



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answer

Topical Questions: Education

Bob Blackman (Conservative): Is it not a disgrace that young children are told to cover up their badges so that people do not know which school they attend, and are told to remove outward signs that they are Jewish? Security is provided once they get to school, but what will my right hon. Friend do to make sure that children are educated on the evils of antisemitism, so that we spread this message across all schools, rather than just Jewish schools?

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend is right. After Holocaust Memorial Day, we are acutely conscious of the continuing need to act against antisemitism. One of the things we are doing is launching a new fund for both schools and higher education, to try to address antisemitism effectively at its root.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-29/debates/F907BCF7-8BD9-4A53-B5C1-E3C0083BD945/TopicalQuestions#contribution-63A13652-BF02-4CD2-9C98-9932F1B97E68>

House of Commons Written Answer

Schools: Antisemitism

Bob Blackman (Conservative) [901201] To ask the Secretary of State for Education,

what steps her Department is taking to tackle antisemitism in schools.

Damian Hinds: It is deeply concerning to see the huge rise in antisemitism following Hamas's terrorist attacks in Israel on 7 October 2023. To see this form of hatred also take place in education is unacceptable.

The government took immediate action in October 2023. First, to increase security measures at Jewish schools, colleges and nurseries - we announced £3 million of additional funding to the Community Security Trust.

The Secretary of State also wrote to all schools and colleges on 17 October 2023, urging them to support Jewish students and highlighting our political impartiality guidance and advice on the Prevent programme.

To support schools and colleges we published learning resources on our Educate Against Hate website.

We are also providing over £3 million of funding, between 10 August 2021 and 31 March 2024, to five anti-bullying organisations, which includes projects to tackle hate-related bullying on the basis of race and faith.

The department has networks of 'Prevent' practitioners who provide training to school staff on radicalisation and empower teachers to challenge extremism in the classroom.

We continue to monitor the situation carefully. Ministers have conducted several visits recently to listen to the experience of Jewish communities, including meeting with Dr David Landau who is Chair of Governors Menorah High School, one of the settings that temporarily closed in October over safety concerns.

We are engaging regularly with faith groups and school leadership organisations to understand their concerns and use it to shape our response. This includes the Board of Jewish Deputies and Chinuch UK.

In the Autumn Statement, on 22 November 2023, the government announced a further £7 million of funding over the next three years to help tackle antisemitism. This will help support schools, colleges, and universities to understand, recognise and deal with antisemitism effectively. We are preparing to issue an invitation for interested organisations to tender in the coming weeks.

If anyone feels that specific issues in education are not being addressed, they can raise them directly to the department through the Counter Extremism helpline or our "Report Extremism" online form. We then engage with the police and local authorities to consider what action is needed.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-23/901201>

The funding announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-new-support-to-keep-british-jewish-communities-safe>

The letter to schools and colleges referred to above can be read at

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKDFE/bulletins/3763f13>

The Educate Against Hate website, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.educateagainsthate.com/>

The Autumn Statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-statement-2023/autumn-statement-2023-html>

The online form referred to above can be accessed at

<https://www.gov.uk/report-terrorism>

Scottish Parliament Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

PE2052: Child Circumcision

Banning child circumcision unless it is medically necessary, with no less invasive solutions available.

The Convener (Jackson Carlaw, Conservative): ... The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to give boys the same level of bodily autonomy and protection that was given to girls in the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Act 2005, which banned all forms of female circumcision.

In its response to the petition, the Scottish Government states that it recognises non-therapeutic male infant circumcision on religious grounds, and it notes that national health service guidelines are in place for that practice. The Scottish Government states that it does not regard male circumcision as comparable to female genital mutilation.

In his written submission, the petitioner argues that children's bodily autonomy and religious rights should take precedence over the beliefs of parents, as children may not follow the same religion in adulthood. He states that male circumcision shares many of the negative effects of the most common forms of female genital mutilation ...

We have also received submissions from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities and the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society. Both argue that circumcision is important for religious and parental autonomy, with parents acting in the best interests of their children within the established legal and medical frameworks.

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities referenced UK-based research that found that more than 80 per cent of respondents would consider a prohibition of brit milah to be at least "a fairly big problem". The submission explains that, because of its centrality to Jewish life, denying milah to a Jewish boy undermines his sense of wellbeing and his right to cultural heritage and identity.

The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society notes that Shia Islam categorically condemns mutilations of all humans, especially children, and that there is a "crucial distinction" between its practice and genital mutilation. ...

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Fergus Ewing (SNP): I recommend that we close the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders, on the basis that the Scottish Government recognises non-therapeutic male infant circumcision on religious grounds and does not regard male circumcision as comparable to female genital mutilation.

The Convener: I think that that is a very clear direction from the Scottish Government with regard to the aims of the petition. Given that, are colleagues minded to agree and to close the petition on that basis?

Members indicated agreement.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/CPPP-24-01-2024?meeting=15678&iob=133734>

Papers before the Committee, including evidence from the petitioner, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, and the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society, and a Scottish Parliament Information Centre Briefing

<https://www.parliament.scot/~media/committ/7448>

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Holocaust

Kate Osamor MP

Kate Osamor Labour & Co-op MP for Edmonton Holocaust Memorial Day is a day to remember the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust and the genocides that have occurred since. I apologise for any offence caused by my reference to the ongoing humanitarian disaster in Gaza as part of that period of remembrance.

<https://twitter.com/KateOsamor/status/1751016559940608329>

Kate Osamor has been suspended from the Parliamentary Labour Party for having tweeted "Tomorrow is Holocaust Memorial Day, an international day to remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, the millions of other people murdered under Nazi persecution of other groups and more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and now Gaza."

A report of the matter can be read at

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-68125424>

Welsh Senedd

Statement by the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip: Holocaust Memorial Day

252 Jane Hutt (Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip): ... Saturday was Holocaust Memorial Day, and here at the Senedd we marked this day by illuminating our building in purple. In the darkness, this light reminded us of the millions of people who were persecuted and killed during the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. At 8.00 p.m. on the same day, people across the UK joined in with the 'light the darkness' moment by lighting candles and placing them in their windows. ...

256 The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2024 is the 'fragility of freedom'. In their introduction to this year's theme, the Holocaust Memorial Trust highlighted that freedom cannot be taken for granted and we must not be complacent—we must fight to ensure it is never lost. ...

257 'Not only do perpetrator regimes erode the freedom of the people they are targeting, demonstrating how fragile freedom is, they also restrict the freedoms of others around them, to prevent people from challenging the regime. 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 regime.'

258 The theme this year underlined the numerous ways in which freedom is restricted and eroded. It shone a light on the individuals who risked their freedom to save others and emphasised that liberation does not necessarily mean to be completely free. ...

259 The Welsh Government funded the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust to employ a support worker in Wales who, for the past few months, has been working with communities and organisations to plan and support commemorative activities across Wales.

260 The Welsh Government continues to fund the Holocaust Educational Trust to run the Lessons from Auschwitz project in Wales. ... Much more than just an excursion, it's a powerful journey of learning and exploration about the history of the Holocaust and the world we live in. In 2023 110 students from 55 Welsh schools took part in the project. ...

261 Tackling antisemitism remains a high priority for Welsh Government. ... Lord Mann welcomed the Curriculum for Wales and its focus on helping children and young people to develop as ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world, recognising it as a platform to address antisemitism in Wales.

262 In December I issued a joint letter with the Minister for Education and the Welsh

Language to all headteachers in Wales to provide guidance and support to schools and education settings on how to effectively address antisemitism and Islamophobia, including ways of supporting learners and their families. ...

263 The theme for National Hate Crime Awareness Week 2023 was faith-based hate, with a focus on antisemitism ...

265 So, I will close this statement by thanking the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Holocaust Educational Trust for their vital work. We condemn the vile hatred expressed by individuals who seek to create a climate of fear and aim to fragment our communities. Today and moving forward we have a duty to ensure that Wales continues to stand up to all forms of hate, to help create a safer and more equal nation, where difference is accepted and embraced.

