealed that the basis of his position was rooted in the videos that he had seen on YouTube. Challenging antisemitism and Holocaust denial falls to each of us, wherever we find it, as does educating our children and young people about the horrific reality of the genocides that have taken place across our world.

The fact that today we are living among many of the communities that the Holocaust sought to extinguish, and that we stand united across the chamber in our remembrance of those awful events and in our opposition to the twisted ideologies of which they were born, is evidence that the Nazis failed. That sort of darkness will always fail, but only if we stand unflinchingly together, united, and resolute against it.

**13.18 Jackie Dunbar (SNP):** ... When I was younger, I remember thinking of the Holocaust as a one-off tragedy—an act of unspeakable evil, carried out by evil folk, who just kind of disappeared at the end of the war. Over the years—especially the past few years—I have come to realise that the Holocaust and other genocides are at the end of what tends to be a long journey. I have come to realise that the folk who carried out those acts were not always evil—that they were once quite ordinary, and that many went back to living ordinary lives. I have come to realise that saying, “Never again,” is, sadly, just an aspiration rather than the promise that it should be.

I have also come to realise how many challenges the groups that were targeted in the Holocaust continue to face. Can any of us say, hand on heart, that, in the past few months, we have not seen, at home or abroad, any bigotry and discrimination that is aimed at Jews, Gypsy Travellers, those with disabilities, or the LGBT+ community? I cannot say so. I think that those things are becoming more common and, in some circles, are starting to be seen as acceptable. ...

**13.23 Tess White (Conservative):** ... A tragedy is now unfolding in the middle east. Israel has suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas, and Palestinian civilians in Gaza are experiencing a humanitarian disaster. What to say, after 1,200 Israeli men, women and children were slaughtered in 24 hours? Where to begin, after the rising tide of antisemitism that we have witnessed in recent months? Understandably, as we commemorate Holocaust memorial day, we look to the past. The devastating events in Israel and Gaza since October 2023 have shown us that we must also look to the horizon. Experts argue that genocides do not simply happen; they are the culmination of a series of circumstances or events. They begin with the persecution of a particular group of people simply for who they are and escalate to annihilation—of lives, religion and culture. In a diary entry dated Saturday 20 June 1942, Anne Frank wrote: “That is when the trouble started for the Jews. Our freedom was severely restricted by a series of anti-Jewish decrees.”

She listed many restrictions in her everyday life, from having to turn in her bicycle to being forbidden from using swimming pools. She said: “You couldn’t do this and you couldn’t do that, but life went on.” ...

The conflict in the middle east must not become part of the culture wars that are waged on streets and screens. The nuance and complexity of crisis cannot be effaced for social media likes and views. With the rise of antisemitism incidents across the UK, Europe and the US, I worry that we have reached a tipping point—we cannot allow the clock to turn back.

**13.26 Jamie Greene (Conservative):** ... The first point is that, in addition to the 6 million Jews who were exterminated—and that is the word that we should use—the events of world war two led to the victimisation, persecution, torture and death of some 9 million non-Jews as well. It is often described as the era of Holocaust because it extended far beyond the systematic targeting of Jews. Catholics, disabled people, Roma people, gay people, communists and freemasons. I am not Jewish, but I would not have stood a chance.



Indeed, to this day, the forget-me-not badge is worn on the lapels of many a mason across the world in remembrance of those who suffered. ...

Of course, the Nazis saw many people as threats for religious, cultural, ethnic, social, racial, political or sexual reasons, or saw them simply as a burden on society because they failed to sign up to Hitler's growing fascism and violent nationalism. ...

The second and perhaps more pertinent point that I want to make today has already been made—the Holocaust did not happen overnight. “Forget me not” means as much today as it did then, because ... it was a creeping hatred and a series of events that led to mass murder. Of course, Kristallnacht ... kicked off overt mass violence against Jewish people and their businesses, but that was the culmination of many months, if not years, of systematically targeting them. The boycott of their businesses was almost discreet when it started—the gossip columns of newspapers, the caricatures of Jews in satirical cartoons, the verbal abuse in the street and blaming them for things that happened in bygone years or, indeed, faraway places. Then the political rhetoric crept in.

Let us not forget that the Nazis were voted in democratically by their people. ...

Antisemitism is as creeping and dangerous today as it was in 1930s Germany, less than a century ago. Underneath it all, whether it be age-old, medieval, true antisemitism, antisemitism cloaked in modern outrage over other horrific events of war and conflict or simply a wider hatred and othering of those on the margins of society, the sentiment, causes and complacency are the same.

It is a dangerous assertion to believe for just a moment that the Holocaust was a thing of the past. A Holocaust, in some shape or form, could happen again. Forget it not.

**13.31 The Minister for victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** ... The horrors of the Holocaust are a stark reminder of the inhumanity and violence that hatred and prejudice can wreak if left unchallenged. ...

This year's theme for Holocaust memorial day is “Fragility of Freedom”. It reinforces the importance of opposing those who threaten the essential freedoms that underpin our society. As history tells us, genocide begins with the erosion of basic liberties. In Nazi Germany, the Jewish, Roma and Sinti people were initially banned from participating in activities that we take for granted, such as attending places of entertainment and enrolling in academia. As we are painfully aware, those cruel and prejudicial acts sowed the seeds of the mass extermination of millions of people. ...

When we reflect on those tragedies, it is tempting to view them as so abhorrent that we could never possibly allow them to be repeated. We cannot turn a blind eye to the challenges that we face today. We know that there are people whose freedoms are being curtailed and who experience hatred and prejudice because of who they are and the group to which they belong.

That is why the Scottish Government, in our commitment to combating hatred and prejudice, has embarked on an ambitious programme of work. Last November, I spoke at our tackling hate crime and building cohesive communities conference, at which we launched our hate crime strategy delivery plan. The delivery plan shapes how we work in collaboration with our partners to enhance protections for those who are most at risk, while taking meaningful action to prevent hate crime from happening in the first place. ...

It is unacceptable for anybody to live in fear or to be made to feel as if they do not belong. Preventative work that builds strong, respectful and cohesive communities can stop the narratives that foster prejudice from taking hold.

We are clear that there is no place for hatred or prejudice of any kind in Scotland's schools. ...

This following Tuesday, I, along with the First Minister, will be participating in the Holocaust memorial day Scottish ceremony. I commend our partners at the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for their continued efforts in organising the event ...

... while the Nazis began consolidating their power, the German journalist Fritz Gerlich warned: “The worst thing we can do, the absolute worst, is to do nothing”. ...



It is only through remaining unwavering in our opposition to all forms of hate, and in striving to protect freedom at any cost, that we can prevent genocides in the future, and instead build a better world for everybody.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15670&i=133695#ScotParlOR>

## Scottish Parliament Time for Reflection

**Ben Kean (Holocaust Educational Trust):** ... We took part in the trust's "Lessons from Auschwitz" project as pupils from Ross high school in November 2023. As part of the project, we heard from a Holocaust survivor, took part in a one-day trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau and will be sharing what we learned with our school community.

We wanted to take part in the project, because it would give us the opportunity to remember individual stories of the Holocaust. Learning about the Holocaust is vital in understanding how genocide can happen. Walking in the same place that Jewish men, women and children walked to their death allowed us to reflect on what those people were forced to face. That is not an experience that one can get from sitting in a classroom or reading a book. ...

**Mia Williams (Holocaust Educational Trust):** After this experience, we both know that it is incredibly important to share the stories of survivors and the people who tragically lost their lives. In our next steps project, we have chosen to work with younger students and will present a lesson that will make them focus more on stories of Jewish families and who they were before the Holocaust.

This year's theme for Holocaust memorial day is "The Fragility of Freedom". That is important as we still see antisemitism and extremism today, including here in the United Kingdom, especially following the massacre that was perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023.

We are proud to continue the voices of the victims and will strive to do so for many years to come. ...

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15665&i=133627#ScotParlOR>

## Northern Ireland Executive

### **Holocaust Memorial Day 2024: Freedom cannot be taken for granted**

... Nearly 300 people gathered at Belfast City Hall ... to remember the millions of victims and survivors of the Holocaust and those impacted by the horrors of more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

The theme of HMD 2024, 'Fragility of Freedom', highlights how delicate freedom is while remembering that despite this, in every genocide there are those who risk their own freedom to help others, to preserve others' freedom or to stand up to the perpetrator regime.

The Regional Commemoration, hosted by The Executive Office in conjunction with the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and Belfast City Council, heard from Holocaust survivor Dr Alfred Garwood, who spoke movingly about the collective trauma felt by survivors after their freedoms had been stripped away.

Dr Garwood, who along with his family was interned at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp from 1943 - 1945, said: ...

"Being a Holocaust Survivor, later a physician, a psychiatrist and a psychotherapist, having endured the troubled times of the Second World War and the Holocaust it has taught me

to recognise the suffering of communities who have endured generations of conflict. ...”  
Gareth Johnston, The Executive Office’s Deputy Secretary of Good Relations and Inclusion, also spoke at the event.

He said: “We often take for granted the many freedoms we enjoy every day: the freedom to choose where we live; the freedom to express an opinion; the freedom to shape for ourselves the path we follow in life. It can be easy to forget that not everyone shares these freedoms. They are fragile and need to be protected.

“Holocaust Memorial Day reminds us that we cannot take our freedoms for granted - that we all have a responsibility to do what we can to strengthen freedoms in our society and beyond by making a stand against hate, intolerance and prejudice. ...

Olivia Marks-Woldman, Chief Executive of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, said: “I’m delighted that Northern Ireland is once again marking Holocaust Memorial Day. Our theme this year - Fragility of Freedom - serves as a stark reminder of the delicate nature of freedom.

“The Holocaust and more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur are a testament to the grave consequences that arise when freedoms are eroded. So, as we gather in our communities, across boundaries of faith, age, and ethnicity, we must learn from genocide – for a better future. We owe it to the victims and survivors to honour their memory through action, challenging prejudice and promoting understanding across communities and generations. By learning from the past, we can create a present where freedom is cherished, protected, and shared by all.”

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/holocaust-memorial-day-2024-freedom-cannot-be-taken-granted#skip-link>

## European Parliament

### **Holocaust Remembrance Day: “Hitler did not win!”**

On Thursday, Irene Shashar, a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto, addressed MEPs in a plenary session in Brussels to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

“We pay tribute today to the victims of the Holocaust and reaffirm our unwavering commitment against antisemitism, racism and other forms of hate. Europe remembers”, stressed European Parliament President, Roberta Metsola, opening the solemn sitting. Warning that the complicit silence of many made the Nazi horrors possible, she underlined that “the European Parliament is not a place of indifference - we speak against Holocaust deniers, against disinformation and against violence”. ...

During her speech, Irene Shashar described how she survived the horrors of Nazism in Warsaw as a “Holocaust Hidden Child”, fleeing through a sewer to the Aryan side of Warsaw where her mother’s friends supported them. Living in Israel today, she said, “I was blessed with the opportunity to have children and grandchildren. I did the very thing Hitler tried so hard to prevent. Hitler did not win!”

Speaking about the ongoing war and the terrorist attacks of 7 October, she said that she left her country “in the wake of violence, murder, rape, and terror” and asked MEPs for their solidarity and support to see the hostages be reunited with their families.

After 7 October “the resurgence of antisemitism means that the hate of the past is still with us”, Ms Shashar warned. “Jews are again not feeling safe living in Europe. After the Holocaust, this should be unacceptable. “Never Again” should truly mean never again.” ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240119IPR16913/holocaust-remembrance-day-hitler-did-not-win>

## Council of Europe

### **Day of Remembrance in memory of the victims of the Holocaust: 'It was to prevent such atrocities that our Organisation was founded', PACE President says**

“Almost 80 years ago, in March 1945, a fifteen-and-a-half-year-old girl named Anne Frank perished in the Bergen-Belsen camp. Without the diary she wrote between the ages of 13 and 15, Anne's fate would be indistinguishable from that of the one and a half million children who vanished under similar circumstances. Through this diary, Anne Frank's remarkable testimony has emerged from obscurity, laying bare to the world the violence and horror that war sows”, PACE President Theodoros Rousopoulos said today during the ceremony organised in on the occasion of International Day of Commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust. ...

“Today, we pay homage to the Holocaust victims, never forgetting that it was precisely to prevent such atrocities that our Organisation was founded in 1949. ...

**To read the full press release see**

[https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9354/day-of-remembrance-in-memory-of-the-holocaust-it-was-to-prevent-such-atrocities-that-our-organisation-was-founded-pace-president-says](https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9354/day-of-remembrance-in-memory-of-the-victims-of-the-holocaust-it-was-to-prevent-such-atrocities-that-our-organisation-was-founded-pace-president-says)

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### **Ceremony to mark the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust: Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

... Hate is on the rise again on our continent.

Antisemitism, certainly –

And other forms of racism too, including anti-Muslim hatred.

So now is our moment to do our duty –

To honour the memory of the millions of innocent victims who perished during the Holocaust.

To remember and not forget.

To speak and not stay silent.

To act and not stand back.

Human rights must be respected.

The rule of law must hold firm.

And democracy must prevail.

For this, we must teach younger generations about the Holocaust.

So that our societies remain vigilant and relearn the lessons of that history, over and over –

Defying the tendency of time to erase the memories that are so important.

The Shoah must remain etched on Europe's collective conscience.

Because it is by remembering the darkness that we can continue to live in the light.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/-/ceremony-to-mark-the-international-day-of-commemoration-in-memory-of-the-victims-of-the-holocaust-1>

TOP

## Israel

**See also the Scottish Parliament debate “Holocaust Memorial Day 2024” that is included in the Holocaust section above.**

### International Human Rights Abuses: UK Response

*col 138WH Sarah Owen (Labour):* ... This week, we will mark Holocaust Memorial Day in Parliament and in our constituencies. It is a sacred and solemn moment in the year, when we consider the depths of evil that can be reached by people in power. The regime of oppression against the Jewish people, as well as other minority communities, did not begin with the holocaust and it did not end there either. It is apt that, alongside our commemorations, we consider ways in which we can intervene in present-day attacks on human rights, particularly through a proactive, fair and—importantly—consistent foreign policy.

Human rights abuses are far and away the topic on which I receive the most correspondence from my constituents. ... I have received thousands of emails regarding the Gaza situation alone, so that is where I would like to begin.

We cannot allow the tragedies happening each day and night in the middle east to fade from our mind. While rightfully condemning the brutal attacks launched by Hamas on 7 October that killed and injured thousands of civilians in Israel, our Government were shamefully slow to oppose the counter-attack that followed, in which violations of international law were plain to see. Does the Minister regret his Department's hesitation to intervene when the Israeli Defence Forces were known to be withholding food, water and other essential supplies from desperate Palestinians?

*col 139WH Mark Logan (Conservative):* ... I recently put in a question to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to make sure that it is constantly checking on Israel's engagement in the middle east when it comes to Gaza, to ensure that it is complying with international humanitarian law. Does the hon. Member agree that the Foreign Office has to be looking at this matter day in, day out, because many of our constituents across the country care about it deeply?

**Sarah Owen:** I wholeheartedly agree. ...

... aid routes were being blocked, hospitals were running out of fuel to treat victims, including babies, and requests to open the Rafah crossing were denied—all actions that were in direct contravention of international law. I would be interested to hear what corrections the Government would make to their approach, because it is not too late to learn from their mistakes. ...

What does the Minister have to say about the horrific ITV News footage that shows a man who was waving a white flag in a supposed safe zone being shot and killed? Will Ministers be taking this up with their Israeli counterparts? When?

The human rights of Palestinians have been systematically violated for decades, from the creeping annexations on the west bank, and settler violence, to the 15-year-long blockade, which shows no signs of weakening, but 2023 saw a deadly escalation in violence and a deterioration in the standard of human rights in the region. The latest figures from Amnesty International tell us that some 24,000 Palestinians have now been killed in Gaza. Given that half of Gaza's population are children, we can therefore estimate that well over 10,000 children have been victims of this conflict. This is a gravely conservative estimate.

Much debate has taken place about whether the Israeli Defence Forces' actions have amounted to war crimes. I have made my views clear. We have seen collective punishment and arbitrary arrests. Amnesty reports evidence of illegal airstrikes against churches and refugee camps. UN human rights experts warned in November of signs of genocide. As we speak, South Africa is mounting a case against Israel in the International Court of Justice, which must be heard without prejudice and taken extremely seriously.

**Afzal Khan (Labour):** ... I find it shocking that when we look at all the facts of what has happened on the ground in Gaza, it seems that almost every rule of international relations and humanitarianism has been broken. A genocide case is being heard at the ICJ, yet our Government cannot even call for a ceasefire. ...