267 **Mark Isherwood (Conservative):** ... Holocaust Memorial Day takes place, as we've heard, on 27 January each year—the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp, on 27 January 1945; remembering the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust under Nazi persecution and in the genocides that followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur; and educating generations of young people about this terrible history and the need to stand up against acts of bigotry and hatred today. In addition to the 6 million Jewish people murdered in the Holocaust, Nazi authorities also targeted and killed other groups, including children because of their perceived racial and biological inferiority, Roma and Sinti Gypsies, disabled Germans, LGBT people, and some of the Slavic peoples, especially Poles and Russians. Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological and behavioural grounds. So—and I'm sure she will—will the Minister agree that the past informs the future and that those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat its mistakes and atrocities?

268 Auschwitz initially served as a detention centre for political prisoners. However, it evolved into a network of camps, where Jewish people and other perceived enemies of the Nazi state were exterminated, often in gas chambers or used as slave labour. I visited the rightly unsettling Holocaust museum, when in Israel, and last September I made a moving visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest of the Nazi concentration and death camps. The empty barracks, the barbed-wire fencing, the solemn exhibits, the telltale chimneys—all these vestiges left a strong impression. But what struck me most was the sheer vastness of the sprawling memorial to history's most notorious death camp. I also made an evocative visit to Oskar Schindler's factory in Krakow. So, how can the Welsh Government hardwire education about the Holocaust, including the horrors that happened in Auschwitz-Birkenau and other death camps, into our schools and wider information sources for each generation? ...

270 How can we ensure that this becomes embedded on a more mainstream basis, not just in those schools that are at the forefront of this sort of issue, but those that perhaps need to be helped further along the way? How will this also embed the new resource for secondary schools in Wales about the Romani Holocaust, or *porajmos*, launched by the Romani Cultural and Arts Company with funding from the UK Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities? And how will this ensure public awareness of the close to 0.25 million disabled children and adults who were also murdered under the Nazi regime?

271 North Wales Police recorded a rise in religious hate crime in the weeks following the outbreak of the Hamas-Israel conflict last year. The number of antisemitic hate crimes recorded by several of Wales's police forces have also seen similar rises. ... what further action is the Welsh Government taking to counter this rise in religious and racial hate crime?

275 **Jane Hutt:** ... we have a duty to stand up against hate and persecution, and commemorating the Holocaust is important to ensure that we'll never forget how divisive hateful narratives can be and what can happen if people in communities are targeted and dehumanised because of who they are. ... Of course, the Holocaust didn't happen overnight; it began with the gradual erosion of human

rights, and, of course, this divisive rhetoric against people who were different or perceived to be different to others. ...

277 But I do want to turn to the important points about education particularly and the role of the Holocaust Educational Trust. Those of us who attended either the event last week in the Pierhead building, or indeed on Friday, will have heard from the young people, the young ambassadors, who gave such important contributions at those events. We have to be so proud—we are so proud—of our young people when they speak up about their experiences. ...

278 I think this does reflect in our curriculum, has been recognised, because diversity is now a cross-cutting theme in the Curriculum for Wales, and this does help and equip our young people to understand and respect their own and each other's histories, cultures and traditions ...

279 Just finally, also, I want to comment on your point that has been made particularly about addressing hate crime ... We are actually the first—. The Wales Hate Support Centre is the first service of its kind in the UK to offer as well a children and young people-friendly hate crime service, and we have our Hate Hurts Wales communications campaign, but are also trying to understand ways in which we can reach out to those who are particularly affected by race hate or sexual orientation or religion hate crimes ...

280 It is important that schoolchildren learn about the wrongs and consequences of contemporary antisemitism ...

281 **Sioned Williams (Plaid Cymru):** ... at the heart of our acts of remembrance, in response to the horrors of the Holocaust, is a reflection on humanity's ability to cause such suffering to fellow humans, and also humanity's ability to remain silent in the face of such suffering. A refusal to remain silent in the face of a state's atrocities against a specific group of people, such as the Jews of Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, can require a great deal of bravery—incredible acts of personal bravery, as in the case of people such as Sophie Scholl in Nazi Germany. It also takes a great deal of political bravery on Governments' behalf to oppose the oppressive actions of powerful nations.

282 I'd like to quote, in this context, a tribute written for one of the most prominent philosophical minds of the twentieth century, and one of the leaders of the civil rights movement in the United States, namely Rabbi Abraham Joshua Herschel. The tribute is by a scholar of philosophy from Wales, W.D. Davies, and it was read by him at Rabbi Herschel's funeral in 1972. W.D. Davies was the son of a miner and his wife in Glanamman, a few miles away from where I live in the Swansea valley. ...

283 'I recall once, at his home, that he referred to the silence of decent people in Germany, and elsewhere, in the presence of the monstrous and unspeakable deeds of Hitler, and spoke of the need to make public protest against such.... That he very publicly marched to Selma and very publicly opposed the Vietnam war ... It was his passionate reaction against the craven silence of decent people in the presence of wrong unendurable. ...

284 The Holocaust, therefore, demands that we take a stand. It calls publicly for an end to prejudice and hatred or violence on the basis of race, religion, sexuality or gender, or any characteristics that are used as grounds for oppression, injustice or limited freedoms, as grounds for causing suffering, as grounds for causing famine, as grounds for driving people from their homes, as grounds for merciless killing. ...

285 I'd like to know, Minister, how the Welsh Government is ensuring that your act of remembrance this year is not simply a passive one. How are you pressing the UK Government to stand against oppression and violence and to call for peace and justice on these isles, and in their relations with Governments worldwide, specifically at present in thinking about the interim judgment by the International Court of Justice that there is a credible case, under the 1948 genocide convention, against the Government of Israel, and that the Palestinian population of Gaza is at genuine risk of irreparable harm?

285 You mentioned that the conflict in the middle east was at the forefront of your mind

during the remembrance ceremony last week. How is the Welsh Government trying to tackle the increased levels of antisemitism and Islamophobia in our communities, which have been intensified by the actions of the Government of Israel in Gaza and the Hamas attack on the citizens of Israel? Do you agree that the Westminster Government must call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and for the safe return of Israeli hostages, and that this would help to decrease tensions and, therefore, levels of hate crime in Wales? And if so, are you willing to add the Welsh Government's weight to calls for an immediate ceasefire to achieve this? ...

290 Jane Hutt: ... It's important, of course, and many of us recognise, that public protest is an important way in which we can express our views. It's part of our thriving democracy that we play our part in that. ...

291 Yes, we have acknowledged, and I did in my statement, that conflicts across the world are at the forefront of our thoughts. And, of course, just in terms of the situation in the middle east, we need a sustainable and lasting ceasefire in order to ensure that we get urgent humanitarian relief, warding off famine, and also freeing hostages, and provide the space for a sustainable ceasefire so that fighting doesn't restart. And, obviously, we acknowledge and look at the situation in terms of the international court of justice's interim ruling. But I think, just in terms of our role and the points that we make, we have to be responsible ... for community cohesion ... And so I think it was very important that on the day of Hannukah and a very powerful event on the steps of the Senedd, the First Minister and I were also meeting with Muslim leaders as well. ...

295 Darren Millar (Conservative): ... Minister, can I thank you for your statement? I think that it is important that Holocaust Memorial Day is marked in the Senedd ...

296 It is important that we celebrate these things locally as well, and I'm pleased that a number of events have been held around Wales remembering the Holocaust ...

297 I was particularly struck this year by the impact of the Lessons from Auschwitz programme on the young people who shared about their visit to Auschwitz ... I would be grateful if you could confirm the ongoing commitment of the Welsh Government to that programme, in order to ensure that many more young people can have the opportunity to become ambassadors for those who have experienced the horrors of the Holocaust, particularly at Auschwitz. ...

298 Andrew Hesketh, ... has written a book, *Escape to Gwrych Castle*. It's about the 300 Jewish refugees who came across as part of the Kindertransport programme, and were at the castle—the largest single centre of Kindertransport arrivals and refugees in the whole of the United Kingdom at the time. I didn't know that that was the case. I knew that there had been some Jews that had taken refuge at the castle during the war, but had no idea that it was the largest single centre. ...

299 Just finally, Minister, if I may, I'd like to thank those universities in Wales that have done work in trying to promote awareness of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism and have adopted it—both Bangor now and Cardiff. There is still more work to be done among our higher education institutions, and I would be grateful if you could continue to work with your colleague the Cabinet Minister for education to address those shortcomings in some parts of our education institutions across Wales. ...

301 Jane Hutt: ... it is good that we have heard on record about ... the contribution of the young people who have benefited from—. Clearly, their whole life experience will benefit from the Holocaust Educational Trust, which we have funded since 2008 ... and I know we'll continue to fund it. It's interesting that we had an online situation during the pandemic and the Lessons from Auschwitz in-person and online project reached 1,957 students and 226 teachers from across Wales.

302 It is important that you've mentioned the work that we're doing in terms of the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition, which, of

course, we adopted in May 2017, and the work that we continue to do with further and higher education institutions. We did write in December to all the further and higher education institutions to ask them, for example, to ensure that they're supporting students, looking at issues, learning about antisemitism and, indeed, Islamophobia and discrimination. ...

304 Delyth Jewell (Plaid Cymru): Perhaps the most frightening thing about the Holocaust was how easily it was allowed to happen. It wasn't only fanatics who rounded Jewish people up or expected them to sew stars of David into their clothes. It was made possible by the terrifying indifference of the people who chose to look the other way—chose to look the other way as the lorries trundled past and the railway wagons clattered through the night. We can't just passively remember the Holocaust, we have to sear into our souls an awareness of the hideous easiness with which the murder of millions was carried out—the Jewish, disabled, gay lives ended because people decided they didn't deserve to exist.

305 Minister, I'm deeply troubled by the rise in antisemitic attacks that have been prompted, it seems, by what's happening in the middle east. It is incomprehensible to me how anyone could blame Jewish people or expect them to be answerable for what's happening on another continent. Jewish people living in Wales are our brothers and our sisters; they are a people of peace. Would you join me, Minister, in reaffirming this point and extending a hand of friendship and solidarity to them?

306 Jane Hutt: ... We're extremely concerned about reports of increases in hate crime targeting Jewish communities, and we do encourage members of those communities to report any hate incidents. ... We are actually monitoring any spikes with the Wales Hate Support Centre, and I have to say, any spikes in the reporting of antisemitic and, indeed, Islamophobic hate crime at this time, because we need to ensure that we understand the impact of this. Again, the Welsh Government stands with the Jewish community in condemning the hatred expressed by individuals who seek to create that climate of fear, aiming to fragment our communities. But we will overcome that with statements and contributions and the commitment of the Welsh Government, as I've outlined today.

307 Alun Davies (Labour): The 'fragility of freedom' is a remarkably powerful statement. The fragility of humanity was something that I reflected upon a few weeks ago in Dachau concentration camp, where you look around the normality of an industrial estate on the edge of Munich and reflect upon what happened there a lifetime ago, and the fragility of humanity that allowed that to happen. And, of course, we all know that Dachau wasn't simply the consequence of Goebbels's words in November 1938, spoken just a few miles away in the old town hall in the centre of Munich. It was the consequence of hatred, hatred that had been driven by a Government intolerant of people and who sought to blame others for the issues facing Germany at that time—the fragility of civilisation. ...

308 ... it didn't start in Dachau, it didn't start on Kristallnacht; it started with individual acts of hatred and intolerance. I'm glad the education Minister is in his place this afternoon, and I hope that, as we teach children tolerance and humanity, we teach them the consequences of inhumanity and intolerance. ...

309 Jane Hutt: ...I just want to mention one point, as well as the curriculum and what we're doing in education, we do have our 'Anti-racist Wales Action Plan'; it is providing a cross-Government framework that will embed anti-racism into our education system. Teachers are telling me about how they're learning just by learning to learn this with their pupils. I think the fact that that plan includes goals and actions to tackle antisemitism, Islamophobia, including our ongoing support for victims of hate crime, will have a powerful influence, we hope.

311 Samuel Kurtz (Conservative): ... [An] important event in my life was when, as a pupil of Ysgol Bro Gwaun, I visited Auschwitz, and that is an experience that lives with me to this day. It's incredibly difficult to put into words what one experiences when they visit Auschwitz. One thing that I heard and saw repeatedly during my visit to Auschwitz, when

I visited the Jewish ghetto in Krakow and the memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, was the phrase by George Santayana:

312 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

313 So, let us remember the Holocaust for what it was: the murder, the systematic eradication of 6 million Jews, two thirds of Europe's Jewish population. But have we truly remembered the past if the cancer that is antisemitism is still far too common in our country and around the world? Have we really remembered the past if Jews continue to be targeted in conspiracy theories and painted as scapegoats for issues that are not their fault? ...

314 **Jane Hutt:** ... Your visit to Auschwitz, as everybody has expressed the impact it has had ...

317 **Jenny Rathbone (Labour):** ... On Sunday, I attended a performance of Stumbling Stones, which on the one hand was a vibrant group of musicians ... They perform to mixture of klezmer ... Yiddish and tango music, a wonderful celebration of both what was lost and what has survived after vibrancy, the giant poignancy of Jewish culture, and it was mixed with the story of my friend Julia Nelki's German-Jewish family, who found on the one hand asylum here as well as those who were sent to the extermination camps.

318 As the double bass player said, 'It's not only about remembering the past; it is about exploring the relevance of the past to the present and the future.' So, it was extremely important that Stumbling Stones included the participation of a Malawi asylum seeker who's been living in England for the last seven years and still waiting for refugee status, and Qais Attalla, a Palestinian from Gaza who's lost 40 members of his family in the last couple of months, and together, the combination, this wonderful celebration of Jewish culture and recognition of the mistakes we are destined to repeat if we don't understand ...

319 **Jane Hutt:** ... you are talking about the impact culture can have on us ... but also to link that to the contributions from the sanctuary seekers, Malawi, and indeed the experience of the Palestinian who was there. And this is about us working together cross-culturally, and learning. ...

322 **Vikki Howells (Labour):** ... it is inherent on all of us, if we're to create a safer, more equal nation to call out hate, bigotry and the evils which are inflicted in their name, and never let the suffering that they cause be forgotten. ...

325 **Jane Hutt:** ... this needs to be fed back to the Holocaust Educational Trust, and, indeed, the community support worker who we funded to help reach out, and we'll do that. And I'm very conscious of the fact that I got some indications of contributions and ways in which this was recognised and celebrated in terms of the richness of those young people's contributions, but marking the horror of the Holocaust. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/13684#A85112>

Jane Hutt's letter to schools, referred to above, is not currently available online

The Romani Holocaust resource referred to above by Mark Isherwood can be read at
<https://www.romaniarts.co.uk/the-romani-holocaust-or-porraimos-in-nazi-occupied-and-fascist-europe-1936-to-1945-a-romani-cultural-and-arts-company-learning-resource/>

Information about the Hate Hurts Wales campaign, referred to above, can be read at
<https://www.gov.wales/hate-hurts-wales>

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[Israel](#)

See also Commons written answer 901201 "Schools: Antisemitism" that is included in the Home Affairs section above, and

the Welsh Senedd Ministerial Statement: Holocaust Memorial Day, and information relating to Kate Osamor MP that is included in the Holocaust section above.

House of Commons Ministerial Statement and Q&A

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

col 620 The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): With permission, I will update the House on the situation in Israel and Gaza. ...

One hundred and fourteen days on from Hamas's barbaric attacks, they still hold more than 130 hostages. Innocent Palestinians are suffering, with over 25,000 people having died, and hunger and disease spreading. The Government's end goal is clear: Israelis should be able to live without fear of Hamas terrorism, and Gazans should be able to rebuild their lives. ...