*col 140WH Sarah Owen:* ... How long will it take for contrition to set in over the Government's stubborn refusal to call for a ceasefire on all sides? How long can this Government ignore all the warning signs of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians? When will the self-reflection begin regarding our continued supply of arms to Israel? There is far more within our power to influence Netanyahu's Government than Ministers are currently doing. We must also do what we can to encourage the release of hostages on both sides of this conflict and to lessen the number of Palestinian and Israeli civilian casualties.

Our approach to Israel must be in line with how we treat other countries. If a Government say that they are committed to human rights, they cannot pick and choose which humans' rights we stand up for and which ones we do not. We should not overlook breaches of international law by holding some countries to a lower standard. We have imposed sanctions on Russia and China to address their abuses of human rights, and our Government have also rightly sanctioned suppliers of arms to the Myanmar military; I would appreciate it if the Minister could divulge whether consideration has been given to similar action for the Israeli Government. ...

*col 141WH Afzal Khan:* My hon. Friend mentioned the horrific human rights abuses that have taken place in Palestine; she talked about Kashmir as well. There is also the brutal genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar and the abuses against the Uyghurs by the Chinese Government. The one thing that all those examples have in common is that the abuses have largely been committed against Muslims for their Muslimness. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is the worst manifestation of Islamophobia and a prime example of what happens when Governments are not held to account for their demonisation of Muslims?

**Sarah Owen:** ... This is not just about holding our country and our Government to a standard, but about fighting against and tackling state-sanctioned Islamophobia across the world. ...

*col 143WH Debbie Abrahams (Labour):* ... I visited the Occupied Palestinian Territories back in 2014 ... Quite frankly, I was absolutely horrified by what I saw and heard: healthcare being withheld from Palestinians, the destruction of Palestinian homes and schools on the west bank, the physical exclusion of Palestinians from their own farmland and the arbitrary application of law. By that, I mean that children who were picked up for throwing stones at cars and soldiers had the full force of an adult criminal justice system thrown at them, and were often detained without trial. It really was quite horrendous and draconian. All those actions are clear contraventions of rights associated with articles of the universal declaration of human rights.

I have campaigned for a two-state solution ever since, including by supporting the work of the Saddleworth Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund, which has funded Palestinian women in Gaza and the west bank through education. We had a presentation from somebody from the fund who visited Gaza in the summer to see how the women we had been supporting were doing. Back in November, she reported that, unfortunately, a number of the students we had supported had been killed in attacks. I cannot describe the sense of loss.

Since the heinous attacks of 7 October and the abduction of the hostages, there have been attacks on Gazan civilians by Israeli forces, with over 25,000 deaths, three quarters of which were women and children, over 60,000 injured, and many thousands missing. That seems to me to be disproportionate and collective punishment of innocent people. Human rights and the rule of law must apply to all, and at all times, not just when it is convenient, whether for the UK or its allies. Those deaths must be investigated by the International Criminal Court. Similarly, I await the judgment from the International Court of Justice on the potential genocide of Palestinian people. ...

*col 144WH* Once again, I call for an immediate ceasefire, the safe return of each and every hostage, the delivery of unrestricted humanitarian aid, and the end of the total siege on



the Gaza strip. ...

**col 145WH Patrick Grady (SNP):** ... the debate ... is an important opportunity to raise very challenging situations around the world. ... it is even more appropriate to emphasise them in the week when we mark Holocaust Memorial Day. ...

**col 146WH** ... there must be an immediate ceasefire on both sides in Israel and Gaza, with the release of hostages, the opening of humanitarian corridors to let aid in and people who want to leave out, and the beginning of the process to negotiate a lasting, peaceful, just and democratic settlement.

Condemnation and speaking out against these situations is important and symbolic, but there is more that the Government can and must do. They have given themselves powers to impose Magnitsky sanctions on individuals who commit gross human rights violations, and they should not be afraid to use those powers. They are negotiating trade deals and disbursing aid funds, and respect for human rights should be at the centre of policymaking in both those areas. ...

**col 147WH John McDonnell (Labour)** ... In 2022, I attended the memorial event for Shireen Abu Akleh, a young al-Jazeera journalist. She had a reputation that was respected across the middle east for professional journalistic practice and for her courage. Although Palestinian, she was an American citizen. She was involved in an action covering a raid by the Israeli Defence Forces in Jenin. During that raid, there was no firing of weapons or engagement in the immediate area, according to various investigations that took place, but she was shot with an Israeli bullet. That indicated to many people that, although there exist specific protections in international law for journalists covering wartime disputes, they were being ignored by the Israel Defence Forces at that time.

According to the independent Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 83 journalists have been killed since then, during the recent activities of the Israel Defence Forces in Gaza, but others put the figure significantly higher. The International Federation of Journalists—the international trade union grouping for journalists—has called for an independent inquiry into the targeting of journalists by the Israel Defence Forces. There is a view now that the Israeli Government have not just turned a blind eye to this, but that there has been a specific policy of targeting journalists to prevent the truth from coming out of Gaza. ...

**col 148WH** Over the last few weeks, that human suffering has been best exemplified by what has happened to al-Jazeera's Gaza bureau chief, Wael al-Dahdouh. He has lost his wife, three children and his grandson, and his son, who was a journalist, was killed by an Israeli drone two weeks ago. ... This goes beyond the debate about the abuse of human rights and, as far as I am concerned, well into war crimes taking place. ...

Figures show that more journalists have died in this conflict than in every conflict since the second world war. For me, that is evidence that the Israel Defence Forces are targeting journalists, so they should be held to account.

I would like the UK Government to raise this issue with the Israeli Government, to work towards an independent investigation and to work with international agencies such as the International Federation of Journalists and the Committee to Protect Journalists to establish the truth and, just as importantly, to establish accountability for the perpetrators of what I believe is a war crime.

**Mary Kelly Foy (Labour):** ... something happened before Christmas to reinforce my view that a ceasefire was absolutely necessary: two Roman Catholic women, a mother and a daughter, were shot dead inside the Holy Family parish church in Gaza. The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem said: "They were shot in cold blood inside the premises of the parish".

Pope Francis condemned the attack, as did the Archbishop of Westminster. Cardinal Vincent made a point we should all reflect on: "the people in Gaza and the Cardinal Archbishop of Jerusalem, they're not given to tell lies".

The cardinal was absolutely right. The Palestinian people are not liars and they deserve to

be listened to.

I raised the issue with the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), earlier this month, when he said: “We are not clear about the full facts of what happened.”—[[Official Report, 8 January 2024; Vol. 743, c. 46.](#)]

*col 149WH* I wonder whether, two weeks on, the Government are now clear about the full facts. ... They were in a place of worship—something that is recognised under international humanitarian law and the Geneva convention. I am no expert, but like so many people outside this place, I know that what happened at the Holy Family parish church was wrong. Those women deserve justice, as does everyone else who has suffered.

The United Nations has described the situation in Gaza as “a living hell”, and the under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs said: “Famine is around the corner... For children in particular, the past 12 weeks have been traumatic: No food. No water. No school. Nothing but the terrifying sounds of war, day in and day out.”

The last time I checked, the death toll in Gaza was over 25,000—it may be more by the end of this debate. ... Two mothers are killed every hour, close to 3,000 women have been widowed, and 1 million women and girls have been displaced. ... caesarean sections are performed without anaesthetic, and women and girls have little or no access to period products. ...

**Zarah Sultana (Labour):** ... I would like to talk about the Government’s response to Israel’s violations of international law in Gaza and about revelations that I believe should be a major news story but that, as far as I am aware, have been covered by only one mainstream outlet. They relate to recently released court documents that reveal that, from very early on in the war, the Foreign Office had major doubts about Israel’s compliance with international law—a fact the Government have hidden.

The documents show that, on 10 November, just a month into the war, the Foreign Office had made an internal assessment of Israel’s compliance with international law and judged that “the volume of strikes, total death toll as proportion of those who are children, raise serious concerns.”

It went on to say that His Majesty’s Government’s “inability to come to a clear assessment on Israel’s record of compliance with IHL poses significant policy risks.”

However, those serious concerns were kept secret from Parliament and the public.

*col 150WH* Instead, Ministers continued to give reassurances about Israel’s commitment to international law. For example, just four days after that assessment was made, I asked the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield, in the main Chamber whether Israel had used British-made weapons for war crimes in Gaza. He replied that “the President of Israel...has made it clear that his country will abide by international humanitarian law.”—[[Official Report, 14 November 2023; Vol. 740, c. 523.](#)]

That was despite the fact that, as shown by these documents, his Department doubted the Israeli President’s words.

The documents reveal that another assessment was made by the Foreign Office on 8 December, expressing “concerns regarding” Israel’s “commitment to comply with the obligation not to arbitrarily deny access to humanitarian assistance” and saying that it was “possible Israel’s actions” in relation to the provision of humanitarian relief “were a breach of International Humanitarian Law.”

Those damning judgments were, again, not made public. Instead, Government Ministers continued to reassure the public about Israel’s commitment to international law, and they continue to do that.

The documents show that, a few days after that assessment, the Foreign Secretary “decided he was satisfied there was good evidence to support a judgment that Israel is committed to comply with International Humanitarian Law.”

On that basis, he continued allowing arms sales to Israel, despite the fact that, according

to our Government's policy and international law, arms export licences should not be granted if there is a clear risk that they could be used in violation of international law. ... When questioned about these matters at the Foreign Affairs Committee this month, the Foreign Secretary failed to disclose the fact that his Department had carried out a formal review of Israel's compliance with international law, and he denied that he had made a ministerial decision about allowing arms sales to continue. ...

Why did Foreign Office Ministers not reveal that their Department had serious concerns about Israel's behaviour from as early as 10 November? Was that because they wanted to give Israel the green light for its bombardment of Gaza and they thought that revealing this assessment would simply make that too hard? ...

**152WH Alyn Smith (SNP):** ... If human rights are to be applied everywhere, they need to be applied universally—against our friends as well as everybody else. So, I strongly support the South African referral of the actions of the State of Israel to the international frameworks. There is a case to answer. I do not believe that individual politicians should use words like “genocide” lightly. I think there should be proper investigations and it should be proper authorities making such decisions, but there is surely cause for concern; surely the evidence that we have seen coming out of Israel and Gaza and Palestine should give us all cause for concern that there is a case to answer—that the State of Israel has committed war crimes, and that must have consequences—so I strongly support the referral by the South Africans to the international framework. ...

**col 154WH Lyn Brown (Labour):** ... What is happening in Gaza is an intolerable horror and a disgrace to humanity, and it must end. In Gaza, 85% of the population have been forcibly displaced, but nowhere is safe for them. Hundreds of thousands of people are living without shelter in cold weather, with precious little access to food, water and healthcare. Famine and disease epidemics are way too close now. Humanitarian access is being limited in a way that even Ministers here are clear is completely and utterly unjustified.

The siege must end. None of this is compatible with the universal human rights that all our faiths and all our traditions hold dear, which are rights that we, in turn, see as a foundation for our own peace and security. We need an immediate halt to the violence in Gaza, with a sustained ceasefire; we need a genuine process to bring about a fair and just two-state peace; and we need accountability through the independent international system, within which the same rules apply to all. ...

**col 158WH The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley):** ... Gaza is a hot subject, and I am not going to duck the issue. There are strong opinions on both sides. ... We want a sustainable ceasefire, and we are working hard towards it.

... Zarah Sultana raised important points. What I can say at this point ... is that Ministers review the advice they receive carefully and act consistently with that advice. We work hard and continue to call for international humanitarian law to be respected and for civilians to be protected. As the Foreign Secretary outlined, we assess that Israel has the capability and commitment to comply with international humanitarian law, but we are also deeply concerned about the impact on the civilian population in Gaza. Too many civilians have been killed. ...

**col 159WH Zarah Sultana:** ... If there are concerns in the Foreign Office, as per the internal assessment, why did the Foreign Secretary recommend continuing to allow arms sales to Israel? That goes against our current policy, which is that where there is a risk that human rights violations will take place, we should not continue selling arms licences to countries.

**David Rutley:** The Foreign Secretary outlined on 8 January that he has not received advice that Israel has breached international humanitarian law. On export licences, the UK supports Israel's legitimate right to defend itself and take action against terrorism, provided

that it is within the bounds of international humanitarian law. All our export licences are kept under careful and continual review, and we can amend, suspend or revoke extant licences or refuse new licence applications where they are inconsistent with the UK's strategic export licensing criteria. It is important to note that ... the regime is among the most rigorous and transparent in the world.

On the topic of Israel and Gaza, a number of people talked about South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice. The Government believe that this development is not helpful, and we do not support it. As previously stated, we recognise that Israel has a right to defend itself against Hamas, and we do not believe that calling that genocide is the right approach. Ultimately, it is for the courts, not states, to decide on matters of genocide, and of course we will respect the role and independence of the ICJ. ...

*col 161WH Sarah Owen:* ... In some places, human rights are being eroded bit by bit; in others such as Gaza, they are being completely demolished. We all know where it ends when good people do and say nothing, so I am asking the Government to be brave and do good before—not in the very distant future—we have to remember the genocides of the Palestinians, the Uyghurs, the Rohingya, the Kashmiris and people of faith in various parts of the world. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-24/debates/F1C108AE-FDE3-4EAD-AD57-7356FC1105EA/InternationalHumanRightsAbusesUKResponse>

## House of Commons Debate

### Situation in the Red Sea

*col 349 The Secretary of State for Defence (Grant Shapps):* ... Since November, there have been more than 40 attacks on commercial vessels across the region. ...

Some 12% of international trade passes through the Red sea every single year, amounting to more than \$1 trillion-worth of goods. In addition, 8% of global grain trade, 12 % of seaborne traded oil and 8% of the world's liquefied natural gas all pass through this ancient seaway. Perhaps even more astonishing is that 40% of the goods that are traded between Europe and Asia go through the Red sea.

Sadly, the Houthis' unlawful and callous attacks are putting all that trade at risk. ...

What these Iran-backed Houthi pirate thugs forget is that it is the least well-off nations and people who suffer the most from their illegal actions, starting with Yemen itself, where almost all food comes by sea. ...

*col 351 Alicia Kearns (Conservative):* ... What is our assessment of the extent to which we need to degrade Houthi capabilities in order for them to change their intent and actions? As yet, I am unclear as to whether we have the ability to look into what the Houthis are thinking, let alone Iran's activities. We must also recognise that the Houthis are, at best, a disobedient ally and not really a proxy, so they do have their own interests that they are pursuing.

*col 353 Andy Slaughter (Labour):* We have ... not had a debate since 7 October on Israel and Palestine, which is extraordinary. ...

*col 356 John Healey (Labour):* ... I totally reject the Houthi claims that firing missiles and drones at ships from around the world is somehow linked to the conflict in Gaza. They have been attacking oil tankers and seizing ships for least five years, not just in the past 109 days since 7 October. These attacks do absolutely nothing for the Palestinian people. We want the Gaza fighting to stop, with a humanitarian truce now and then a sustainable ceasefire to stop the killing of innocent citizens, get all remaining hostages out and get much more aid into Gaza. ...

The humanitarian agonies of the Palestinians in Gaza are now extreme. Parents are



starving, children are drinking dirty water and there are even reports of amputations being carried out without anaesthetic. More aid has to get to Palestinians now. Surely Britain can do more. There have been just four RAF aid flights and one Navy shipment in nearly four months. ... There should be a steady stream of aid from Britain. Our aid efforts must be accelerated.

For long-term peace, there has to be a political process, and one that has the capacity, conviction and commitment to turn the rhetoric around two states living side-by-side in peace into reality. Many across this House, like all in the Labour party present, will have found the Israeli Prime Minister's recent rejection of the two-state settlement utterly unacceptable and wrong. Palestinian statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people. It is the only long-term hope for peace and stability, and for normalisation for both Israelis and Palestinians. If elected to form the Government, Labour will lead a new push for peace, working with international allies, in the confidence that, as the Prime Minister said to this House yesterday, we in this country and we in this House are "united in support of a two-state solution."—[[Official Report, 23 January 2024; Vol. 744, c. 152.](#)]

**col 357 Alicia Kearns:** While much of this debate will rightly focus on the rationale, execution and objectives of the recent airstrikes against Houthi rebel military infrastructure, I want to begin with some comments on who the Houthis really are. I have been deeply disturbed by comments in our national conversation painting them somehow as a progressive movement, as freedom fighters or as some legitimate representative body of the Yemeni people. That is so disturbing not only because people are not taking the time to educate themselves, but because the Houthis do not deny who they are. It is out there for all to see. Their rallying cry and flag are quite explicit: "Death to America, Death to Israel, A Curse upon the Jews".

These are the words that this group puts on their flag. That is their rallying cry, and every action the Houthis take is with that in mind, with hatred in their hearts. Yet we see people, often well-meaning people—it is concerning that even people in this House have made such suggestions—suggest that Yemen has freedom fighters on its shores, and that somehow because Yemen, they claim, was a British colony, the Houthis should be seen as anti-colonial freedom fighters. ...