The British Government have identified five vital steps for that to happen: a political horizon that provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution; forming a new Palestinian Government for the west bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; the release of all Israeli hostages; and key Hamas leaders agreeing to leave Gaza. All those things are intricately linked, and we cannot secure one without all the others. There are also many other elements to consider, such as Arab-Israeli normalisation, security guarantees, and financing the rebuilding of Gaza, but we need to generate momentum now towards a permanent peace. That is why pushing for a pause now is so important, and why we need a Contact Group meeting, bringing together the key players as soon as possible. ...

The Government are focused on practical solutions to get aid into Gaza. We have trebled our aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 7 October, committing £60 million this financial year. In Israel, the Foreign Secretary pressed for changes to allow unhindered humanitarian access, such as opening more crossing points for longer and permitting deliveries via Ashdod port. He announced work with Qatar to get more aid into Gaza, with our joint consignment containing 17 tonnes of family-sized tents being flown last Thursday. Earlier this month, Royal Fleet Auxiliary Lyme Bay delivered 87 tonnes of aid into Port Said. Crucially, we are supporting the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza, which has already delivered over 1,000 tonnes of aid into Gaza. ...

col 621 I turn to the ICJ ruling and allegations against UNRWA. Right hon. and hon. Members will know that we had considerable concerns about South Africa's decision to bring this case. Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas, and we do not believe that Israel's actions in Gaza can be described as a genocide. Of course, we respect the role and independence of the ICJ, and the Court has now reached a decision on provisional measures. It called for increased aid into Gaza, and measures to ensure basic services, as we have been calling for. It has ordered Israel to preserve evidence relating to allegations of genocide, reporting to the Court on progress within one month. It has also ordered the immediate release of all hostages, and reminded all parties to the conflict that they are bound by international humanitarian law. Those are points that we have been pressing consistently, and we will continue to press them after the Court's decision. For our part, Britain continues to engage closely with the Israeli Government on the conduct of their military campaign in Gaza. We have said that they must take greater care to avoid harming civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Finally, I turn to the very serious allegations about UNRWA first publicised last week, with further media reporting over the weekend. The agency is critical to delivering humanitarian assistance into Gaza and across the region. It plays a stabilising role at a time when we need focus on de-escalating tensions. The UK is a long-standing donor to UNRWA, as are

our closest partners, notably the United States. Since 7 October, we have allocated a further £16 million to it as part of our response to the crisis. UNRWA's 13,000 staff in Gaza continue their working at great personal risk in the most dangerous circumstances: 152 UNRWA staff members have lost their lives.

The UK is however appalled by allegations that any agency staff were involved in the 7 October atrocities. We welcome the swift action that UNRWA has taken to terminate contracts while it launches an immediate investigation. We and several partners are temporarily pausing future funding until we have reviewed these investigations. We continue to fund vital aid delivery through multiple other partners, including other UN agencies and international and British non-governmental organisations. ...

col/ 622 David Lammy (Labour): ... Last week, the International Court of Justice made an interim ruling under the genocide convention on the situation in Gaza. It was profoundly serious. The ICJ's interim ruling does not give a verdict on the case, but it sets out urgent provisional measures.

Labour has been clear that Israel must comply with the orders in the ruling in full, and Hamas terrorists must release all the hostages immediately, but I note that the missing Foreign Secretary made no statement. The only response that appeared was from a nameless spokesperson the day after the judgment. It claimed that the Government respect the role and independence of the ICJ, but stated that they had "considerable concerns about this case". ...

Do the Government accept the Court's authority or not? Do they believe that the ruling should be implemented in full? If not, which orders do they disagree with? ...

... we will press for all the orders to be implemented alongside an immediate humanitarian truce and a sustainable ceasefire. The dire situation in Gaza must not continue. ...

... aid getting into Gaza must surge, not stop. The allegations that a number of UNRWA employees were involved in the appalling 7 October terror attacks appalled the whole House. Anyone involved should be held to account by the force of the law. It is right that UNRWA has responded quickly by terminating contracts of staff allegedly involved and launching an investigation. Meanwhile, though, the humanitarian emergency in Gaza cannot wait. Twenty-five thousand people are dead, including thousands of women and children, 85% of the population are displaced and millions face the risk of famine. Will the Minister confirm that existing UK aid will continue to flow into Gaza so that current operations can continue? Will he outline a clear and fast path for future funding to return? We cannot let innocent Palestinians lose lifesaving aid because of Hamas terrorists.

Meanwhile, there continues to be a dangerous escalation across the middle east. We totally deplore the attacks on US soldiers. ... The attacks are totally unjustifiable and raise tensions at an already dangerous time in the region. Iran must cease these attacks and de-escalate immediately. ... in government, Labour would proscribe the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, either through existing processes or a new mechanism to tackle hostile state actors. What will it take for the Government to finally act? ...

col/ 623 Andrew Mitchell: ... the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the rising tensions in the region and the importance of de-escalating. He asked me, once again, about the IRGC. His points are noted, but I cannot comment on that on the Floor of the House ... He talked about the importance of getting aid back into Gaza. All our efforts are set on that. He talked about the role of UNWRA; I talked to Philippe Lazzarini, the head of UNWRA, about two hours ago, to check its critical assets in Gaza—whether warehouses, vehicles or stores—without which no aid can get in. We all understand that they are essential for aid delivery, but the right hon. Gentleman will equally reflect that, given the very serious nature of the allegations, it is essential that the Government pause to ensure that they cannot happen again.

Finally, on the ICJ, we welcome the Court's call for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza. We are clear that an immediate

pause is necessary to get the aid in and the hostages out. ... we regularly call on Israel to uphold its obligations under international humanitarian law, and we will continue to do so. ...

Alicia Kearns (Conservative): ... I am concerned that on 18 January in Al-Mawasi, a supposed safe zone in Gaza, the UK charity Medical Aid for Palestinians and the International Rescue Committee had their compound bombed by an airstrike from an F-16 jet. Thankfully, the four British doctors living there were only injured, although that itself is a cause for concern. A month before that, on 22 December, it was confirmed via UK defence channels that the IDF had logged the co-ordinates of the humanitarian base and de-conflicted it, marking it as a protected sensitive and humanitarian site. I am gravely concerned that the airstrike still took place. ...

col 624 I raised with UNRWA the concerns of many colleagues back in November about whether it was doing enough security checks on staff. Is the goal of pausing aid essentially to force it to get its house in order? ...

The ICJ's ruling was quite clear: Israel does have a right to self-defence, but it is not limitless. What are the Government doing to ensure that we are fully in line with the ruling and the six conditions placed on Israel by the ICJ?

Andrw Mitchell: ... we continually remind the Israeli Government of their duties under international humanitarian law. The bombing of the compound ... was raised by the Foreign Secretary in his meetings in Israel last week and, as soon as was practical after the details got out, our ambassador in Tel Aviv raised it as well.

On UNRWA, my hon. Friend rightly refers to the fact that the assets it had, which I described in my response to the shadow Foreign Secretary, are vital for the delivery of aid. The inquiry would normally have been carried out by UNRWA, but it will instead be carried out by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, which will conduct an immediate inquiry and report to the Secretary-General. We will obviously look very carefully at what it says. ...

Brendan O'Hara (SNP): ... On Friday, despite concerted efforts to dismiss, ridicule and undermine South Africa's case, the International Court of Justice delivered a damning provisional ruling that ordered Israel to take all measures to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza. The ruling has left the UK Government with nowhere to hide, as they now have a legal obligation to protect Palestinian civilians—an obligation that should, at the very least, mean an immediate arms embargo on Israel. However, we all know that the best way to protect civilian lives, stop the killings and secure the release of the hostages is an immediate ceasefire.

The ICJ ruling also demanded that effective humanitarian assistance be provided to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in Gaza. Instead, the UK Government immediately chose to cut funding for UNRWA—one of the few organisations that stand between the people of Gaza and mass starvation—on the basis of 12 of its 13,000 employees having been accused of taking part in the atrocities of 7 October. If those accusations are true, it is absolutely right that action is taken against them and that they be held to account. However, by deciding to cut funding to UNRWA, the UK Government have imposed their own collective punishment on an already beleaguered and desperate civilian population, knowing with absolute certainty that that decision will result in the deaths of thousands of Palestinian civilians. ...

col 625 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... He should be very clear that the Government want to see an immediate humanitarian pause so that we can get the hostages out and humanitarian support in, leading then to a sustainable ceasefire. ...

As I set out in my statement, we respect the role and independence of the ICJ. I pointed out that the Court has called for increased aid into Gaza and measures to ensure basic services, ordered the immediate release of all hostages and reminded all parties to the conflict that they are bound by international humanitarian law. We agree with that. It is extremely important that those points are respected.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the cutting of UNRWA funding. We are not cutting funding to UNRWA; we are pausing any future funding. We have made the funding available and there is no funding due for the rest of this financial year. Clearly, future funding will depend on the result of the inquiries now in process.

Michael Ellis (Conservative): The ICJ has rightly dismissed South Africa's obscene demand for Israel to stop defending its people and instructed Israel not to stop, but only to prevent genocide, which of course it is already doing. Meanwhile, Hamas have been ordered to release the hostages, which they have not done. South Africa, whose crime rate is totally out of control, has meanwhile banned David Teeger, the young captain of South Africa's under-19 cricket team, because he is Jewish. Is my right hon. Friend concerned about the safety of Jews in South Africa ...

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. and learned Friend points—absolutely rightly, I believe—to the hideous nature of the charge against Israel of genocide, and I agree with him on that. On the release of hostages, which everyone has been asking for, I have read the reports of the meetings that took place in France over the weekend. It is still not clear whether significant progress has been made, but we all very much hope that it has.

col 626 **Khalid Mahmood (Labour):** ... Does the Minister believe that Israel has a legal obligation to comply with the measures set out by the ICJ?

Andrew Mitchell: ... Israel plans to act in accordance with international humanitarian law and has the ability to do so. That is what the British Government continually press upon the Israeli Government.

Chris Grayling (Conservative): We all share the abhorrence of what happened in October, and this House has stood behind Israel in its right to defend itself, but this conflict, which has lasted for far too many decades, will only be solved with a two-state solution and a proper humanitarian response, led by the Israeli Government. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... We and our allies and friends, and virtually everyone in the region, believe that the only answer is a two-state solution, with Palestinians living behind safe borders and Israelis living behind safe borders as well. ...

Andy Slaughter (Labour): The Minister said that the Government did not support the reference to the ICJ, but that they support the outcome that justifies that reference. Given those mixed messages, what confidence can we have that he is communicating to his Israeli counterpart that the legally binding orders of the Court must be complied with?

Andrew Mitchell: ... those points were made by the Foreign Secretary throughout his extensive trip to the region last week.

Vicky Ford (Conservative): A pause in fighting, humanitarian aid and a long-lasting peace: all are needed to stop people dying now and in the future. ... I find it so frustrating that people who may be pro-Israel say to me, "There is no point talking about a two-state solution, because the Palestinian people will never agree to it," and people who may be a bit more pro-Palestine say, "There is no point talking about a two-state solution, because the Israeli Government will never agree to it." ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... We are quite clear about the importance of the two-state solution, and we hope that when the political track is able to recommence—a moment that cannot come too soon—everyone will bend their sinews to deliver that result.

col 627 **Joanna Cherry (SNP):** No one is disputing the fact that Israel has the right to defend itself, but it must do so within the law, and that is what the ICJ has said. When the ICJ ordered provisional measures in the case against Myanmar, the UK Government welcomed the decision and asserted that Myanmar must do more "to protect the Rohingya." ... Is this Minister prepared to stand at the Dispatch Box and say the same of Israel? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we always emphasise the importance of abiding by international humanitarian law. ...

Andrew Percy (Conservative): When we talk of collective punishment, let us remember that it is Hamas who subjected the people of Gaza to collective punishment when they decided to steal aid and fuel meant for civilians, when they decided to embed their military capability in schools and hospitals in civilian areas, and when they made it clear that they intended to continue to attack Israel in the way in which they did on 7 October. ...

As for UNRWA, according to today's edition of *The Wall Street Journal*, intelligence suggests that 1,200 UNRWA staff are actual operatives of Hamas or other Palestinian terror groups, 23% of UNRWA's male employees have taken part in Hamas's military or political framework, and 49% of all UNRWA employees have family members or other relatives who belong to Hamas or other Gaza-based terrorist groups. Is that what the money from the taxpayers of Brigg and Goole should be used for: funding groups who wish to murder not just all Jews in Israel, but all Jews in this country?

Andrew Mitchell: That is why the Government have paused future payments. However, I should also make it clear that during my discussion this morning with Philippe Lazzarini, who runs UNRWA, I specifically welcomed the news that he will commission a totally independent review so that its conclusions will be unimpeachable. ...

col 628 Rushanara Ali (Labour): Can the Minister explain what impact the review, and the time it will take, will have on the aid that is provided to people? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... while we are temporarily pausing any future funding of UNRWA while we review these appalling allegations, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that humanitarian aid gets into Gaza for the people who need it so desperately. We do, of course, work with other organisations: the British Red Cross, UNICEF and the World Food Programme, which has been essential in bringing vital supplies from Jordan into Gaza. ...

Tobias Ellwood (Conservative): I very much welcome the five-point plan, the call for an immediate pause in fighting and the contact group bringing together stakeholders. The allegations directed at UNRWA are indeed serious, and we should all welcome the investigation ordered by the UN chief António Guterres. I understand why countries including the UK have paused funding, but given that UNRWA is the primary humanitarian agency in Gaza, does the Minister agree that holding back funds for too long could see the humanitarian situation degrade further and lead to more Gazans joining the ranks of Hamas?

Andrew Mitchell: ... I also spoke this morning to Sigrid Kaag, the humanitarian reconstruction co-ordinator for Gaza, and she made it clear to me that while we have zero tolerance of these dreadful things that are alleged to have been done, we cannot operate at zero risks. The politics of logistics and distribution are a nightmare in Gaza ... We will look carefully at these reports, and we will suspend any future funding until we have them, but we recognise that the UNRWA assets are essential to delivering in Gaza.

Liam Byrne (Labour): The ICJ ruling is incredibly serious for all sides. Can the Minister tell us today whether it is His Majesty's Government's analysis that Israel is operating within the measures that have been set out and, crucially, what consequences there will be if there is no observance of the ICJ's ruling? ...

col 629 Andrew Mitchell: ... we know that Israel plans to act in accordance with international humanitarian law and has the ability to do so. ...

Edward Leigh (Conservative): Israel is much more than Prime Minister Netanyahu. What more are we in the US and the UK doing to encourage the moderate voices in Israel who argue for a definite democratic future for Gaza and the west bank? Above all, is there any more progress we can make to convince the Israeli Government that it is not in their interests to have any more settlements or expansions of existing settlements? It is the sense of helplessness among the Palestinian people that is fuelling this whole conflict ...

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. Friend accurately says that there is a plurality of

opinion in Israel. We strongly support, and say within Israel, what we think is the right way forward, which above all is a two-state solution. During the course of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's visits, he was able to engage with President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority and assure them that there is a plan to push forward at the point where certain changes are made in the way that the Palestinian Authority is run, and that Britain will be there at their shoulder to assist when that moment comes.