The Houthis offer no vision for Yemen's future. They seek a return to the past, free from ideals such as equality, women's rights and democracy. What inspiration they draw from the modern world comes from the Ayatollah and the Islamic revolutionary movement of Iran. ...

**col 358** The brutality of the Houthi leadership has been recognised by our Government, and UN security resolutions have been put in place against leader Sultan Zabin for the rape and torture of politically active women. Let that sink in, Mr Deputy Speaker: women who choose to have a voice in Yemen will be tortured. The head of the Houthi security services arbitrarily detained them and raped them for speaking their minds. ...

Tragically, the Houthis also expelled Yemen's 3,500-year-old Jewish community from their homeland, and banished the last Jewish family back in March 2021. Yet now they say that they are acting in defence of Gaza. Now they say they have always cared about the Palestinian cause, despite having hated Israel—yes—but done nothing in the interests of the people of Palestine. This conflict is merely an attempt to distract from their own brutal regime at home and gain clout because, let us be clear, among terrorists there is a pecking order, and they are fighting for who is the big man on the block. The Houthis think this is their chance.

**Alec Shelbrooke (Conservative):** ... one of the other things that the Houthis have done is deliberately block humanitarian aid coming into the port, to starve the population. They might draw a parallel with the terrible situation in Gaza, but their actions show that they do not believe that at all.

**col 360 Alicia Kearns:** ... We have also seen the IRGC commit an airstrike in Erbil, and



that is concerning but an opportunity. For the IRGC to have taken responsibility for such an airstrike is a step change; we have not seen it do that in the past. That gives more credence ... about the need to proscribe the IRGC, and it also fundamentally changes how we can talk about the IRGC and its operations. ...

I turn to Iranian proxies. The Houthis are only one of Iran's proxies and allies. As I said earlier, different proxies have different relationships. I believe the Houthis to be more of a disobedient ally than a direct proxy, because the command and control is not as significant as it is with Hezbollah. We have Hamas, Hezbollah, Iraqi Shi'a militias and the Assad regime in Syria. What work are we doing to ensure that we have a clear assessment of the differing relationships between different proxies and allies with Iran? Some will be receiving just intelligence. Some will be receiving matériel. With some, there will be direct command and control. Some will feel greater loyalty to others. We need to assess the extent to which Iran will conduct further conflict and chaos to defend each of those proxies. For example, I suspect that Hezbollah is far more happy to wage full-on warfare in defence of the clerics in Iran than the Houthis would be. ...

I have severe concerns about Hezbollah's future actions. Nasrallah has so far decided to stay out of the action, but the reality is that that could change in a moment. Again, this goes back to who wants to be seen as the best terrorist on the block, and Nasrallah is deeply ideologically tied to the Ayatollahs—more so than any others. While in the past Hezbollah has acted almost as a trip wire to protect Iran's nuclear capabilities, now, unfortunately, while we may not see significant restraint, it has been showing significant restraint, given its capabilities. I am concerned about what we may see going forward. ...

*col 361* That takes me to my fundamental point: this may be a debate on the Red sea, but we are really talking about Iran. My assessment ... is that Iran is willing to do everything but reach outright warfare. It will industrialise sub-threshold conflict and seek chaos wherever it can. My worry is that its current appetite—where it has set its threshold just below outright warfare—is too high. The message that we need to hear going out from our allies to the Iranians ... is that that threshold is too high and they must pull back. That must be our strategic priority. ...

We must stop treating those individual issues as if they can somehow be drawn away from each other and recognise that we need a strategic approach, working with our allies for all of them. At the moment, we see individual escalations in each of those areas and do not respond comprehensively. ...

I hesitate to talk too much about IRGC proscription ... I acknowledge that it is not a straightforward decision. Yes, Iran will see it as an act of war. Yes, we will likely have to close our embassy on the ground. However, we need to take action against the IRGC. Only this week we saw on the BBC a video of sanctioned IRGC generals holding recruitment Zooms with British national student organisations. This is the same organisation that MI5 had to warn was conducting assassinations on our soil. ...

*col 362* I reiterate that these attacks have absolutely nothing to do with Gaza. We must reject that false narrative, which is designed solely to further the Houthis along their blood-soaked road to power in Yemen, and the Ayatollah's dreams of regional domination. What unites the Houthis and the Iranian regime is their willingness to sacrifice innocent people in their pursuit of power and their readiness to inflict unthinkable violence on anyone who opposes them.

I ask the Government to avoid the mistakes of the past and to think long term and strategically about how we go from here. We all want to see a two-state solution and a Palestinian state. What we need now is an international Palestine contact group and to launch track 2 negotiations, bringing together civil society, women and academics. I also urge all colleagues—those of us who would quickly condemn anyone who denied Israel the right to statehood—to also condemn those who deny the Palestinians the right to their own state.

A true friend seeks to end the cycles of war, not add more fuel to the fire. Iran and the

Houthis are no friends of the Palestinian people. ...

**col 363 Martin Docherty-Hughes (SNP):** ... Not only does the Houthis' current strategy continue these violations of international law, but they seek to use the suffering of the Palestinian people in a way that cannot be justified.

However ... the fact that current events in Palestine are not the cause of the Houthi attacks on shipping does not mean that they are not symptoms of the same phenomenon: namely, western indifference to the region, followed by periods of intense military involvement, and little effort made to address longer-term issues. ...

**col 368 Alec Shelbrooke:** ... The idea that an arc that seems to emanate from or be influenced by Iran is forming around the disruption of maritime trade cannot be dismissed. As has already been mentioned, Iran has an influence on the Houthis in Yemen and on Hezbollah, and we know it is arming Russia. ... it would suit Iran's overall objective in the region to cause instability in another country neighbouring Israel.

**col 369 Andy Slaughter:** ... Let us look at what the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister's questions. If I understood him correctly, he set a number of tests that had to be met before there could be a ceasefire in Gaza: all hostages should be released—presumably he means Israeli and Palestinian hostages; Hamas should disarm and disappear from Gaza, so as not to be in a position to threaten Israel or anyone else; and the Palestinian Authority should take over the role of governance there. Nobody would be more pleased than I if those three criteria were met. Indeed, I am sure that hostage release and swaps will be part of any ceasefire, even a temporary one, but how realistic is it to expect that Hamas will disappear overnight or that, to use their own phraseology, the Palestinian Authority will ride into Gaza on the back of Israeli tanks? I do not believe that that is a realistic assessment of where we need to go before a ceasefire occurs.

**col 370** Today, the Prime Minister was asked by the leader of the Scottish National party—this question is often asked of the Government—whether he believed that war crimes had been committed in Gaza. That is not a difficult question. Yes, it is absolutely true that there are restrictions on journalists and international observers going into Gaza, but there is enough coming out of Gaza to see that it is not an exhaustive list. None the less, many leading international jurists have seen deprivation of life, collective punishment, arbitrary detention, denial of basic services including healthcare, forced displacement and ethnic cleansing. Simply to reply, as any Government spokesman does, that Israel should comply with international humanitarian law, is not sufficient. The question is: is Israel complying in that way?

Today, I noted that a 200-page opinion piece, published by Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights but authored by independent jurists, found that in Gaza, persecution—a crime against humanity—had been committed more intensely since 7 October, but that it goes back to 2007, when the siege of Gaza began. If the Government's position is to be credible they must address those events. What is happening in Gaza is extraordinary: 1% of the population—25,000 people—have been killed in three months under the most horrific circumstances. ...

**Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat):** On international law, let us face it: international humanitarian law is the last resort, when other things have gone wrong. Perhaps the side that we politicians can take is that of morality. What is the right thing to do? What is the humanitarian thing to do? What should we do about human misery? That is why the immediate bilateral ceasefire is so important. There is a choice. The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court will be looking at the war crimes, and it is right to let the courts do their job, but the Government could also have made a moral judgment. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

**Andy Slaughter:** ... She has clear personal knowledge of it, and is under particular strain because her extended family are in Gaza. I pay tribute to her ability to maintain the objectivity that she has just shown in her comments.

**Debbie Abrahams (Labour):** We have just had a debate in Westminster Hall on human rights, and Gaza came up. During the debate it was revealed that the Foreign Office had sought evidence from its legal advisers on the legality of actions that have been taken by Israel, going back to 10 November. We did not receive a satisfactory answer from the Minister responding to that debate, but should the Government not publish that advice? I also understand that since the new Foreign Secretary arrived he has asked for a review of that legal advice.

**col 371 Andy Slaughter:** ... The deaths that continue to occur daily in Gaza have so far been mostly the result of military action, but we have reached a point where the number of deaths through privation and disease is overtaking them. There is a strong parallel with what happened in Yemen, where about 150,000 people—mainly civilians—have been killed over the course of the civil war that began in 2014. At least another 200,000 have died through disease and privation as a consequence of the civil war, and we are at that tipping point in Gaza. Yes, those are higher numbers, but they are from a much longer period. ... We need a ceasefire and an end to hostilities, and pressure from the UK alongside partners could play a much bigger role in achieving that.

Secondly, we need aid and reconstruction, but that requires a more permanent peace, because many donors, including EU and UK donors, who have contributed to the reconstruction in the past have seen the money wasted as a result of further military action. Better governance is also needed, and support for civil society. One of the most cynical things that has happened since the terrible, tragic events of 7 October—we all feel for the people of Israel for what they suffered then—is that the response has been not just to go after Hamas but to destroy civilian neighbourhoods and civil society. Destroying law courts, destroying the Parliament, and destroying the records office appears designed to make Gaza ungovernable. ...

What puts Gaza in a different category than Yemen, is that we are dealing with occupation. Following his statement yesterday, I asked the Prime Minister when the UK will recognise a Palestinian state. Unsurprisingly, he gave an answer that will be familiar to everyone present, and said that “we will recognise a Palestinian state at a time that best serves the peace process.”—[\[Official Report, 23 January 2024; Vol. 744, c. 166.\]](#)

That time is now, or nearly now, because it is impossible to have serious negotiations towards peace unless they are between two sovereign states, notwithstanding conditions in Gaza and, increasingly, conditions in the west bank as well.

Let us not pretend that the recognition of a Palestinian state would put Israel and Palestine on an even keel, but without it as a precondition of the negotiations, they simply will not get off the ground. ...

**col 376 Jeff Smith (Labour):** ... We should be clear about the nature of the attacks by the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, which were opportunistic ... We should reject the Houthi claim that UK and US airstrikes on their positions are related to the conflict in Gaza.

Nevertheless, there are things that we must continue to say about the situation in Gaza. We watched in horror the attacks on 7 October, and have watched in horror the level of suffering and deaths in Gaza since. We urgently need a ceasefire to end that suffering, we need the release of hostages, and we need urgently to address the biggest humanitarian crisis in that region in a generation. People are facing starvation and thirst, and are without medical assistance. I pay tribute to all the organisations that are carrying out humanitarian work in the most difficult conditions. I have been getting regular updates from Medical Aid for Palestinians, which does great work there given the impossible situation that some of its workers have been put in. Of course, the situation is made worse by the fact that Gaza is not somewhere people can get out of. I encourage the Government to keep pressing the Israeli and Egyptian authorities to open the crossings for aid, but also to allow the people who need to get out to do so. ...

**col 377 Liam Fox (Conservative):** ... I accept ... there is no direct link between the conflict

in Gaza and the Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red sea—but we would be wrong not to accept that there is interconnectivity between the tensions in different parts of the middle east today, and we need to understand the context of those tensions.

Back in 2020, the Trump Administration brokered the Abraham accords between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and then Morocco. It was a great exercise in leadership to bring reconciliation to a part of the world that had seen too much conflict for too long. It has resulted in a big improvement: both economically, in terms of business and trade between the countries involved, and in people-to-people relationships. For example, around half a million Israelis visited Dubai in the past few years, something that would have been unthinkable just a decade ago.

However, there was always one country that did not want the Abraham accords to succeed: Iran. It did not want those accords to succeed because it did not believe in a two-state solution, because it did not believe that Israel should exist. Ayatollah Khamenei has been tremendously consistent in his views about the purity of the Islamic revolution, his detestation of the west, and his contempt for the existence of the state of Israel. ... Iran was never going to want to see peace between the Arab states and Israel, because that threatened Iran's hegemony—as it saw it—over the Islamic parts of the middle east.

The big question was always: what would Saudi Arabia do? It is a major player in the security of both the Red sea and the Gulf. When I saw the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia on Fox News saying that every day he believed Saudi Arabia was closer to peace and reconciliation with Israel, my first reaction was that Iran would react against it, whether through its proxies: Hamas in Gaza, funded and armed by Iran; Hezbollah in Lebanon, funded and armed by Iran; or the Houthis in Yemen, funded and armed by Iran. In fact, it turns out that we now see all three being active, and we need to understand that that “axis of resistance” against the west, as Iran calls it, is something it will keep going as long as it possibly can. It will not seek peace; it will resist peace at all times. ...

*col 378* ... we have videos of antisemitic speeches by IRGC generals being investigated by the Charity Commission. The regulator is looking at footage of “Death to Israel” chants on an Islamic charity's UK premises. Two of the videos show talks by IRGC leaders about an apocalyptic war on the Jews. Again as my hon. Friend said, the IRGC actually took responsibility this week for a military attack on a foreign territory, which is something they have not had the audacity to do before.

So I ask again: why is the IRGC not a proscribed organisation in this country? ...

*col 379* We face a choice in the Red sea and beyond: we are either going to deal with the political problems we face or, rather than the rosy future that the Abraham accords offered, we can go back to 1971, with a radicalised generation in the middle east and return to all the problems of hijacks, Munich and all the things we thought we had left behind us.

... there must be a commitment to a two-state solution, and it is not acceptable for anyone to put a political block on that. We need security guarantees to be given for Israel and the Israeli people, who have a right to live in peace, and for any future Palestinian state. That will require an international peace agreement. It will require the United States, Saudi Arabia and others all to be willing to commit to that peace. It will require a new way of looking at politics in the region, and it is right that Hamas cannot be part of that if there is to be any way forward, and there will need to be massive economic reconstruction in the area.

In conclusion, let me say what I have said before in the House: when we look at the whole region, we see that peace is not just the absence of war or conflict, but the freedom from the fear of conflict, oppression or terror. It comes with concepts of rights that have to apply to all people—not just rights and dignity, but enforceable rights and dignity. Only when all the people of the middle east and the wider region have access to all those things will we have any chance of achieving the peace that is not just part of their security, but part of our security.

**Layla Moran:** ... Although I am half Palestinian, we lived in Jordan for five years just after



King Hussein passed away, and we were in Egypt just after the Arab spring, so my link to the region is not just by blood; we were there. When we talk about the middle east, it sometimes feels as though we are playing 3D chess, while spinning around most of the time, trying to understand who is in, who is out and what is happening. It is fair to say that the region has been poorly led and poorly served by its politicians for very many decades. Arabs are proud, intelligent, capable people who have every right to live in dignity and security, as does anyone else. I am sorry to say that there have been elements of the debate about Israel and Palestine that seem to forget that. When we talk about peace in the region, we often omit that Palestinians need to be at the heart of it as much as Israelis. We talk about Arab-led, and yes absolutely—Arab-led. ... I went to the Manama dialogue at the invitation of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. When we were there, we heard from the Bahraini Foreign Minister, who made clear the case for why peace and two states is not just in the interests of Israel and Palestine, but is in Bahrain's interests as well. It is a regional interest, and the reason for that—this is linked to what previous speakers have said—is because this is the biggest toy that Iran and other mischief makers in the region have to play with, and they have been playing with it for their own nefarious ends for far too long. They have no real interest in the Palestinian people. Let me be clear: when I speak to other Palestinians, we know that. We know that they are jumping on the bandwagon now. We still talk about the paper tigers of the '60s, and lots of Arab states will say when it is convenient for them that they will come and ride in our defence. But when at that final moment it comes to who backs us, the answer is, "Well, no one", and so we rely on ourselves. That is the view of pretty much every Palestinian I know.

*col 380* That said, it does not mean that we do not need help, so this is my plea for help. Two states is not just in the interests of Israelis and Palestinians. Let me emphasise Israelis as well, because the peace camp in Israel has taken an enormous blow. Let us remind ourselves that very many peace activists have been taken hostage and been disgracefully raped. Hamas is no friend to the Palestinian cause. But this war has driven ordinary, peace-loving people into the arms of the extremes of the debate, and when we look at the polls—one was done very recently—we see that people are now backing Hamas and backing Netanyahu, when before they did not. We must reflect on that.

Why has that happened? These are the same people as before 7 October. The reason it has happened is because we have allowed it to happen. The longer this war is waged in the way it has been waged, and in the way that it feels so one-sided, with the humanity at the centre of it not at its heart, by the western world in particular, the more abandoned ordinary people feel. And when people feel abandoned, that is when the centre ground where the dialogue happens is vacated.