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): The ICJ ruling is highly significant all around the world, despite the Government's opposition to South Africa even taking its case there. A few days later, when news comes out of the issues facing UNRWA, the UK Government, the US Government and others announce that they are withdrawing funding from it. ... The immediate effect on the most desperate people in the world—that is, the 1 million people around Rafah who are trying to get something to eat, water to drink and medicines to be cured with—is that they are not getting the support that they desperately need. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... the Prime Minister spoke to President Biden on 22 January. They discussed the UK and America's shared deep concern about the terrible suffering and loss of civilian life... the right hon. Gentleman may rest assured that we are very focused on the extraordinary degree of suffering that is taking place in the area around Rafah, where so many people are effectively kettled without either shelter or food.

col 630 **Desmond Swayne (Conservative):** What circumstances would change the Government's policy towards Israel, which is currently determined to oppose a two-state solution?

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. Friend reflects one strand of opinion in Israel, but he does not reflect the fact that there are many others. ...

Imran Hussain (Labour): Let the House be in no doubt that article 1 of the genocide convention makes it absolutely clear that the UK has a legal obligation, not just a moral duty, to act to prevent genocide. ... Now that the ICJ's interim ruling agrees that it is legally plausible, under international law, that genocide is being committed in Gaza, possibly using arms sold by the UK, will the Government immediately suspend the sale of arms to the Israeli military?

Andrew Mitchell: I make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that his interpretation of what the ICJ is saying is not the Government's interpretation ...

Flick Drummond (Conservative): The Foreign Secretary, writing in *The Mail on Sunday* on 28 January, said how important it is to "allow vital aid to get in to Gaza, where people are starving and disease is spreading."

Indeed, the provision of aid has been a key cornerstone of the UK's response to the current crisis in Gaza, as the Minister outlined, with £60 million of aid donated since 7 October. In the light of the recent decision to freeze funding to UNRWA, how will this aid be delivered? ...

Andrew Mitchell: The action that UNRWA needs to take is pretty clear: it needs to make sure that nothing like this can ever happen again. ...

col 631 **Seema Malhotra (Labour Co-op):** ... UNRWA has done vital work since 1950, and it supports refugees on the west bank and in Jordan, as well as in Gaza. UNRWA educates half a million children. ... Following the suspension of 12 UNRWA staff, out of 13,000, and the rightful condemnation of their actions, will the Minister clarify the assurance that UNRWA operations will continue while investigations take place ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... UNRWA humanitarian operations, getting aid to people who need it, will not be fettered in any way by the British decision. ...

Drew Hendry (SNP): ... Unlike other Governments, the UK Government are offering no help to UK citizens who have family stuck in Gaza. Will the Government consider a scheme for non-citizens, such as the Ukraine scheme, to help with this desperate situation—this plight for citizens in Gaza?

Andrew Mitchell: We have been working with partners to secure passage for all those who wish to leave, including British nationals and their families. We have helped to facilitate over 300 British nationals leaving Gaza. We are working with Egyptian and Israeli authorities to ensure that any remaining British nationals who want to leave but have not been able to do so previously can do so. ...

Matthew Offord (Conservative): In November, a report by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education found that half of Gaza's 500,000 school pupils attended UNRWA-operated education institutions and that the Palestinian Authority curriculum taught in those schools is replete with antisemitism and encourages violence. The Minister says that he is going to suspend future payments, but the damage has already been done by decades of UK funding.

col/ 632 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... I heard these allegations back in 2010, 2011, 2012. I asked to see and have translated these school books, and I have in the past year raised the same point again. I have not seen any evidence of what he is describing. If he would like to give the Government evidence, we will of course follow it up, but I must make it clear to him that both 10 years ago and in the past year no such evidence has been forthcoming.

Bob Blackman (Conservative): Many of us have had concerns about the activities of UNRWA and the people who work for it. ... what confidence can we now have that the aid we are providing actually gets to the people who need it, rather than being diverted by the terrorists that exist in Gaza? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... He refers to the 12 people who have been identified, out of a workforce of 13,000. I can tell him that the head of UNRWA told me this morning that of the 12, two are dead and one is mismatched, so we are talking about nine people. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend makes the right point about the fact that this is completely intolerable. ...

Jess Phillips (Labour): ... the Minister has said, "We have raised this with Israel", as if that were enough. What does Israel say in response ...?

Andrew Mitchell: Because Britain is a close ally and friend of many in the region and of Israel in particular, we are able to have difficult conversations. ... Those discussions have sought to persuade them to accept the need for a vast increase in the humanitarian support getting into Gaza, and to move forward towards the political track. ...

Greg Smith (Conservative): I welcome the move to pause UNRWA funding, but the scale of the problem is much more significant than if it had involved only a handful of people, given the reports that 10% of UNRWA's 12,000 workers in Gaza are somehow linked to Hamas and other terror groups. A few weeks ago, it was revealed that a Telegram group used by 3,000 UNRWA teachers celebrated the 7 October massacre. Given those appalling earlier revelations, why did the Government not rethink our relationship with UNRWA before?

col/ 633 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... those allegations are abhorrent. We have always been aware that there are dangers in operating in the environment of Gaza. That is why this is one of the most inspected and scrubbed development and aid programmes that Britain has anywhere in the world. ...

John McDonnell (Labour): Has the Minister seen the reaction to the ICJ judgment in Israel? There were reports at the weekend of a number of rallies at which Netanyahu Cabinet members said, "The ICJ makes judgments, but we make settlements." There is now a call for settlements in Gaza, both in Khan Yunis and in Rafah. At the same time, Netanyahu is attacking the Qataris, even though, from most aspects, they have been playing a significant role in securing the release of hostages. He has also been refusing to engage in a discussion about the Egyptian peace programme. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... the Government condemn the building of such settlements. He will have heard what I and others have said about the complete condemnation

of settler violence, and the demand that the Israeli Government hold to account those responsible for it, put them before the courts and punish them. ...

Alexander Stafford (Conservative): Reports of UNRWA staff potentially being involved in the 7 October massacre—one of the worst pogroms against Jewish people since the holocaust—bring horror to many people, especially now that we are learning that up to 10% of UNRWA employees have some links with Hamas. I know that the Minister has said that there will be an independent review of UNRWA. Can he assure me that it will be independent, and that the UK Government will have input into it to make sure that the UN is not marking its own homework? ...

col 634 **Andrew Mitchell:** The review will not be a case of UNRWA marking its own homework. It has specifically accepted that it must be a different part of the United Nations, far away from UNRWA, that makes these judgments.

We will look very carefully at what inquiries reveal. I am completely with my hon. Friend on ensuring that nothing like this can happen again. ...

Holly Lynch (Labour): As others have said, the ICJ's interim ruling could not be more serious, and it sets out urgent provisional measures that must be taken. ... do the Government agree that Israel has a legal obligation to comply with those measures? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we regularly call on Israel to uphold its obligations under international humanitarian law, and we will continue to do so in all circumstances.

Richard Fuller (conservative): The allegations against employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency were appalling, but UNRWA remains a vital source of food and support for the Palestinian people. ...

Andrew Mitchell: We will make our plans for funding known to the House in the usual way, but we cannot do so until we have seen the report and are clear that what has been revealed cannot happen again. Let me emphasise to my hon. Friends that the UNRWA infrastructure assets inside Gaza—the warehouses, the vehicles, the stores, and UNRWA's ID system, which is used by the Israeli Government—will have to be used, regardless of who uses them.

Apsana Begum (Labour): What steps are the Government taking, in line with their obligations under international law, to ensure the full and immediate implementation of provisional measures ordered by the ICJ regarding the protection of Palestinians from genocide, and the immediate provision of humanitarian aid and other vital services? Can the Minister confirm whether the UK will now end arms sales to Israel, due to the risk that they could be used unlawfully to kill women and children?

Andrew Mitchell: We keep all arms exports under review. ... Clearly, we will consider any impact from the Court's ruling. ...

col 635 **Steve Double (Conservative):** ... We should not forget that, in the midst of all this, dozens and dozens of families continue to live every day with the anguish of knowing that one of their loved ones is being held hostage in unknown conditions. They do not know their whereabouts, or about their wellbeing or the conditions in which they are being held. Should not the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas be the one thing that every Member of this House calls for, following the ICJ report?

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. ... the British Government, working with partners, will do everything that they can to secure their release as swiftly as possible.

Grahame Morris (Labour): ... almost 100 journalists have been killed in Gaza since 7 October. Their bravery has kept the world informed and exposed some of the appalling atrocities that we see daily. What does [the Minister] plan to do to stop the deliberate targeting of journalists? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... the Government ... have done their best to stand up for journalistic integrity, and the right of journalists to report on such circumstances ...

Stella Creasy (Labour Co-op): The Minister has spoken at length about this country's relationship with Israel, and the powerful networks of advocacy that could work towards

the noble cause of securing a ceasefire, a safe Israel and a free Palestine. ... Will he be clear that the Government, in their next conversations with the Israeli Government, will condemn the far-right Israeli Ministers who attended the conference this weekend in Jerusalem about the resettlement of Gaza? ...

col 636 Andrew Mitchell: ... She talked about our effect and reach within Israel. It is not just within Israel; it is in the whole region. The British diplomatic service has unparalleled reach, in terms of talking about the way ahead and the political track, and we are exercising it. On the rallies that took place over the weekend and the reports that she mentioned, the policies mentioned are not those of the British Government.

Chris Law (SNP): Given the mounting reports of evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel, and now serious recognition by the ICJ of the real risk of genocide, do the UK Government accept that the provision of weapons may lead to complicity in such a crime, and will they therefore immediately cease licensing arms and security equipment to Israel?

Andrew Mitchell: ... Britain has one of the most effective and tough arms sale regulation authorities in the world. He may rest assured that its provisions do not change when it is dealing with Israel—or any other country.

Richard Burgon (Labour): The International Court of Justice ... has called on Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent the killing of, or causing of serious harm to, people in Gaza, yet hundreds more people in Gaza have been killed since Friday's ruling. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... I have ... set out the Government's position on the ICJ very

Debbie Abrahams (Labour): ... The ICJ interim ruling stated that article II of the genocide convention must be upheld, including ensuring the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza. Given what the Minister has said about UNRWA, and the fact that it is the largest humanitarian agency in Gaza, if the UK and other donors decide not just to pause their support, but to cease it completely and permanently, how are the Government and other international donors going to ensure the same capacity of humanitarian relief—and if they do not, are they in contempt of the ICJ ruling?

col 637 Andrew Mitchell: I am not a lawyer, so I am not able to answer any of the hon. Lady's legal points ... but I can assure her that we are committed to making sure that international relief and humanitarian supplies get into Gaza. ...

We are doing everything we can to expand the ability to get aid into Gaza. On UNRWA, the hon. Lady will know that, while we have made it clear that we will not be making any further payments until the inquiries are completed to our satisfaction, nevertheless the funding we have already given to UNRWA is having an effect on the ground. ...

Mohammad Yasin (Labour): ... Given the ICJ's interim ruling that the risk of genocide in Gaza is plausible, will the Minister suspend UK arms sales to Israel to ensure that UK weapons are not used to kill innocent Palestinians?

Andrew Mitchell: ... I have set out ... the Government's position. ...

Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru): Two months ago, I asked the Government whether they would consider providing specialist treatment for the wounded children of Gaza in UK hospitals, as is often done when there is a natural disaster or a cruel war abroad. The Minister responded at the time by saying that the choice was to increase in-country aid, and he referred to the increase of £16 million in his statement. Given the destruction of hospitals in Gaza and the dire state of medical facilities, will he reconsider that stance?

Andrew Mitchell: We are considering whether we should join with the United Arab Emirates, which is lifting people out of Gaza, particularly children, and giving them support in the UAE. ... we have deployed an emergency medical team who are looking at the situation there, and we would, if it was appropriate, deploy a field hospital ... we would deploy it into Gaza, if that was practical and appropriate. ...

Andrew Gwynne (Labour): We talk about statistics as though they are not human lives: 26,000 men, women and children killed, 1.9 million people displaced, and a human catastrophe engulfing the people of Gaza. The five-point plan is great. ... However, there is one roadblock to a Palestinian state, and that is Prime Minister Netanyahu and the allies around him in government. They do not want Judea and Samaria to be handed over to the Palestinians for their state; they want the resettlement of Gaza. ...

col 638 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... there will be no one in the House who does not reflect upon the catastrophe that has engulfed Gaza. ... In respect of Prime Minister Netanyahu being the blockage ... to the ceasefire and to progress, I would point out to him that Hamas have made it clear that they are not interested in a ceasefire; what they want is a repeat of the appalling events that took place on 7 October.

Claudia Webbe (Independent): According to Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, in just two days since the International Court of Justice ruling, at least 373 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli bombings and airstrikes, including 345 civilians, and 643 others have been seriously injured. Israel is already in breach of the order. What action are the Government taking to prevent the killing of Palestinians in Gaza? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... the Government also recognise how difficult the situation is and are doing everything we possibly can to help move on to a political track and end the great difficulties ...

Helen Hayes (Labour): The ICJ's ruling is clear and specific, and respect for the international Court is of the utmost importance, yet in response the Minister seems to be saying simply that it is business as usual. ...

Andrew Mitchell: I believe it essential that there is an immediate humanitarian pause to get aid in and hostages out, that Hamas must agree to the release of all hostages, that Hamas can no longer be in charge of Gaza, and that an agreement must be in place for the Palestinian authorities to return to Gaza to provide governance, services and security. ...

col 639 **Jeff Smith (Labour):** ... We need an immediate ceasefire to stop that humanitarian disaster and get the aid in now, but such has been the level of destruction in Gaza that the need for aid work will continue for many months and years. When the Minister spoke to him earlier, did Philippe Lazzarini indicate, first, how long his inquiry is likely to take, and secondly, when the pause in funding will start to impact on the agency's humanitarian aid work?

Andrew Mitchell: Philippe Lazzarini did not indicate a specific timeline, but I would be very surprised if it could not be completed within the next two months. ...

Sarah Olney (Liberal Democrat): It is reported that the heads of the CIA, of Mossad and of Egyptian intelligence and the Qatari Prime Minister have agreed on a new hostage deal framework to put to Hamas. ... Can the Minister inform the House whether the UK was involved at all in negotiating that framework, and whether the Government are using their diplomatic position to press for the release of all the hostages as soon as possible?

Andrew Mitchell: The British Government are very strongly in support of the process that the hon. Lady has described ...

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour): I am sure the Minister will have seen the harrowing ITV News interview and subsequent video of an innocent Palestinian civilian brandishing a white flag in a so-called Gaza safe zone as he was shot dead in cold blood by the Israeli army. Does the Minister think that that constitutes a war crime ...

Andrew Mitchell: I have seen many videos of that sort, and my reaction is the same as the hon. Gentleman's. ... we are intent on helping to ensure that the situation is brought to a conclusion as rapidly as possible and, in the meantime, that we get aid and humanitarian support into Gaza to help those who are suffering so grievously there.

Zarah Sultana (Labour): The International Court of Justice ruling that it is plausible that Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza should have been the moment that this

Government suspended arms sales to Israel and finally called for an immediate end to Israel's bombardment of Gaza. Instead, they are stopping their funding for the UN aid agency that millions of Palestinians rely on. ...

col 640 Andrew Mitchell: ... Britain has been funding UNRWA and is funding it today, but in the circumstances, until the inquiries have been completed, we are not willing to pledge any additional funds to UNRWA at this time. In respect of the hon. Lady's interpretation of the ICJ ruling, I must reiterate what I have said: that understanding is not the understanding of the British Government.

Chris Stephens (SNP): The Minister's statement is silent on the west bank. He will be aware of reports of increased settler violence, shepherds being forced from their land, the confiscation of livestock, the imposition of fuel blockades, and the arrest of Palestinian civilians who have been placed under administrative detention—that is, indefinite detention without charge. What assessments and representations is the Minister making regarding those serious reports that keep coming out of the west bank?