My plea to this House continues to be to not forget the Palestinian cause. Yes, I am here with my Palestinian scarf and my blood, but I say that not for me but for regional security. ... When we say that the region is a tinderbox, we do not mean that one thing is causal on another, but that there are multiple flashpoints, and all it takes is for one thing to go wrong and we find that they all blow up at the same time. ...

On plans, the recognition of the state of Palestine has never been more important. I talk about an immediate bilateral ceasefire to bring the people from the extremes back to the centre and to start to heal some of the wounds, but a ceasefire is not the end; a ceasefire only ever freezes a conflict. If we want to say, "This is the last time"—I sincerely believe that across this House there is broad agreement on that point—we need to get serious about how we bring the two states back to the table, and quickly. ...

*col 381* My question to the Minister is: who are we talking to? ... I urge him, as I have in previous debates, to recognise Palestine sooner rather than later.

Putting my Palestine hat back on for a moment, all we Palestinians want is the power to have what all other countries have. We want our own votes at the United Nations. We want to raise our own money to rebuild and to educate our children. It is not the case that we are not capable; we just do not have the tools. What we want above all is to live in dignity



alongside our Israeli cousins. It is the scars that we so sadly share that will bind us together. Like scars, they are not comfortable, but often when the bone grows back it is stronger than before. That is how both peoples feel. They need to be given the tools as equal partners to be able to resolve this conflict. Without a very early, full-fledged recognition of the Palestinian state—I argue that should be first, not last in the process—we will never get there.

**Flick Drummond (Conservative):** ... the Houthis are clear that they see a linkage between their actions in the Red sea and the situation in Gaza. I say to them that attacking ships will not help the Palestinian cause. ...

*col 383* **Ian Blackford (SNP):** ... Today, when we consider the Red sea, it has to be seen as part of a broader landscape of instability and the geopolitical threats we face around the world. There is no link, as has been said by many others, to what is going on in Gaza, but we do need to reflect on what is going on there. The awful events of 7 October last year will forever remain with us all, and of course there must be peace and security for Israel, but it is time to recognise that Palestinians have rights and that the Palestinian state must be recognised. Dealing with that threat and removing Hamas does not mean having to flatten Gaza. We are now living with the humanitarian crisis that we see as a result of that.

*col 384* It should shame us all that we are now talking about in excess of 25,000 Palestinians who have perished since last October—innocent civilians who have been targeted for what? We must not lose sight of the legitimate rights of the Israelis and Palestinians to find peace and harmony together. To deliver a two-state solution is the only way to resolve conflict in that war-torn region. We must redouble our efforts to make sure that, out of this crisis, we deliver peace and hope for the Palestinians, Israelis and all of us.

Over the last few months, we have watched the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East seek to continue its valiant efforts to provide sanctuary for people in Gaza. Sadly, too many UN personnel, as well as civilians, have lost their lives in this conflict. The UN humanitarian agencies have done their best on the frontline, but the UN Security Council has been paralysed, as it has been for decades, through the power of veto. The time has come to provide proper leadership and to question how these agencies should operate.

How should we get the collaboration necessary to deal with the challenges in the Red sea, Gaza and elsewhere? We need to recognise that the effectiveness of the UN to deliver has been blunted by the power of the veto. ...

When we consider that the provision of the veto was not part of the UN charter, it is right that we now question its use. When we consider that this power sits only with the five permanent members of the Security Council, we have to question the suitability of the existence of that power. ... We should bear in mind that four resolutions on the subject of Gaza have been stymied during the last few months. ...

*col 385* **Bob Seely (Conservative):** ... I completely agree with what [Layla Moran] is saying about a two-state solution. Those friends of Israel who give Netanyahu and the Israeli right an easy ride on this are no friends of Israel, as far as I can see, because all they are doing is making Israel's long-term future significantly more precarious. Israel's existence is accepted and guaranteed when there is peace with the Palestinians, and until there is peace with Palestinians, Israel is always going to be under threat of some kind.

*col 386* Where I differ from the hon. Lady is on her optimism. ... On Palestinian statehood, I cannot see a good reason not to do it now, but if we had Palestinian statehood now and Hamas immediately took over that Palestinian statehood in the west bank, it would simply undermine the cause of Palestinian statehood. ...

There appears to be a growing, significant, provable link between the use of proxy warfare and non-state actors, often used by other states, and the rise in conflict-related sexual

violence, which in some parts of the world and some conflicts is now endemic. We saw that with ISIS, which is a non-state actor, and arguably nobody's proxy, in the use of Yazidi women effectively as the spoils of war until they were raped to death. We have seen it with the abuse of Israeli women by Hamas, but Hamas are also increasingly intolerant in their Islamist attitude towards women in their own society. We have also seen it with the Houthis, with Wagner in Ukraine and with Russian troops. ...

col/ 387 In the middle east, Russia's ally Iran is behind much of what is happening ... Iran now has 22 proxies. In Bahrain it has two or three and in Iraq it has at least six, some of which are rocketing UK and US forces. Where else? In Lebanon it has Hezbollah, which is potentially its most powerful proxy. It is strongly aligned to the regime in Syria. That is not a proxy but the regime has been heavily dependent on Iran to fight its wars. Throughout the middle east, the Iranians have built up a web that is a significant threat to us. ...

We ... have this very black-and-white notion that we are either at peace or we are at war, yet the nature of war is changing. We are living in a world in which we are effectively in a perpetual state of conflict with some nations. ... Likewise, we are effectively waging an indirect war against a series of Iranian proxies: Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and whoever was rocketing us this week in Iraq. ...

col/ 388 **John McDonnell (Labour):** ... The International Court of Justice's interim decision will be coming out soon ... and when it does come out it is important that we have a debate in this House. That would enable the Government to tell us what they will do in the light of that decision. The interim decision will almost certainly attach some conditions to the activities of Israel in particular, and it is important that we debate that in this House. It is also important that we have a decision-making process—a vote—on how we as a country can ensure that such a decision and its conditions are abided by and implemented.

My second brief point is that, time and again, the Prime Minister and others have said that there is no link between the Houthis' actions and what is happening in Gaza. That argument is unsustainable. ... What they are doing is horrific, it is putting lives at risk and they are undermining their own people, but to say that it is completely unrelated to Gaza is unsustainable.

col/ 389 People have said, "Well, maybe it is 'connected' to Gaza," ... what is happening in Gaza is mobilising the Arab street across the middle east, and understandably so. People are watching the reportage of the human suffering and reacting aghast at what they are seeing on the ground in Gaza. As a result, they are putting pressure on their own regimes, right the way across, for some form of action. It is because both the US and the UK have not taken effective action that desire for action gets distorted in other forms—it is the Houthis' excuse for their actions. ...

Ian Blackford talked about the House being shamed by the number of deaths—the 25,000 deaths that have taken place. We are shamed by witnessing on our television screens the operations and the amputations of children's limbs without anaesthetics. We should be shamed, but we should be more shamed by our refusal to act soon enough. I think we were complicit with Biden in basically saying to the Israelis, "You have more time to sort this out with military action, rather than looking at a real strategic plan for the future." We have a responsibility because of our history over the past century and a half in the region, so we should come forward with our own proposals soon. Some have been mentioned already and I do think that the recognition of Palestine is important, because that sends a message to Israel and elsewhere ...

Recognition of Palestine will send a message to Israel that it has to come to terms with that reality at some stage. I know people have said that we have to get rid of Hamas, but, as soon as we can secure peace, Palestinians should be given the opportunity to vote for their leadership and be allowed to exercise democracy. I think people will be surprised at how the Palestinians will vote; I think they will vote for peace and for those who advocate peace. That might give us the opportunity to consolidate the Palestinian people, who have been so divided by Israel between the west bank and Gaza. We need to think creatively,

for example like that, before we blunder even further. I hope the Government will now come forward with a more constructive plan, and let us vote on it. ...

**col 392 Wera Hobhouse (Liberal Democrat):** ... A coalition with greater regional and Arab involvement would undercut the Houthis' claim that they are supporting the fight of the Palestinians against America and the west. Greater engagement from big Arab states in defending international law would have the added benefit of not only making interventions more effective, but creating broader international norms that attacking non-military shipping cannot be a legitimate act of war. ...

**col 393 Kenny MacAskill (Alba):** ... Of course we condemn the actions of the Houthis ... as we rightly condemn Hamas.

... the issues are inextricably linked. This is, however, an escalation. We have not been bombing Somalia with regard to piracy, or Eritrea. ...

People—not simply the Houthis, but people in the Arab world, the Muslim world and in our own country—will see this as one-sided, judgmental and picking upon one side, yet failing to do anything about the fundamental issue of what is happening in Gaza. We run the risk of worsening terrorism, both abroad and, indeed, home-grown.

That takes us to the question of why the Houthis are doing this. It is risible to say that it is not connected to Gaza—of course it is. The timeline speaks to that. Trade was going, although not without difficulties, prior to 7 October. The timeline dictates that that was the cause of it. Indeed, the Houthis have told us, in their almost webcam invasion of landing on the tanker, because they even flew the Palestinian flag. It was reminiscent of when Britain took a helicopter and landed somebody so that we could have a flag on Rockall. The Houthis made it clear that what they were doing related to what was happening in Gaza. That is why in order to get peace, as I said after the Prime Minister's statement earlier this week, we are required to look in conflict resolution not simply at the manifestations, but the fundamental root, and at the root is what is happening in Gaza.

**col 394** We have heard today that the purpose of the airstrikes is to preserve international law. International law also covers stopping genocide. We have heard from other speakers eloquently pointing out that 25,000 Palestinians have died in Gaza—1.1% of the population, and 70% of them women and children. What would that be in UK terms? That would be almost three quarters of a million UK citizens wiped out since 7 October. Do we think that would go unnoticed? Yet what has happened? We have said, "Netanyahu is maybe going a bit far," and, "Maybe Israel has to call it all back." We should be supporting South Africa and other countries in pushing this at the International Court of Justice. I believe and expect that on Friday the International Court of Justice, as people have suggested, will rule against Israel, because what Israel is doing is fundamentally wrong, and we need to call that out. ...

We cannot pick and choose on international law, and it is about time that the UK stood up for the rights of the Palestinian people.

**col 397 Wayne David (Labour):** ... I agree ... that the Houthis are a truly appalling terrorist organisation, and are most definitely no freedom fighters. It is also worth noting that the Houthis' actions are harming Yemen itself, the country that has experienced the worst starvation in modern times. ...

**col 398** A number of Members referred to the terrible situation in Gaza. The situation is truly terrible. I do not accept, however, the Houthi claims that attacking ships from around the world is somehow linked to the conflict in Gaza. There is a desperate need for a humanitarian truce leading to a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza. Indeed, we must move as quickly as we possibly can to a two-state solution. ...

**col 399 The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Andrew Mitchell):** ... the Houthis' illegal attacks on commercial shipping and British and American warships in the Red sea are completely unacceptable. Despite repeated warnings from the international community, they have carried out more than 30

attacks since 19 November. ... That is why, amid the ongoing and imminent threat to British commercial and military vessels and those of our partners in the Red sea, the Prime Minister ordered the Royal Air Force to carry out targeted strikes against military facilities used by the Houthis, first on 11 January and then again on Monday. We acted alongside our US allies and with support from the Netherlands, Canada, Australia and Bahrain. The strikes were limited, necessary, proportionate and legal. We acted in self-defence, consistent with the UN charter and in line with international law to uphold the freedom of navigation. ...

col 400 I reiterate that there is no link between our action of self-defence in the Red sea, and the situation in Israel and Gaza. The Houthis are using events in Israel and Gaza as an excuse to destabilise the region further. They are trying to paint themselves as protectors of the oppressed, but their own track record of oppression shows them in a very different light.

Britain wants to see an end to the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible. We are calling for an immediate humanitarian pause to get aid in and hostages out, and as a vital step towards building a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting, and loss of life. To achieve that, we need Hamas to agree to release all the hostages. Hamas can no longer be in charge of Gaza, and an agreement must be in place for the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza.

col 401 While I am on that point, may I say to the hon. Member for East Lothian a word or two about the reference to the International Court of Justice? The Government believe that the referral by South Africa to the International Court of Justice is unhelpful, but of course we respect the role and independence of the ICJ. I say to the House, particularly on Holocaust Memorial Day, that the suggestion that Israel is engaged in genocide against the Palestinian people is both wrong and profoundly offensive. I make it clear on Holocaust Memorial Day that we also remember the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, in Bosnia in 1995 and in Sudan in 2003, as well as in Cambodia in the 1970s. If I may update the House, the ICJ has announced during the course of the debate that it will deliver its decision on South Africa's request for provisional measures at 12 o'clock UK time on Friday 26 January. ...

col 402 ... [Layla Moran] spoke movingly and compellingly on the importance, as I think the whole House agrees, of a two-state solution being in the interests not just of Israelis and Palestinians, but of the wider region and all of us here in the UK. ...

col 403 We have sent the clearest possible message that we will continue to reduce the Houthis' ability to carry out these attacks, and we will back our warning with actions. The Houthis should be under no misunderstanding: Britain and our allies are committed to holding them to account. ...

col 404 Finally, we need to keep helping the people of Yemen, who have suffered so grievously as a result of the country's civil war. The Houthis' actions make that suffering worse. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-24/debates/B23E065D-721D-4859-8FB8-98D2CE3ECF94/SituationInTheRedSea>

*The Foreign Affairs Committee evidence session referred to above by Zarah Sultana can be read at*

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14047/html/>

*The opinion piece referred to above by Andy Slaughter can be read at*

<https://lphr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Public-version-Legal-Opinion-on-the-Gaza-closure.pdf>



### Action Against Houthi Maritime Attacks

*col 151* **The Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak):** ... Overnight, at my order, the Royal Air Force engaged in a second wave of strikes against Houthi military targets in Yemen. We did so because we continue to see, for instance in intelligence, an ongoing and imminent threat from the Houthis to UK commercial and military vessels and to those of our partners in the Red sea and the wider region. ...

Attempting to counter every Houthi attack after it has been launched is simply not sustainable. We have already shot down dozens of missiles and drones targeted at civilian vessels and at the Royal Navy, and the Houthis have conducted at least 12 further attacks on shipping since 11 January, including just last night, shortly before our strikes were conducted. So we acted to further degrade their ability to mount such attacks. ...

*col 152* I repeat that there is no link between our actions of self-defence in the Red sea and the situation in Israel and Gaza. Those who make that link do the Houthis' work for them, and I want to be clear that those here at home who glorify the Houthis' attacks are glorifying terrorism, plain and simple. They will be met with a zero-tolerance approach. All of that said, I would like to address the situation in Israel and Gaza directly because it remains at the forefront of Members' minds. President Biden and I discussed this again yesterday and he shares my deep concerns about the situation and the terrible suffering and loss of civilian lives, so together we are working to establish a new aid route through the port of Ashdod.

The UK wants to see an end to the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible. We are calling for an immediate humanitarian pause to get aid in and hostages out, as a vital step towards building a sustainable, permanent ceasefire without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life. To achieve that, Hamas must agree to the release of all hostages. They can no longer be in charge of Gaza. The threat from Hamas terror and rocket attacks must end, and an agreement must be in place for the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza to provide governance, services and security. That pathway to peace should unite the whole House. I believe we are also united in support of a two-state solution. ...

*col 153* **Keir Starmer (Labour):** ... Labour said that we will judge further action against the Houthis on a case-by-case basis, so let me be clear that we back this targeted action to reinforce maritime security in the Red sea. ...

The international community cannot allow itself to be divided, which is exactly what the Houthi backers in Tehran would love to see. On that note, can the Prime Minister update the House on whether his Government have given further consideration to the proscription of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps? We need every tool at our disposal to disrupt IRGC activities, and we must show Iran that it cannot pursue its ends by destabilising the entire region.

*col 154* Like the Prime Minister, I totally reject the Houthi claims that attacking ships from around the world is somehow linked to the conflict in Gaza. These attacks do absolutely nothing for the Palestinian people. What is needed in Gaza is a humanitarian truce now, a sustainable ceasefire to stop the killing of innocent civilians, space for the return of all hostages, urgent humanitarian relief and a decisive step towards a two-state solution. Palestinian statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people; it is not in the gift of a neighbour. Does the Prime Minister agree that a secure Israel alongside a viable Palestinian state is the only path to a just and lasting peace? ...

*col 155* **The Prime Minister:** ... He is right to highlight the malign influence of Iran in the region. Obviously, we do not comment on ongoing decisions or processes relating to the proscription of organisations, but he can rest assured that we are alive to the risk and working closely with our allies, particularly the United States and our European allies, to jointly work out the most effective way of countering that influence. As I have said, the Foreign Secretary spoke to his counterpart last



week, and we will continue to use all measures at our disposal to protect ourselves. We passed the National Security Act 2023 here in the UK and have already sanctioned the IRGC in its entirety. ...

**Stephen Flynn (SNP):** ... Freedom of navigation is not a choice: it is a necessity ... As such, as a point of principle it is fair for the Government to use proportionate and robust action to defend that right to freedom of navigation. However, all of us in this Chamber need to be mindful of the opponent that we face in this regard. The Houthis have been under almost constant bombardment from Saudi Arabia for the best part of eight years; they did not get that message, so why are we so confident that they will get our message this time around?

*col 156* That, of course, leads to the wider question: what is the ultimate strategy going forward, in relation not just to the Houthis but to the wider region? Over the past week, we have seen missile strikes in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Syria and, of course, Yemen. In the meantime, we continue to see the complete destruction of Gaza and, of course, Hamas continue to obtain hostages. We need to understand the Government's strategy to calm waters not just in the Red sea but right across the region. Surely that must begin with a ceasefire in Gaza.

**The Prime Minister:** As difficult as the situation is, to do nothing would also be a choice ... because it would be tantamount to ceding control of a global, economically vital shipping route to a dangerous militant group that is backed by Iran, and it would put innocent lives at risk. ...

On the hon. Gentleman's point about Israel and Gaza, as I have made clear, no one wants to see this conflict go on for a moment longer than necessary. An immediate pause is necessary to get aid in and hostages out—that is what we have been calling for. The best outcome will be moving from that pause to a sustainable ceasefire, but, as I was clear about in my statement, a number of things need to happen for that to be possible, including the release of all the hostages by Hamas, Hamas no longer being in charge in Gaza and an agreement for the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza to provide governance. That is a conversation we have been having, and we will continue to push for that, because I believe that will be the best outcome ...

**Alicia Kearns (Conservative):** ... there are a number of Iranian proxies and allied groups operating across the middle east, and the hand of Iran is clear in their activities. Iran is the fundamental threat to UK security and to stability in the region. What is the strategic approach and intent to comprehensively reduce the threat that we face from all the proxies and allies ... Finally, as the Prime Minister touched on Gaza-Israel, please may I reiterate my request for the UK to launch a contact group for Palestine, so that we can launch track 2 negotiations to get some progress towards stability and a two-state solution?

*col 157* **The Prime Minister:** The behaviour of the Iranian regime, including the actions of the IRGC, poses a significant threat to the safety and security of the United Kingdom and our allies, particularly given Iran's direct threats against people here in the UK, as well as its destabilising influence in the region. We are alive to the threat, which is why we have already sanctioned more than 400 Iranian individuals, including the IRGC in its entirety. ...

**Ed Davey (Liberal Democrat):** ... the Liberal Democrats accept the case for limited strikes against the Houthis, as long as they remain limited. ...

**The Prime Minister:** What is escalatory is the Houthis ramping up attacks on commercial shipping, launching missiles and drones against US and UK warships, and threatening allied bases in the region. ...

*col 158* **Imran Hussain (Labour):** The Prime Minister rightly states that the majority of this House supports a two-state solution to bring a lasting peace, but that is clearly not shared by the Israeli Prime Minister, Netanyahu, members of his far- right Cabinet, or the Israeli ambassador to the UK, who openly advocated genocide on the UK airwaves. They have

all rejected an independent state of Palestine. Will the Prime Minister make it clear to the Israeli Prime Minister that he condemns his comments, which stand in the way of peace? Will he also condemn the vile comments of the Israeli ambassador, who labelled every building in Gaza as a legitimate target for the Israeli military?

**The Prime Minister:** The Foreign Secretary will be in the region this week and will reiterate what I have said publicly and from this Dispatch Box: we are absolutely committed to a two-state solution. We believe that is the right outcome for the people in the region. We want Palestinians and Israelis to be able to live side by side in peace, security and dignity, and we will redouble our efforts to bring about that outcome.

*col 160* **John McDonnell (Labour):** At the moment, we see Houthi attacks continuing, the Popular Mobilisation Units attacking US bases in Syria, and Hezbollah in a low-level war with Israel in Lebanon. Yesterday in Gaza 24 members of the Israeli military were killed, and 24,000 Palestinians have died—*[Interruption.]* It is now 25,000, we are told. This morning we heard how a doctor is amputating children's limbs in Gaza without anaesthetics. Does the Prime Minister not realise that, without an immediate ceasefire, any hope of a strategy succeeding will fail, and that the Netanyahu Cabinet has now become an obstacle to peace, rather than a partner in peace?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said, no one wants to see the conflict in Gaza go on for a moment longer than is necessary. An immediate pause is now needed to get aid in and hostages out. The best outcome will be moving from that pause to a sustainable ceasefire, but that sustainable, permanent ceasefire does require a set of conditions for it to be truly sustainable and permanent, and that involves the release of all hostages and Hamas having no role in Gaza, particularly to fire rockets continually into Israel. That is the sustainable ceasefire that we are pushing for.

*col 161* **Marsha De Cordova (Labour):** The war in Gaza and the situation in the middle east are worsening every day. We know that more than 25,000 people have been killed, including 10,000 children, not to mention about 135,000 children suffering from severe malnutrition. We know that the only way to de-escalate the violence in Gaza and the crisis in the Red sea is by securing an immediate ceasefire—not a pause, but an immediate ceasefire. Why will the Prime Minister not commit to calling for this, so that we can see an end to this humanitarian catastrophe and the killing of innocent children?

**The Prime Minister:** I point the hon. Lady to my previous comments on that topic, but I will also just highlight that we have trebled our aid commitment for this financial year. We are working with partners in the region to increase the amount of aid going into the region. I discussed that with President Biden yesterday, because we recognise the humanitarian impact that the conflict is having. The UK is playing a leading role in getting more humanitarian aid into the region. As I have said, right now we will work with the Americans on opening up Ashdod so that we have a new maritime corridor to increase the flow.

**Lisa Cameron (Conservative):** ... I thank the Prime Minister for his resolute work, including the wider update on humanitarian aid and work to release hostages. Families of hostages and those hostages released will be suffering unconscionable long-term psychological trauma. Can we, in addition to physical aid, look at providing psychological support and expertise from the UK wherever it is needed for all those so gravely impacted?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent point. Like her, I have spent time with hostage families, including just yesterday, and she is right about the trauma that they are experiencing. Every family that we are in contact with will have dedicated support from the Foreign Office to provide them with what they need, and I will continue to ensure that the issue she raises gets the attention it deserves. She highlights the importance of pauses and ceasefires to ensuring the unconditional release of all the hostages. They and their families are undergoing

something that no one would wish to have happen to them, and it is important that we prioritise them in all these conversations.

**Caroline Lucas (Green):** I and many others will be disappointed at the Prime Minister's failure to condemn the increasingly violent and extreme language by Netanyahu and his Ministers ... The Prime Minister said 10 days ago that the airstrikes against Houthi targets would send a clear message. The Foreign Secretary said this morning that more strikes send the clearest message. Can the Prime Minister tell us where that will end, given that the only message actually being received in the region, whether he likes it or not, is about the UK's failure to back an end to the suffering in Gaza?

*col 162* **The Prime Minister:** Again, I urge the hon. Lady not to link and conflate these two things, because—

**Caroline Lucas:** It is not me!

**The Prime Minister:** She is right: it is the Houthis who are doing that, and it is right that we call that out as being wrong ... In parallel and separately, we are also doing everything we can to bring about more aid into Gaza and a sustainable ceasefire there that involves a release of hostages and the end of Hamas's hostilities. ...

**Debbie Abrahams (Labour):** I, too, share concerns about what the strategy is, what the contagion to the rest of the middle east will be, and the possibility that might be bolstering the Houthis' position in Yemen. Can I ask the Prime Minister about a constituent's partner, who I mentioned to the Leader of the House last Thursday? He has been awaiting evacuation from south Gaza for a number of months. He has now suffered a broken leg and is receiving no healthcare. I urge the Prime Minister to liaise with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities for his immediate evacuation—it cannot carry on.

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to do that, and I will follow up with the Leader of the House on the hon. Lady's case.

*col 163* **Kenny MacAskill (Alba):** The key to addressing violence is to address the root cause, not just its manifestations. The Red sea is inextricably linked to the events in Gaza. Rather than bombing the Houthis, who have been bombed for a decade by Saudi Arabia with the best military equipment that Britain and America could sell to it, is it not time that we supported South Africa and other countries at the International Court of Justice in addressing the root cause, which is the genocide unfolding in Palestine?

**The Prime Minister:** I disagree with the hon. Gentleman, and we disagree with what South Africa has brought to the ICJ and do not believe that it is helpful. I also disagree with him that those two things are linked. The Houthis have carried out attacks on multiple ships from different countries, many of which have nothing to do with the situation in Israel and Gaza. As the Government of Yemen themselves have pointed out, the attacks have nothing to do with that situation, which the Houthis are using as propaganda for their own selfish ends. ...

**Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat):** We now have 25,000 dead. There are still 130 hostages. My extended family are still trapped. While we want to have hope, I dare say that it has now turned to complete despondency. The Prime Minister will have heard with dismay, I am sure, the words of Netanyahu when he said that he is categorically against two states. That echoes the equally awful words of Hamas, who say the same thing. Does the Prime Minister not agree that what we have here are the extremes of the debate? What words of hope does he have to offer those voices in Israel, Palestine and beyond who cling on desperately for the light in this darkness?

*col 164* **The Prime Minister:** ... I agree that we are committed to a two-state solution, because that is the only way we can bring about a future where Palestinians and Israelis can live side by side with the security they deserve, with dignity and with opportunity. The events of the last few months remind us that we must redouble our efforts to bring about that outcome. I remain confident, because of the engagement that we are having, that we can make progress on that aim. ...

**Apsana Begum (Labour):** ... Instead of escalating risks to civilian populations in the

region, why can the Prime Minister not just support the growing and increasing calls internationally for an immediate ceasefire in Israel-Gaza, an end to the bloodshed in Gaza and an end to the attacks on Yemen, and call for peace, justice and human rights?

**The Prime Minister:** Again, I would not draw a link between the action in the Red sea and the situation in Gaza. They are two completely different things. The Houthis may seek to link them, but we should not pander to that narrative.

**Stephen Farry (Alliance):** The Prime Minister sketched out some of the Government's view on terms for a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza. What steps are the Government taking to discuss with other states—particularly with friendly states—a long-term peace plan for the region, including a two-state solution, to ensure that we make real progress towards that objective?

*col 165* **The Prime Minister:** I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are having exactly that conversation with all our partners and allies in the region. I started that dialogue when I visited the region towards the end of last year, the Foreign Secretary will be in the region again this week, and it is something that President Biden and I have discussed. I believe that we are aligned on the future that we all want to see for the people of Israel and Gaza, and now we will work constructively with our allies to try to ensure that that can happen.

**Andrew Gwynne (Labour):** May I press the Prime Minister a little more on Palestine? Although he was right to say in his statement that President Biden and he are united in support of a two-state solution, he will be acutely aware that the person who is likely to be President Biden's main challenger in November's election is almost certainly not in favour of a two-state solution, and neither is the Israeli Prime Minister. What are the Prime Minister and the British Government doing to use this narrow window of opportunity to push for that two-state solution?

**The Prime Minister:** ... We are absolutely committed to a two-state solution and will work very hard with all our allies to make progress towards that aim.

**Stella Creasy (Labour Co-op):** The Houthis have already said that we should "expect a response" to the strikes. Benjamin Netanyahu's words have further inflamed things, jeopardising opportunities for peace between Israel and Palestine. There have been attacks in Pakistan by Iran. Clearly, the situation is escalating. We need all partners to collaborate as best we can if we are to secure a ceasefire, end the attacks on shipping and get that two-state solution. The Prime Minister has talked about talking to our allies. Will he set out the conversations that he has had with colleagues in the European Union, which has its own peace initiative in the region, and where does he think that will get to?

**The Prime Minister:** I speak regularly to colleagues across Europe ... I believe that we are all united on the outcome we want to see, which is a two-state solution in which Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side with peace, security and dignity.

*col 166* **Richard Burgon (Labour):** To follow up on the Prime Minister's comments on Gaza, 25,000 people have now been killed there, so is it not time that our Government did more than express sympathies and instead used their diplomatic power to prevent more deaths there, starting with a UN Security Council motion calling for an immediate ceasefire and ending arms sales to Israel?

**The Prime Minister:** Our actions are clear: we have trebled our aid commitment this year, we are doing everything we can to open more crossings, and recently we worked to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza, with 750 tonnes of lifesaving food and aid arriving on its first delivery. We can be proud of the impact that we are having, but of course, there is more to do, and that is why we will continue to have those conversations to get more aid in.

**Andy Slaughter (Labour):** The Prime Minister says that he supports a two-state solution. That requires his Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel. When will he do that?



**The Prime Minister:** The position of this Government is the same as that of previous Governments and is long-standing: we will recognise a Palestinian state at a time that best serves the peace process. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-23/debates/3C0E2A80-1A3B-4823-AB0E-27490DF1B3B0/ActionAgainstHouthiMaritimeAttacks>

## House of Commons Oral Answers

### Prime Minister's Questions

**Stephen Flynn (SNP)** Last night ... the public were at home watching John Irvine of ITV News report on footage from Gaza of an unarmed Palestinian man walking under a white flag being shot and killed by the Israel Defence Forces. Such an act constitutes a war crime, does it not?

**The Prime Minister:** We have been absolutely consistent that international humanitarian law should be respected and civilians should be protected. I have made that point expressly to Prime Minister Netanyahu, and the Foreign Secretary is in the region this week making exactly the same point.

**Stephen Flynn:** I do not think it is unreasonable to expect the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to rise to that Dispatch Box and tell the people of these isles and elsewhere that shooting an unarmed man walking under a white flag is a war crime. In recent weeks, the House has acted with urgency and intent following an ITV drama. The question is, will the House now show the same urgency and intent following this ITV News report and finally back a ceasefire in Gaza?

**The Prime Minister:** No one wants to see this conflict go on for a moment longer than necessary. We do want to see an immediate and sustained humanitarian pause to get more aid in and, crucially, the hostages out, helping to create the conditions for a sustainable ceasefire. I have set out the conditions for that in the House. The Foreign Secretary is in the region today, and we will continue to press all our allies and partners to make sure that we can bring about that outcome.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-24/debates/7E61064D-D3AF-4AB7-AD75-6D7E193174F9/Engagements#contribution-C57EE1F6-C290-41EE-8787-BE904AE52504>

### Prime Minister's Questions

**Colum Eastwood (SDLP):** In the week of the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, people in Derry are watching unarmed Palestinians being gunned down by Israeli soldiers. Over 25,000 people have now been slaughtered in Gaza. The Prime Minister has said—he has said it again today—that he wants to see a sustained ceasefire. My question is a very simple one: the next time there is a vote at the UN for a ceasefire, will his representative vote for it?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course we will engage with all UN resolutions on their merits. I have been clear that no one wants to see this conflict go on for a moment longer than is necessary. We want to see an immediate pause so that we can get aid in and hostages out, because the situation is desperate for many people there, but a sustainable, permanent ceasefire needs to fulfil a set of conditions, which include Hamas releasing all the hostages, Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza with the threat of rocket attacks into Israel, and an agreement in place for the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza to provide governance and services. The Foreign Secretary is in the region. Those are the principles on which we are working, and I believe that those are shared by all our major allies.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-24/debates/7E61064D-D3AF-4AB7-AD75-6D7E193174F9/Engagements#contribution-923763B6-E995-4EAC-837D-5DD674C8778D>



### Prime Minister's Questions

**Anum Qaisar (SNP)** [901175] We entered 2024 with starvation and famine as acute as ever across the globe, much of it caused by the climate crisis, yet at present the world's worst hunger crisis is in Gaza, created by Israel's ongoing siege. The integrated food security phase classification has found that of the 600,000 people facing starvation globally, 95% are in Gaza. Starvation used as a weapon of war is a war crime. The Israeli Government have the power to end this starvation crisis by ending the siege of Gaza and opening all crossings—do they not, Prime Minister?

**The Prime Minister:** I have been absolutely clear that we are incredibly concerned about the devastating impact of the situation in Gaza on citizens. That is why we have tripled our humanitarian aid for this financial year to the region and, as I said in the statement yesterday, we are working with partners such as Jordan and the United States to open up new aid corridors so that we can increase the supply of aid getting to those who desperately need it.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-24/debates/7E61064D-D3AF-4AB7-AD75-6D7E193174F9/Engagements#contribution-D6292C8D-32D1-400C-91A9-72186ED80056>

### Prime Minister's Questions

**Tahir Ali (Labour)** [901176] Recently released documents reveal that the Foreign Office had serious concerns about Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law and its ongoing assault on Gaza. This assessment was hidden from Parliament while the Prime Minister boldly stated his confidence in Israel's respect for international law. Since then, the scale of Israel's war crimes in Gaza has been revealed to the world, thanks to South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice. Therefore, is it not now time for the Prime Minister to admit that he has the blood of thousands of innocent people on his hands, and time for him to commit to demanding an immediate ceasefire and an ending of the UK's arms trade with Israel?

**The Prime Minister:** That is the face of the changed Labour party.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-24/debates/7E61064D-D3AF-4AB7-AD75-6D7E193174F9/Engagements#contribution-F3A8E747-53A1-49D0-AE92-3376789A3ABD>

## House of Commons Written Answers

### Visas: Palestinians

**Geraint Davies (Independent)** [10582] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of a Palestinian Visa scheme based upon the Ukraine Visa scheme that allows those with family in the UK to be given safe passage.

**Tom Pursglove:** The UK Government is monitoring the situation in Israel and Gaza closely to ensure that it is able to respond appropriately.

We recognise that some people impacted by the events in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories may wish to join family in the UK. The Government is working with authorities across the region to facilitate the repatriation of British citizens and their family members who already hold permission to come to the UK.

There are currently no plans to introduce bespoke arrangements for people arriving from the region who do not hold permission to come to the UK.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-19/10582>

### Israel: Foreign Relations

**Anum Qaisar (SNP)** [9714] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how many meetings he has had with the Israeli Ambassador since 13 November 2023.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We continue to engage closely and regularly with a range of senior Israeli officials. Since the outbreak of the conflict on 7 October, the Israeli Ambassador to the UK, Tzipi Hotovely has had two meetings with Foreign Office Ministers. The Ambassador spoke with Lord Ahmad, Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, on 10 October. She also attended a meeting on 24 October between former Foreign Secretary James Cleverly and the families of those taken hostage by Hamas.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/9714>

### **Israel: Gaza**

**Dan Carden (Labour)** [9919] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has received legal advice on the UK's duty to prevent under the Genocide Convention for the conflict in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** As a party to the Convention, the UK is fully committed to the prevention and punishment of genocide as appropriate under the Convention. In terms of the situation in Gaza, our position on this is clear: Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law. 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/2024-01-16/9919>

### **Arms Trade: Export Controls**

**Richard Burgon (Labour)** [10199] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the Answer of 8 July 2002 to Question 67534 on Export Licences, whether the guidance on incorporation of British weaponry components is still current; whether that guidance has been (a) updated or (b) modified; and whether it was consulted during the review of (i) extant and (ii) pending licence applications to Israel since October 2023.

**Greg Hands:** The Government takes its defence export responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world. All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria (the Criteria).

The Criteria provide a thorough risk assessment framework, and the Export Control Joint Unit will not issue an export licence to any destination where to do so would be inconsistent 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 (IHL). This includes licences where UK components are sent to a third country for incorporation into another product which is then supplied to the final destination.

All our export licences are kept under careful and continual review, and we are able to amend, suspend or revoke extant licences, as well as refuse new licence applications, where they are inconsistent with the Criteria.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10199>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2002-07-08/debates/7862b665-4cff-4c54-8fc4-94146f61be60/WrittenAnswers#contribution-e9923540-0abb-40a3-b4f1-03409f71a0a1>

*The Criteria referred to above can be read at*

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

### **Israel: Gaza**

**Zarah Sultana (Labour)** [10673] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 January 2024 to Question 9950, how many incidents have been logged

in its Tracker database of alleged instances of breaches or violations of International Humanitarian Law on the conduct of Israel in its military engagement in Gaza since October 2023.

**James Heapey:** The "tracker" referenced in Question 9950 does not log alleged Israeli military International Humanitarian Law violations. It specifically records alleged International Humanitarian Law violations relating to Saudi Arabia's air campaign in Yemen.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-19/10673>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-16/9950>

### **Gaza: Hospitals**

**Rupa Huq (Labour) [10208]** To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to help protect (a) hospitals, (b) medical staff and (c) civilians in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** Israel has a right to defend itself against Hamas, but it must comply with International Humanitarian Law; including the protection of hospitals, civilians, and medical staff. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. The UK trebled our aid commitment this financial year and is doing everything it can do to get more aid in and open more crossings.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10208>

### **Israel: Gaza**

**Seema Malhotra (Labour Co-op) [10142]** To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the number of (a) aid workers and (b) journalists who have been killed in Gaza since 7 October 2023.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The safety of humanitarian personnel and healthcare workers in Gaza is critical to enable aid to reach those who need it most. We also recognise the valuable role of journalists operating on the ground in Gaza, providing important coverage of the conflict in incredibly challenging circumstances. We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to be respected; under IHL, journalists covering conflicts and humanitarian aid workers should be afforded protection. As the Foreign Secretary has said, there must be a reduction in civilian casualties and Israel must take greater care to limit its operations to military targets. The Prime Minister has made this clear to Prime Minister Netanyahu repeatedly and has been in close contact throughout.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10142>

### **Gaza: Humanitarian Situation**

**Mark Hendrick (Labour Co-op) [9428]** To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We recognise that there is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza, and our focus now must be on practical solutions that save lives. The Foreign Secretary continues to discuss and press for the action that needs to be taken to increase aid to Gaza in his regular calls with his Israeli, Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese, US and Palestinian Authority counterparts; Israel must 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 routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity. The UK also played a leading role in securing the

passage of Security Council resolution 2720, which set out the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/9428>

### **Palestinians: Humanitarian Aid**

**Rupa Huq (Labour)** [10207] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to help ensure that adequate aid is being allowed into Palestine.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The UK has trebled its aid commitment for this financial year and is working closely with partners in international agencies and in the region to get aid to where it is desperately needed.

We played a leading role in securing the passage of Security Council resolution 2720, which set out the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access, and 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. The Foreign Secretary continues to discuss and press for the action that needs to be taken to increase aid to Gaza in his regular calls with his Israeli, Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese, US and Palestinian Authority counterparts. The Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Mark Bryson-Richardson, is based in the region and working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10207>

*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))

## **House of Lords Ministerial Statement and Q&A**

### **Action Against Houthi Maritime Attacks**

**The Prime Minister's statement to the House of Commons was read in the Lords.**

**col 760 Baroness Smith of Basildon (Labour):** ... All efforts must be made to resolve this issue by diplomatic means; where military action must be taken within international law, it should be targeted and proportionate; and there is a need to ensure ongoing international support and co-operation. ... So, in the light of Houthi attacks continuing in the Red Sea and the intelligence regarding their ongoing military capacity, we back the military action taken on this occasion. ...

However, when reporting on the UK-US military action, the Prime Minister used the term "eliminated" regarding the identified targets. Yet the Houthi attacks have continued, so we know that they retain capability. We agree with the strategic aims, as set out by the Government and the noble Lord, but it would be helpful for your Lordships' House to understand how effective our military strikes have been in achieving these. ...

**col 761** More broadly, the avoidance of any escalation across the Middle East obviously remains a primary objective, and collaboration with the international coalition is absolutely vital. We share the Government's rejection of Houthi claims that their action in attacking international shipping can be justified in any way by the conflict in Gaza. There is no benefit to the Palestinian people, who desperately need a sustained and effective ceasefire and urgent humanitarian aid and support. We continue to urge the release of all hostages. The only way forward for a just and lasting peace is a secure Israel alongside a viable and secure Palestinian state. A sustainable ceasefire and humanitarian truce are needed, first, to allow the return of all hostages and the provision of urgent humanitarian relief, but also to enable progress to be made towards a two-state solution. Israel existing alongside

Palestine is the only path to a just and lasting peace in the region. ...

**Lord Newby (Liberal Democrat):** ... these Benches support the proportionate military action taken against the Houthi aggression ...

The Statement says that the UK's diplomatic efforts are being increased and that the Foreign Secretary spoke to his Iranian counterpart last week. This is extremely welcome, but it leaves us in the dark about the Iranian response to our requests for a cessation of arms supply to the Houthis. Did the Foreign Secretary feel that he had made any progress with Iran? What happens next in our engagement with it? ...

*col 762* The Prime Minister repeats his assertion of last week that there is no link between our actions of self-defence in the Red Sea and the situation in Israel and Gaza. This may in a limited sense be technically correct, but the Government cannot credibly argue that the Houthi attacks have nothing to do with what is happening in Gaza. It is noteworthy and worrying that this very link is increasing the popularity of the Houthis, not just in the areas they control but across the whole of Yemen. It is therefore only appropriate that the Statement proceeds as if they are linked and sets out the latest UK position on the Gaza conflict as a whole.

It is welcome that the Government are working to establish a new aid route through the port of Ashdod, and for a humanitarian pause, but progress is, to put it politely, very slow. In the meantime, thousands more men, women and children are being indiscriminately killed in Gaza. There have been reports in recent days about a possible new deal on the hostages which would lead to a pause in hostilities, and there appears to be an Arab-led initiative that would see Palestinian control of Gaza without Hamas involvement, alongside concrete moves towards a two-state solution. Predictably, this initiative has been rebuffed by the Israeli Prime Minister, but can the noble Lord give any indication of the UK's involvement in this move and the extent to which the Foreign Secretary will feel able to put pressure on the Israeli Government to respond more positively towards it?

The situation in the Red Sea and in Gaza remains extremely volatile and dangerous. The Government need to continue to act with both determination and care. It is also important that they do so with the united support of Parliament, so I hope that we will continue to have further regular updates on what is happening in this most troubled region.

*col 763* **The Lord Privy Seal (Lord True):** ... I do not think the Government have ever claimed that this defensive action to defend freedom of navigation—so far as we can and intend to—was going to be resolved by the first strike. In response to this gross violation of international law by the Houthis, which is threatening humanitarian aid, among other things, the Government are seeking to degrade the Houthis' ability to carry out their dangerous and illegal attacks. Our assessment of the first round of attacks was that they were successful and had that impact. ...

*col 764* ... My noble friend the Foreign Secretary ... is engaged on a new round of diplomatic activity of which a major part will be to try to encourage further movement towards perhaps opening a new route through Ashdod ... He is meeting the Israeli Prime Minister and, I believe, the Foreign Minister. He is also going on to meet other counterparties in the Middle East. ...

The Iranian regime needs to be judged by its actions and by the actions of its dependants, which have not been encouraging so far.

The fundamental point remains that the Houthis have the ability to stop these attacks. If we did not take action, it would weaken international security and damage the global economy, including ... some of the poorest people in the world, who suffer from the interruption of the movement of goods by sea. ...

On the Gaza conflict ... we are very much focused on the need to make humanitarian aid more substantial, more proximate and more open. ...

**Lord Howell of Guildford (Conservative):** My Lords, it is surely obvious to everyone ... that the Iranians are completely behind all these Houthi operations ... I do not think they want escalation—otherwise, they would have given the green light to their Hezbollah



friends, which they have not done—but they are very determined to show that they are the leaders in the axis of resistance, looking east.

*col/ 765* In light of that, what moves does my noble friend suggest that we can take now to contribute more effectively? ...

**Lord True:** ... One must not forget that, looking at the whole span of human history back to ancient times, Iran has been a vital and greatly civilised place in the world, and it will always be a powerful force in that region, whatever the circumstances. However, it is incumbent on people who have authority, power and strength to use them with wisdom and for specific and constructive purposes. That is not, as my noble friend said, what the Iranian regime is doing at all; it is doing the reverse and is responsible for a lot of the instability in the region, including in relation to the Houthis. ...

*col/ 766* **Baroness Smith of Newnham (Liberal Democrat):** My Lords, in his Statements this week and last week, the Prime Minister suggested that it is wrong to accept that there is any relationship between what is happening in the Red Sea and what is happening in Israel/Gaza, and yet ... one of the key links between those two areas is Iran. What assessment have His Majesty's Government made of the role of Iran in supporting Hamas, the Houthis and Hezbollah and of what response the United Kingdom can make? ...

**Lord True:** ... The fundamental point ... is that there is an issue which this country for centuries has been concerned about, which is ensuring freedom of navigation and freedom of movement and trade on the seas. ... I can only repeat, without going into specifics, that we have taken action against the Iranian proxies in Yemen, the Houthis. ...

**Lord Robathan (Conservative):** ... we must never enter lethal conflict lightly; we have to consider it very well not just to avoid deaths of our own service personnel but for the sake of civilians and others elsewhere. Regarding Iran, does my noble friend consider that in fact, the Iranians' wish—the whole purpose of this—is to test the resolve of the West by attacking shipping to see whether we are actually willing to stand up? Regarding Gaza, does my noble friend agree that, if Hamas was to lay down its weapons and release the hostages and the criminals responsible for the attacks of 7 October were to flee to the Gulf and live in luxury hotels with their friends, there would be an immediate ceasefire, the possibility of a new Government in Israel and a possibility, however remote, of a decent settlement which allowed both Palestinians and Israelis to live in peace?

**Lord True:** I fully agree with my noble friend. The Houthis should cease their action; Hamas should never have undertaken the action it did. We are putting the Iranians under pressure, and I remind the House that we have already sanctioned 400 Iranian individuals and entities, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and we will continue to watch their role in weapons proliferation, regional conflict and human rights violations—all the things they are up to in the region.

*col/ 769* **Lord Turnberg (Labour):** My Lords, it is difficult to understand what advantage there is to be gained by the Houthis in sending their missiles into the Red Sea. The idea that it might be in support of their friends in Hamas does not seem to hold too much water. It is much more clearly the result of Iran's sponsorship. Influencing Iran's behaviour is extremely difficult ...

**Lord True:** ... [I] agree profoundly with the noble Lord that this is a regime that governs in the name of God but acts in a way that seems to be in defiance of the great moral principles of the ages. Ultimately, it will be judged by its own people and by history.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-01-24/debates/D5DCD93D-8497-4071-AAB6-53CDF0101A4D/ActionAgainstHouthiMaritimeAttacks>

## House of Lords Written Answer

### Armed Conflict: Peace Negotiations

**The Lord Bishop of Worcester** [HL1501] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking (1) to assess the lessons of the Oslo peace process, especially in relation to the inclusion of regional actors, and (2) to apply those lessons in their response to current calls from regional players for a ceasefire in Gaza.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** Our position is that for a peaceful solution, four things must happen - there must be a Palestinian-led government in Gaza and the West Bank, a concrete plan to help reform and support the Palestinian Authority, a massive reconstruction plan for Gaza and a political horizon towards a two-state solution. The UK worked extensively with regional partners, notably the UAE, in the adoption of UNSCR 2720, which set out the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access and the steps towards a sustainable ceasefire. The Foreign Secretary and Minister of State for the Middle East continue to discuss and press for the action that needs to be taken to increase aid to Gaza in their regular calls with their Israeli, Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese, US and Palestinian Authority counterparts.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-10/hl1501>

*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))

## UK Parliament Early Day Motion

**Drew Hendry (SNP)** [317] **Support for families of British Palestinians** – That this House absolutely condemns the ongoing conflict in Gaza; further condemns the futile and tragic loss of life and the impact on all Palestinians; notes with specific concern the situation of Salim Ghayyada's 40 immediate family members who have been forced to abandon their homes in Gaza City and move to a tent city in Rafah with limited access to basic necessities including food, water and sanitation; and urges the UK Government to take immediate action and create safe, viable routes for the family of British Palestinians to evacuate and seek safety in the UK.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61804>

## UK Parliament Petition

### Ceasefire in Gaza

**Afzal Khan (Labour)** [P002905] I rise to present a petition urging the Government to call on Israel and Hamas to implement an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and for the immediate release of all hostages.

Over the past four months, Gaza has been subject to unrelenting bombardment which, following almost two decades of siege, has created a humanitarian crisis. Almost 100,000 Palestinians have been killed and injured by the Israeli military, and millions more have been displaced and are subject to severe shortages of food, medicine, water and aid—with no end in sight.

The petition ...

Declares that an urgent, immediate and sustained ceasefire is needed in Gaza to prevent the humanitarian crisis from intensifying; further declares condemnation for the killing of the civilians, the bombing of public infrastructure, and the targeting of journalists; calls for the immediate release of Israeli hostages being held by Hamas; and notes that an

immediate end to the violence is urgent to ensure the viability for a peaceful two-state solution.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to call on Israel and Hamas to implement an immediate ceasefire to prevent further bloodshed and damage so that a peaceful two-state solution may be achieved in Palestine and Israel. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-24/debates/EE1868FE-A645-4433-8F8A-56B21EFAA5F9/CeasefireInGaza>

## UK Parliament Petition: Government Response

### Ceasefire in Palestine

[P002882] The petition of residents of the United Kingdom, Declares that the only and quickest route to lasting peace in Palestine is for all sides to support and adhere to full ceasefire; condemns violence against people for simply being Israeli, equally condemns violence against people simply for being Palestinian; mourns the growing death toll of women, men and children and grieves for the thousands more traumatised by what they have witnessed and experienced.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to add its voice to international calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire so that aid can continue to reach Palestinians; bombed out homes, universities and hospitals in Palestine can be rebuilt and the process to finding last peace with a two state solution can begin.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Anne McLaughlin, Official Report, 29 November 2023; Vol. 741, c. 1020.*]

### **Observations from Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office:**

The UK supports a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, with an end to the destruction, the release of hostages and no return to hostilities, creating a deliverable political horizon to a two-state solution.

No one wants to see this conflict go on a moment longer than necessary, and an immediate pause is now necessary to get aid in and hostages out. The situation is desperate.

Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas, in accordance with international humanitarian law and its obligations in Gaza and across the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The best outcome will be moving from that pause to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to hostilities. Of course, a sustainable, permanent ceasefire—with an end to the destruction, fighting and loss of life, the release of hostages and no resumption of hostilities—would be the best way forward. To achieve that, a number of things would need to happen:

Hamas would have to agree to the release of all hostages

Hamas would no longer be in charge of Gaza—and the threat from Hamas terror and rocket attacks would have to end.

Agreement in place for the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza in order to provide governance and services and, increasingly, security.

There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza; the current levels are woefully inadequate and are deepening the humanitarian crisis. Israel must 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 routes into Gaza, and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity supplies.

Israel must also take the following steps:

Ensure effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys, humanitarian operations

and IDP returns, and facilitate access.

Ensure the UN has the people, vehicles and equipment to distribute aid safely across Gaza. This includes issuing visas.

Extend the opening hours and capacity of the Nitzana screening facility and the Kerem Shalom checkpoint so more trucks, aid and fuel can enter Gaza.

Open the Kerem Shalom crossing seven days a week.

Remove restrictions to ensure greater consistency on the goods allowed in.

Allow unencumbered access to aid coming from Jordan.

Open Ashdod port as a route for aid to reach Gaza.

Open the Erez crossing to allow direct access to the north of Gaza.

Restore water, fuel and electricity connections.

We have trebled our aid commitment this financial year to the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the UK is doing everything it can to get more aid in and open more crossings. We played a leading role in securing the passage of Security Council resolution 2720, which set out the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access in Gaza. We have also supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. Seven hundred and fifty metric tonnes of lifesaving food aid arrived in the first delivery in December and a second delivery of 315 tonnes was made in January 2024. The first UK maritime shipment of aid for Gaza arrived into Egypt on 3 January, carrying 87 tonnes of lifesaving UK and Cypriot aid for the people of Gaza, delivered by Royal Fleet Auxiliary Ship Lyme Bay, in addition to 74 tonnes of aid previously delivered.

The Foreign Secretary and I continue to discuss and press for the action that needs to be taken to increase aid to Gaza in regular calls with our Israeli, Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese, US and Palestinian Authority counterparts, recently with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to discuss the humanitarian situation in Gaza and Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz to raise the urgent need for increased aid to Gaza. The Foreign Secretary has also appointed his representative for humanitarian affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Mark Bryson-Richardson. He is based in the region and is working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

We remain deeply concerned about the impact of the conflict on the civilian population in Gaza. There must be a reduction in civilian casualties. Israel must act within international humanitarian law and protect civilians.

We are clear that for a peaceful solution, four things must happen—there must be a Palestinian-led Government in Gaza and the West Bank, a concrete plan to help reform and support the Palestinian Authority, a massive reconstruction plan for Gaza and a political horizon towards delivering a two-state solution. This will provide a safe and secure Israel living alongside a sovereign and viable Palestinian state across the Occupied Palestinian Territories—the west bank and Gaza—based on 1967 borders and agreed land swaps. The Foreign Secretary and I are fully engaged and committed to working with allies and regional partners in pursuit of this vital objective.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-24/debates/240124119000046/CeasefireInPalestine>

*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))

## House of Commons Library Briefing

### **UK and international response to Houthis in the Red Sea 2024**

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9930/CBP-9930.pdf>

## Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

### **Foreign Secretary's meeting with the Prime Minister of Israel**

... The Foreign Secretary reiterated UK support for Israel's efforts to secure the release of the 136 hostages from Gaza after the barbaric Hamas attack of 7 October. The Foreign Secretary explained that he wants to see an immediate humanitarian pause to get hostages out and aid in, leading to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to hostilities. To enable this, Hamas must agree to the release of all hostages, they could no longer be in charge in Gaza firing rockets at Israel, and an agreement must be in place for the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza to provide governance, services and security. The Foreign Secretary underlined the need for a political strategy to achieve long term peace. This must be based on a credible and irreversible pathway to achieve a Palestinian State alongside Israel, allowing Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security. They discussed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation there. The Foreign Secretary reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza, for Nitzana and Kerem Shalom to be open for longer, and for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza. The Foreign Secretary also underlined the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, and to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretarys-meeting-with-the-prime-minister-of-israel-january-2024>

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### **UK announces new aid support for Gaza on Foreign Secretary visit to Middle East**

... The Foreign Secretary has announced that the UK and Qatar are working together to get more aid into Gaza, with our first joint consignment containing 17 tonnes of family sized tents being flown today ...

On the visit, the Foreign Secretary will witness first-hand both the UK and Qatar's humanitarian aid being loaded onto a plane destined for Egypt, after which it will go by road to Gaza. The tents will provide critical shelter for people and are desperately needed, as more families are displaced by the conflict and a cold winter continues.

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said: The scale of suffering in Gaza is unimaginable. More must be done, faster, to help people trapped in this desperate situation. We have trebled our assistance for Gaza, and cooperation with partners like Qatar is helping move life-saving aid and equipment over the border to those living in devastation.

But our efforts will only make a difference if aid gets to those who need it most, which is why we need more access for UN staff. As I said to PM Netanyahu yesterday, far more trucks need to be able to enter Gaza and more crossings need to open. We need an immediate humanitarian pause to get aid in and hostages out, followed by a sustainable ceasefire, without a return to hostilities. ...

With reports of 9 out of 10 people in Gaza living on less than a meal a day in northern Gaza, our focus must be on practical solutions to save lives. ...

Israel must 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 routes into Gaza and fully restoring water, fuel and electricity supplies. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-new-aid-support-for-gaza-on-foreign-secretary-visit-to-middle-east>



## **Foreign Secretary in Middle East and Turkey to progress sustainable Gaza ceasefire**

... The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have set out the necessary elements for progress – Hamas must agree to the release of all hostages, they can no longer be in charge of Gaza and the threat from their terror and rocket attacks must end. An agreement must also be put in place for the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza in order to provide governance and services and, increasingly, security. ...

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said: No-one wants to see this conflict go on a moment longer than necessary. An immediate pause is now necessary to get aid in and hostages out. The situation is desperate.

This week I am in the Middle East working with partners to help build a plan to move from that pause to a sustainable, permanent ceasefire without a return to hostilities.

Such a plan would require Hamas to agree to the release of all hostages, Hamas to no longer be in charge of Gaza launching rocket attacks at Israel, and an agreement in place for the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza in order to provide governance and services and, increasingly, security.

The Foreign Secretary will also meet with President Abbas and will highlight the UK's long-term support for a two-state solution so that Israelis and Palestinians can live side-by-side in peace.

In Qatar, David Cameron will see first-hand UK-Qatar co-operation to get more humanitarian aid into Gaza for those who need it most, and meet counterparts to discuss how the two countries can work more closely together to do even more.

He will also hold detailed talks on efforts to secure the safe release of hostages, pressing the cases of British and dual nationals through as many diplomatic channels possible. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-in-middle-east-and-turkey-to-progress-sustainable-gaza-ceasefire>

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## **We must collectively work towards a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza: Lord Ahmad's statement at the Security Council**

... What is very clear is the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is worsening daily. People have lost their families. People have lost their homes. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are now facing the risk of famine. They're suffering, frankly put, is unacceptable and our priority must be to alleviate it. ... May I put on record that we sincerely commend all UN and humanitarian teams for their ongoing work, amid hugely difficult conditions on the ground. Many, as we've heard, already have paid with their lives. I've heard also first-hand reports of what can only be described as shocking and harrowing medical operations and procedures taking place, including on young children, desperate conditions, no anaesthesia and, as a backdrop to that, mass burials taking place. To put it succinctly and directly, this must end. Agreements are needed now, and the UK is calling for an immediate humanitarian pause as being necessary to get lifesaving aid in and hostages out. We must alleviate the pain and suffering for all.

In parallel and in accordance with resolution 2720, we urgently call on Israel to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza, including through opening Ashdod port and increasing immediate access through Kerem Shalom. ...

Yes, the UK supports Israel's security, its right to self-defense, but this must be in line with international humanitarian law. And of course, like others, we condemn all forms of terrorism. Hamas' horrific terrorist attacks have had an irreversible impact on innocent lives. ... But what is very clear is that this conflict must not go on a moment longer than necessary. We must collectively work towards a sustainable ceasefire which ends this shocking destruction, which ends fighting, which ends loss of life and prevents the resumption of hostilities.

So what do we need to do to achieve this? Hamas would have to agree the release of all hostages. No longer can they be in charge of Gaza and no longer pose a threat to Israel through terror attacks. But we also need an agreement in place for the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, as well as a complete rejection of any forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza. ... Stability, peace, justice and security is the only way forward. For a peaceful solution, four things must also happen: There must be a Palestinian led government in Gaza and across the West Bank, there must be a concrete plan to help revitalize and support the Palestinian Authority, there must be a massive reconstruction plan for Gaza, and importantly, there must be a political horizon towards the delivery of a two-state solution. ...

**To read the full transcript wee**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-must-collectively-work-towards-a-sustainable-ceasefire-in-gaza-lord-ahmads-statement-at-the-security-council>

*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))

## Scottish Parliament Motion

**Ross Greer (Green) [S6M-11929] Palestinians' Right to Self-determination** – That the Parliament condemns Benjamin Netanyahu for his recently reported opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state, and states its support for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, including a Palestinian state if they so choose.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-11929>

## Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

**Middle East: PACE condemns Hamas' terrorist attack, calls for a ceasefire and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for the population in Gaza**

At a plenary session debate in Strasbourg, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) “unequivocally and in the strongest possible terms condemned the barbaric attack conducted by Hamas and other militia groups against Israel on 7 October 2023”, acts which “cannot be justified on any grounds whatsoever”. The parliamentarians expressed their support for Israel in the face of “the most brutal terrorist attack of its history”, affirming its right to self-defence.

In a resolution adopted today ... the parliamentarians also voiced their dismay at “the staggering number of innocent casualties in the Gaza Strip”, noting that Israel's military response has resulted in the loss of thousands of lives, massive displacement and “widespread destruction of civilian objects and infrastructure in Gaza”.

PACE called for a permanent ceasefire and for a restart of efforts towards a political solution “provided that all hostages are immediately and unconditionally released” and that “the terrorist organisation Hamas is dismantled”. It also called for rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for the population in Gaza.

It stressed the need for the parties to the hostilities to strictly abide by international law and international humanitarian law, in line with the principles of distinction, necessity, proportionality and precaution.

According to the adopted text, the Israeli authorities must urgently and resolutely engage in preventing settler violence and to refrain from the “building of new settlements, and the extension of old ones, home demolitions, and confiscation of land in the occupied territories”.

Finally, the Parliamentary Assembly called for the resumption of peace negotiations based

on a two-State solution, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders and the support of the international community to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region. In this context, PACE will step up its efforts to promote dialogue between the Knesset, the Palestinian National Council and parliaments of Council of Europe member states.

<https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9352/middle-east-pace-condemns-hamas-terrorist-attack-calls-for-a-ceasefire-and-unhindered-access-to-humanitarian-assistance-for-the-population-in-gaza>

**Resolution 2524 (2024): Recent developments in the Middle East: Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel and Israel's response**

<https://pace.coe.int/pdf/a7938f4f47285bb2c972975f718a10461b10857e1b14ff04a0830bb56adfa4b2/res.%202524.pdf>

## United Nations

**Two-State Solution 'Only Way to Avoid Endless Cycles of Fear, Hatred, Violence', Secretary-General Tells Security Council Debate on Middle East**

... Over 100 days have passed since more than 1,200 Israelis and others were killed in the horrific terror attacks launched by Hamas against Israel, with over 250 people taken hostage. For all those affected, these have been 100 days of heartache and anguish.

Nothing can justify deliberate killing, injuring, kidnapping of civilians, the use of sexual violence against them — or the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards civilian targets. I once again demand the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. In the interim they must be treated humanely and allowed to receive visits and assistance from the Red Cross. ...

It was also reported yesterday that Israel is proposing a two-month pause in hostilities in exchange for a phased release of all remaining hostages. I will continue, in my limited capacity, to pursue all efforts to contribute to their release.

The past 100 days have been heartbreaking and catastrophic for Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

More than 25,000 people, mainly women and children, have reportedly been killed in operations launched by Israeli forces. More than 60,000 others have been reportedly injured. ...

The entire population of Gaza is enduring destruction at a scale and speed without parallel in recent history.

Nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is appalling.

With winter bearing down, 2.2 million Palestinians in Gaza face inhumane, squalid conditions, struggling to simply make it through another day without proper shelter, heating, sanitary facilities, food, and drinking water.

Everyone in Gaza is hungry — with a quarter of Gaza's population — more than half a million people — grappling with catastrophic levels of food insecurity. Meanwhile, nearly one and a half million people are now crammed inside Rafah Governorate.

Disease is spreading as the health system collapses. Only 16 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are even partly functional. ...

Without functioning hospitals, and with minimal opportunities for patients to exit Gaza, thousands suffering from chronic diseases like cancer and kidney failure are at risk of dying. A functioning medical evacuation system is urgently needed. ...

I welcome the agreement, facilitated by Qatar and France, of an operation to deliver additional medicines and health-care supplies to civilians in Gaza, and to hostages held in Gaza. ...

Let's face it. Despite all the efforts I described, no effective humanitarian aid operation can

function under the conditions that have been forced on Palestinians in Gaza and those doing everything possible to help them.

The quantity of aid is highly insufficient in light of needs.

It is fantasy to think that 2.2 million people can survive on aid alone.

Basic commodities from the private sector must enter in meaningful quantities — as they did for many years before the current fighting. This is essential to address rising needs and avert both a complete breakdown and ever-mounting death toll. ...

Humanitarian delivery is not an exercise of counting trucks. It is about ensuring the right volume and quality of assistance reaches people in need ...

We need safety. We are operating in a war zone. The current humanitarian notification mechanisms do not offer any real confidence for operations and planning humanitarian responses. ...

We need to be equipped to do our job. This includes telecommunications equipment, so convoys can communicate with each other; armoured vehicles and protective gear, given the ongoing hostilities and the widespread contamination with explosive remnants of war; far greater logistical capacity; spare parts for infrastructure such as desalination plants, and other critical humanitarian items. ...

But we still face a cumbersome process of verifications and multiple unjustified rejections of desperately needed items.

We need more crossing points into Gaza to reduce congestion and avoid chokepoints.

The provision of aid to Gaza via the Ashdod port in Israel must also resume. A first shipment of flour reached Gaza from Ashdod but much more is required.

We need access to the north. ...

The majority of missions were denied access by Israel. ...

And we need visas. Dozens of humanitarians have been waiting for months to receive their visas from the Government of Israel. ...

I repeat my call for an end to all violations of international humanitarian law.

The use of human shields is unacceptable — as are the unprecedented levels of devastation and civilian killings. I am also deeply troubled by reports of Israel's inhumane treatment of Palestinians detained during military operations.

I renew my appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. ...

War and misery in Gaza are fuelling turmoil far beyond. We are seeing dangerous developments across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where tensions are off the charts — with a dramatic increase in casualties.

Dozens of Palestinians are being arrested daily. Over 6,000 Palestinians were detained since 7 October, with many subsequently released.

Settler violence is also another major concern. The demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned houses and other structures continues.

The Palestinian economy is in crisis. Israel's withholding of a significant portion of Palestinian tax revenues, the continued prohibition on nearly all Palestinian workers entering Israel since 7 October, and severe movement and access restrictions across the West Bank are all contributing to soaring unemployment and poverty. ...

The risks of broader regional escalation are now becoming a reality. Turning to the north, daily exchanges of fire across the Blue Line, including strikes on civilian areas, have killed six Israelis and 25 Lebanese civilians and driven tens of thousands from their homes on both sides. ...

The situation in the Red Sea is also deeply worrying. ...

Meanwhile, there are almost daily attacks on facilities hosting United States and international coalition forces in Iraq and Syria. In response, the United States has launched air strikes targeting individuals and groups suspected of these actions.

And in Syria, air strikes that Iran and Syria have attributed to Israel, have targeted officials of Hamas and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran.

I urge all parties to step back from the brink and to consider the horrendous human cost of

a regional conflict. ...

A lasting end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only come through a two-State solution. Israelis must see their legitimate needs for security materialized, and Palestinians must see their legitimate aspirations for a fully independent, viable and sovereign State realized, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

Israel's occupation must end.

Last week's clear and repeated rejection of the two-State solution at the highest levels of the Israeli Government is unacceptable. ...

This refusal, and the denial of the right to statehood to the Palestinian people, would indefinitely prolong a conflict that has become a major threat to global peace and security. It would exacerbate polarization and embolden extremists everywhere.

The right of the Palestinian people to build their own fully independent State must be recognized by all. And any refusal to accept the two-State solution by any party must be firmly rejected.

What is the alternative? How would a one-State solution look with such a large number of Palestinians inside without any real sense of freedom, rights and dignity? ...

The role of the international community is clear. We must unite to support Israelis and Palestinians to take determined actions to advance a meaningful peace process.

Over recent decades, the two-State solution has been traduced, undermined and left for dead many times. However, it remains the only way to achieve durable and equitable peace in Israel, in Palestine and in the region. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sqsm22113.doc.htm>

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### **Secretary-General Underscores Two-State Solution Only Way to End Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, One-State Formula Inconceivable, in Day-Long Debate**

... **António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations**, noted that 100 days have passed since more than 1,200 Israelis and others were killed, and over 250 taken hostage, in the horrific terror attacks launched by Hamas. ... [\[click here to read this speech in more detail\]](#)

**Riyad Al-Maliki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine**, painted a grim picture of Israel's deadly aggression against the Palestinian people, which continues unabated and is taking thousands of innocent civilian lives, destroying everything in its path and threatening regional and international peace and security. ... it is a premeditated effort to inflict maximum pain on the Palestinian population. Israel has unleashed the most savage and indiscriminate bombing campaign since the Second World War. Further, it has imposed a cruel siege on Gaza — leading to famine, dehydration, disease and despair — and its actions have led to forcible displacement at a scale and speed not witnessed in modern history.

“No home, hospital, school, mosque, church or UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] shelter is safe from Israel's bombardments,” he declared, pointing to “2,000-ton bombs dropped with no care whatsoever for civilian lives”. More than 25,000 civilians have been killed — including over 11,000 children — more than 63,000 have been injured, thousands have been permanently maimed or disabled and more than 7,000 have been buried under the rubble. ...

Israeli leaders, he said, “do not see our people as an empirical and political reality to coexist with, but as a demographic threat to get rid of through death, displacement or subjugation”. There are only two paths ahead, he stressed — one that starts with Palestinian freedom and leads to shared peace and security in the region, or one that continues denying this freedom and dooms the region to endless conflict. “Israel should no longer entertain the



illusion that there is somehow a third path whereby it can choose continued occupation and colonialism and apartheid and somehow still achieve regional peace and security,” he emphasized. ...

**The representative of Israel** urged the Council to shift its focus towards addressing the real, significant security threats in the Middle East, which is suffering from “cancer”. ... he spotlighted the continuous threat posed by Hamas, which exploits international aid to turn Gaza into “a war machine”, as well as the “genocidal goals of annihilating Israel” pursued by Hamas during the 7 October events where over 1,200 Israelis were killed. Describing calls for a ceasefire by Council members as “shocking”, he warned that any such measure would leave Hamas in power, allowing them to regroup and rearm while “Israelis will face another attempted Holocaust”.

Against that backdrop, he reiterated his country’s commitment to defending its future and criticized the international community for advocating for a ceasefire without addressing the root causes of the conflict. ...

Warning about the potential spillover of the conflict, he said that it was planned and instructed by Iran, citing instances where Iranian weapons were used in attacks beyond the Middle East — including in Africa and Europe. He then asked whether the Council will finally address the real threat to regional security, calling Iran “the architect of instability”. ...

**Stéphane Séjourné, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France** ... point[ed] out that the Council has two possible options. The first is division, argument and fanning the flames — the choice of those who invade their neighbour. His choice, however, would be the second option — to stand alongside both Israelis and Palestinians, for peace and the good of both, which entails difficult things for both sides. To Israel, he said that there must be a Palestinian State; that violence towards Palestinians, particularly by extremist settlers, must end; and that international law applies to everyone. To Palestinians, he said that there could be no ambiguity about Israel’s right to live in peace and security and to exercise its right to self-defence in the face of terrorism. ...

He therefore called for the immediate, unconditional release of all hostages; the condemnation of the 7 October terrorist attacks; and the establishment of a ceasefire. ... he called for a relaunched peace process, through the two-State solution, stating that it is not for Israel to decide for Palestinians how they will be governed tomorrow, nor the scope of their sovereignty. As well, the violence by settlers in the West Bank is unacceptable and must end. ...

**Ahmed Attaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs and National Community Abroad of Algeria**, noted ... the need to compel Israel, the colonizing Power, to uphold international law and end the ongoing situation. He noted South Africa’s initiative to institute proceedings at the International Court of Justice in response to the ongoing genocidal war in Gaza, as well as Chile’s referral of crimes committed in Gaza to the International Criminal Court. ...

**Sergey V. Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation** ... stress[ed] the need to ensure a ceasefire and end the suffering of Palestinians. Equally needed are steps towards avoiding further destabilization across the Middle East. ...

Categorically repudiating the aggression against Yemen by the United States and United Kingdom without Council approval, he said that their actions pose a direct threat to international peace. ... Western countries want to focus on the day after the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as if the escalation in Gaza had already ceased. ...

**Tariq Ahmad, Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Commonwealth and United Nations of the United Kingdom**, called for an immediate pause to get life-saving aid in and hostages out of Gaza. He also called on Israel to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza ...

Expressing support for Israel’s right to self-defence, he condemned all forms of terror. Hamas’ horrific terrorist attacks have had an irreversible impact on innocent

lives. The militant group must agree that it will release all hostages, no longer be in charge of Gaza, and no longer pose a threat to Israel through security and terror attacks. ... [click here to read this speech in greater detail](#)

**Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights of the United States**, underscored the need for more to be done to ensure rapid humanitarian assistance at scale for all civilians in Gaza. ... She went on to reject calls to relocate Palestinians outside Gaza, also condemning dehumanizing language used by officials on all sides of the conflict. Israeli leaders must take feasible precautions to minimize civilian harm in line with international law, she said, also calling for the protection of humanitarian workers. ...

The protected status of hospitals in western Khan Younis must be respected, she went on to say, adding that Hamas must not be allowed to launch attacks from such facilities. Emphasizing that group's role in unleashing the conflict, she stressed that its perpetration of conflict-related sexual violence is "undisputed" and called for the release of the 100 remaining hostages. ... As well, she called for a diplomatic solution to be reached on the Blue Line and condemned the forced displacement and unprecedented settler violence in the West Bank. ...

**The representative of China** said the tragedy in Gaza violates the conscience of humankind and the bottom line of international law. "There is no justification for this and it absolutely should not continue," he stressed, highlighting the consensus in the international community on an immediate ceasefire. ... He ... called on Israel to immediately reverse its course and cease indiscriminate military attacks on Gaza. The two-State solution is the only viable path for achieving peace between Palestine and Israel, he said, expressing grave concern over recent Israeli leadership statements rejecting this solution. ...

**Ayman H. Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan**, stating that Israel's aggression towards Gaza has lasted for far too long, recalled that, over 109 days of brutality, more than 25,000 lives have been taken and thousands of children have been buried under the rubble. While "Israel is making a mockery of international law", the Security Council has yet to demand a ceasefire, he pointed out. Further, the organ has yet to enforce its own resolution demanding that food get to the starved, medicine to the ill and wounded and anaesthesia to children undergoing surgery to treat injuries caused by indiscriminate Israeli shelling of homes, schools, hospitals and shelters. He underscored: "Stop this massacre."

No place in Gaza is safe, he went on to say, noting that even the dead in 16 cemeteries have been dug out by Israeli soldiers. Such crimes were not the actions of rogue troops, but an expression of the extremist, racist agenda propelling the war, which has systematically dehumanized 5 million Palestinians under Israeli occupation in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and is embraced by Israeli ministers. ...

**Hakan Fidan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Türkiye**, said ... Gaza used to be an open prison; now, it is a battleground where Israel's Prime Minister runs military operations to extend his political life. The argument that the current war is about providing security for Israel is "far from being convincing", he stressed, adding that the situation in Gaza and the West Bank clearly demonstrates who needs security and the right to self-defence ...

... he welcomed the application before the International Court of Justice concerning Israel's violations of its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. "It is a timely attempt to protect the Palestinian people against further harm," he added. ...

**Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iran**, said that the Council's inability to address the crimes of the Israeli regime, and to hold it accountable, is unacceptable. ... The killing of civilians in Gaza and the West Bank cannot continue until the "total destruction of Hamas", he stressed, warning that "this time will never come". ...

**Abdallah Bou Habib, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon**,

underscored the role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in providing a sanctuary aiding small States like his to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity. ... 75 years after the establishment of Israel on Palestinian land, displacing half its population to neighbouring countries, temporary solutions are still being sought when conflict resurfaces, as was most recently the case on 7 October. ... Israel threatens to continue its “reckless war” without a vision for sustainable peace, turning Gaza into ashes to eliminate Hamas, he said, deploring the “carte blanche” given to the blind killing of Palestinian civilians by the West. ...

**Alexander Schallenberg, Federal Minister for Europe and International Affairs of Austria**, said Hamas’ barbaric terror attacks have brought Gaza and the whole region to the edge of the abyss. No country on Earth would tolerate such a murderous band of extremists in its neighbourhood. Israel has not only the right but also the duty to defend its people. At the same time, there can be no doubt that much more needs to be done to protect civilians in Gaza. More humanitarian aid needs to reach those in need. ...

**Waleed El-Khereiji, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia**, observed that tensions in the Middle East are increasing as the Israeli war machine continues its attacks on hospitals, homes and places of worship in the Gaza Strip. Noting that 30,000 Palestinians have perished because of the ongoing military escalation, he asked: “How can this tragedy continue with no measure to halt the carnage and collective punishment of defenceless civilians?” ...

**Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait**, deplored that Gaza is witnessing collective punishment, indiscriminate bombing and the killing of innocent civilians. He said he has come to the Council to defend the brotherly Palestinian people and international law. The main reason for the conflict is the existence of an occupation that has no prospects of ending. ...

He welcomed the step taken by South Africa in submitting a case before the International Court of Justice against Israel for committing genocide against the Palestinian people. ...

**Diego Martínez Belío, State Secretary for Foreign and Global Affairs of Spain**, underscored that the international community cannot resign itself to the facts that innocent Palestinian civilians continue to die, that the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate and that Israeli hostages and displaced people within Israel are unable to return to their homes. ...

There is no excuse for making innocent civilians pay for Hamas’ crimes. The Palestinians have the right to their own State, he asserted, adding that the international community must assume its responsibility and provide the framework with which to realize the two-State solution without further delay. ...

**The representative of the United Arab Emirates** called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, adding that it is time for the minority view to cease obstructing its implementation. With one in four people experiencing famine-like conditions in Gaza, there is an urgent need for prioritizing life-saving aid and the safe release of hostages. ... She further urged to end “dual use” restrictions preventing trucks with basic medical supplies — a deliberate policy causing collective suffering — from being turned away. ...

**The Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States** said ... Israel is acting impetuously, also due to the Council’s inability to create a political horizon for settling the Palestinian question. The humanitarian tragedy is exacerbated every day in Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem and other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory ...

**The representative of Bahrain**, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, expressed concern over Israel’s systemic aggression perpetrated against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. It has led to systemic destruction of civilian infrastructure and facilitates, which has exacerbated the suffering of Palestinian civilians who are going through horrific humanitarian conditions. ...

Further, he strongly rejected Israel’s policy of collective punishment imposed on the people in Gaza, rejecting any attempt for forced displacement of Palestinians from their land. He

also condemned Israel's illegal practices in the West Bank ...

**The representative of South Africa** said that Israel's atrocities in Palestine violate international law, as did Hamas' attacks and kidnapping of innocent civilians on 7 October. The ultimate solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the establishment of two States, and he urged that a UN-led peace process commence immediately. For this reason, "all of us must insist on a comprehensive ceasefire", he said, noting that Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians has persisted for decades without effective action to safeguard Palestinian lives. ...

**The representative of Germany** condemned Hamas' brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks across Israel on and since 7 October 2023, noting that Israel has the right to defend itself. At the same time, she voiced concern over the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. "To be clear: Life in Gaza is hell", she asserted, adding that the suffering of so many innocent civilians must end and calling on Israel's military to better protect them. ...

**The representative of Egypt** ... said that the war in Gaza has resulted in atrocities not witnessed by humankind for centuries. It has spared nobody — not even the dead, whose tombs were defaced and bodies exhumed. ... Those who believed that occupation was viable and that security concerns could be addressed through military means alone were misled, he said, underscoring the need for the "sole solution" to be revisited: the establishment of a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. ...

**The representative of the European Union** ... stressed that rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access is an obligation under international law. ...

Israel has the right to defend itself, he went on to say, but added that military operations must be proportionate and in line with international humanitarian and human-rights law. ...

**The representative of Qatar** highlighted her country's diplomatic efforts, undertaken at the highest levels with regional and international partners, to end the war, ensure the delivery of sufficient and continuous humanitarian assistance, release prisoners and hostages and prevent regional escalation. Thanks to Qatar's mediation efforts alongside the United States and Egypt, a humanitarian pause was reached in November 2023 that allowed the delivery of aid as well as the release of both hundreds of women and children detained in Gaza and Palestinian prisoners. Further, she pointed out that Qatar and France succeeded in reaching an agreement between Israel and Hamas to deliver medicine and humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza, especially those in the most affected areas. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15569.doc.htm>

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### **Amid Continuing Rights Violations in Gaza, Security Council Must Do More to Enforce International Law, Its Own Resolutions, Speakers Stress as Open Debate Concludes**

... **The representative of Iraq** deplored the Council's failure to fulfil its legal responsibility in maintaining international peace and security, namely solving the massacres and genocide perpetrated by Israeli occupation forces despite international calls for a ceasefire. ... What happened on 7 October 2023 cannot be seen in isolation, given the accumulated violations by Israeli forces, including usurping lands and violating holy places, for more than seven decades. ...

**The representative of Syria** ... said that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to implement the blockade of Gaza, prevent the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and use prohibited weapons, increasing the threat of the use of nuclear bombs. ... Welcoming the steps taken by South Africa against Israel at the International Court of Justice, he also called for an end to Israel's policy against the occupied Golan since 1977, including attempts to change the demographic composition. ...

**The representative of Ireland** ... said that “it is now manifestly clear that the situation on the ground demands an immediate humanitarian ceasefire” ... While he recalled his country’s consistent condemnation of Hamas’ attacks on and since 7 October, he stressed that international law limits the use of force in self-defence to no more than is necessary and proportionate. “No more,” he repeated. These limits have been exceeded, he said, also expressing concern that the use of heavy munitions with wide blast areas cannot be limited to military objectives located in heavily populated urban centres — “and is therefore indiscriminate”. ...

**The observer for the Holy See**, recalling Pope Francis’ condemnation of every instance of terrorism and extremism, also recalled his statement: “This is not the way to resolve disputes between peoples.” He reiterated Pope Francis’ appeal for a ceasefire “on every front”, which would allow space for dialogue — “however difficult it might be” — to secure the release of the remaining hostages and facilitate the distribution of much-needed humanitarian aid. “It is essential to avoid an entire population paying the consequences for a heinous act of terrorism,” he stressed, adding that any action taken in self-defence must be guided by the principles of distinction and proportionality. ...

**The representative of Oman** pointed out that the Council is failing to take measures to stop the situation in Gaza despite repeated calls to do so from the international community. “Peace-loving countries will not forget those who gave a green light to Israel to continue its aggression against the Palestinian people,” he observed and, addressing Israel, stated: “You need to stop this holocaust against the Palestinian people.” That State’s project of genocide, ethnic cleansing and forcible displacement is not acceptable. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15570.doc.htm>

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## Foreign Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answer

#### Denmark: Blasphemy

**Fleur Anderson (Labour)** [10554] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment his Department has made of the implications for his policies of changes to the law of blasphemy in Denmark.

**Leo Docherty:** Denmark has no law against blasphemy. On 7 December, the Danish Parliament passed a law banning the inappropriate treatment of religious texts. We have condemned recent incidents of Quran burning in Europe and we unequivocally denounce hatred and incitement of violence on the basis of religion or belief. Our position remains unchanged: we are committed to both freedom of expression and Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), and will continue to promote mutual respect between different communities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-18/10554>

### House of Commons Library Briefing

#### Religious persecution and the World Watch List 2024

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2024-0017/CDP-2024-0017.pdf>

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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>

Holocaust Memorial Bill Committee: Petitions against the Bill: 23 January 2024

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14134/html/>

#### **International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill**

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

#### **Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill**

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

#### **Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill**

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

### Scottish Parliament

#### **Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill**

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

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## Consultations \*\* new or updated today

**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>

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