Andrew Mitchell: ... the British Government have condemned without qualification settler violence and illegal acts that have taken place on the west bank, and have made it absolutely clear that when such acts take place, those who commit them must be held to account, put before the courts and punished. ...

Beth Winter (Labour): On Friday, the ICJ determined that there may be plausible grounds that Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. With that in mind, and with the case ongoing, will the Minister confirm that we will take the only serious options available to separate ourselves from the risk of complicity, which is to demand an immediate ceasefire, immediately ban all sales of arms to Israel — including ending assistance in the transfer of any arms to Israel, such as via the Akrotiri base in Cyprus — and ensure that sufficient funding is provided so that humanitarian aid reaches those people in desperate need?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady will understand that the issue is not with providing aid, but getting it in. There is plenty of aid ready to go into Gaza ... the British Government have set out very clearly that we want to see a humanitarian pause, the hostages freed and aid getting into Gaza, and then we want to see a sustained ceasefire. However ... that that is not something Hamas want to see. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-29/debates/08A4F56A-BA86-4A9B-BAF8-854C100E498B/IsraelAndTheOccupiedPalestinianTerritories>

The ICJ Order (interim judgement) referred to above can be read at

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

The Government statement referred to above by David Lammy can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-the-interim-icj-ruling-in-south-africa-vs-israel>

The Wall Street Journal article referred to above by Andrew Percy can be read at

<https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/at-least-12-u-n-agency-employees-involved-in-oct-7-attacks-intelligence-reports-say-a7de8f36>

The Mail on Sunday article referred to above by Flick Drummond can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-all-abhor-unpleasant-deals-but-thats-what-must-happen-if-we-are-to-solve-the-gaza-crisis-article-by-the-foreign-secretary>

The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education report referred to above by Matthew Offord can be read at

<https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/UNRWA-Education-Textbooks-and-Terror-Nov-2023.pdf>

The Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor report referred to above by Claudia Webbe can be read at

<https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/6126/Two-days-after-ICJ-ruling,-Euro-Med-Monitor-says-Israel-has-maintained-its-rate-of-killing-in-Gaza>

House of Commons Written Answers

Middle East: Conflict Prevention

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [9622] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to help prevent regional escalation in the Middle East.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The UK continues to seek the de-escalation of tensions in the Middle East. We are employing the full range of our diplomatic and security efforts, working with allies and international partners to counter groups seeking to undermine the region's peace, stability and prosperity. Prior to our strike on Houthi targets, we had been engaging extensively with regional partners. We continue to do this. It is in all our interests to work together to de-escalate tensions in the region. The Foreign Secretary has discussed developments in the Red Sea with key interlocutors. He has spoken several times with the Iranian Foreign Minister, most recently on 17 January, making it clear that Iran bears responsibility for the actions of groups it has long supported, and that it has a role in actively restraining its aligned groups.

Our aim has always been to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea. Military action was a last resort and was taken in self-defence, fully in line with international law and in response to a persistent threat.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/9622>

Gaza: Israel

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [10934] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has sought (a) internal and (b) external legal advice on the case brought against Israel at the International Court for Justice by the Republic of South Africa.

Andrew Mitchell: We regularly review advice about Israel's capability and commitment to International Humanitarian Law. We act consistently with that advice, for example when considering export licenses.

Regarding the case brought by South Africa at the International Court of Justice, we believe this development to be unhelpful and we do not support it. As previously stated, we recognise that Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law. We do not believe that calling this genocide is the right approach. It is wrong to say that Israeli leadership, and Israel as a country, have the intention to commit genocide. Ultimately, it is for courts to decide on matters of genocide, not for states. We of course respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-22/10934>

Information about the ICJ case referred to above can be accessed at

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

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Dan Carden (Labour) [9923] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report entitled Gaza: Fewer than 1 in 4 aid missions given green light, published on 16 January 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza. The Prime Minister discussed the situation in Israel and Gaza with President Biden on 22 January; the UK and US share deep concerns about the terrible suffering and loss of civilian lives and are working together to establish a new aid route through the port of Ashdod.

An immediate humanitarian pause is now necessary to get aid in and hostages out. 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.

We have trebled our aid commitment for this financial year and are working closely with partners in international agencies and in the region to increase access. The Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories 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/2024-01-16/9923>

House of Lords Written Answers

Hamas: Hostage Taking

Lord Stevens of Birmingham (Crossbench) [HL1605] To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the International Committee of the Red Cross concerning securing access to Israeli hostages being held in Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Since October 7, the UK government has been working with relevant partners across the region, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, to help secure the release of hostages and better understand their status, including working to gain information on proof of life and access to medical professionals. As the Foreign Secretary has said, we need a humanitarian pause now to allow for the release of hostages.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/hl1605>

Gaza: Ceasefires

The Lord Bishop of Worcester [HL1496] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking (1) to secure a ceasefire, and (2) to press for an investigation by the International Criminal Court of violations of international humanitarian law, in Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: 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, and as a vital first step towards building a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life. But to achieve that:

- Hamas must agree to the release of all hostages.
- Hamas must no longer be in charge of Gaza - and the threat from Hamas terror and rocket attacks must end.
- An agreement must be in place for the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza in order to provide governance, services and security.

Regarding the involvement of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the UK is a strong supporter of ICC and we respect its independence.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-10/hl1496>

Israel: Hezbollah

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL1579] To ask His Majesty's Government what action they are taking, together with international partners, to prevent an expansion of hostilities between the government of Israel and Hezbollah, following recent airstrikes in Lebanon which killed Saleh al-Aroui, deputy chair of Hamas's political bureau, and the Hezbollah senior commander, Wissam al-Tawil.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We remain in close contact with key international and regional partners, including to urge all sides to avoid further escalation in Lebanon;

the situation is fragile and an escalation in violence, including on Lebanon's southern boundary with Israel, is not in anyone's interests. The UK is committed to its longstanding support to the Lebanese Armed Forces which helps maintain Lebanon's security.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/hl1579>

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 returns to Middle East to support efforts towards regional stability

... The Foreign Secretary will ... reiterate with regional leaders the UK's call for an immediate pause in the conflict in Gaza to allow significantly more aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable ceasefire.

The visit will be an opportunity to move forward the Foreign Secretary's work to establish a Contact Group to be established between the US, UK, key EU, Gulf and Arab countries and Turkey, to use a pause in fighting to build momentum towards a lasting solution.

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said: The Houthis continue to attack ships in the Red Sea, risking lives, delaying vital aid getting to the Yemeni people and disrupting global trade. And we cannot ignore the risk that the conflict in Gaza spreads, spilling over borders into other countries in the region.

We will do everything we can to make sure that does not happen – escalation and instability is in nobody's interests.

In Gaza, there is an urgent need for an immediate pause to allow aid in and hostages out. We are determined to do all we can to press for a sustainable ceasefire, and are stepping up our engagement with countries in the region to make sure that happens. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-returns-to-middle-east-to-support-efforts-towards-regional-stability>

We all abhor unpleasant deals, but that's what must happen if we are to solve the Gaza crisis: article by the Foreign Secretary in the Mail on Sunday

Last week I travelled from Israel, a country where they want to eradicate every last Hamas terrorist, to Qatar, where they gave Hamas's political leaders a home.

In Turkey, I met up with President Erdogan. While he praised the South Africans for accusing Israel of genocide, I think their case is unjustified.

Despite this, I finished the week believing that, with the right steps, we could see an end to the fighting and even the start of a viable solution to the Israel/Palestine question. ...

After the horrors of October 7, even liberally minded Israelis find it hard to stomach the idea of a two-state solution. And, of course, many Palestinians have been further brutalised by what has happened during more than 100 days of fighting.

Yet, underneath, both sides can see that the past 30 years have been a colossal failure. For all the growth of Israel's economy, rising living standards and investment in military might and physical barriers, they don't have the one thing every country and every family yearns for: security. And for all the actions of the Palestinians – whether taking the peaceful path and campaigning for recognition, or the violent one and attacking Israel – they have

not achieved the dignity of statehood. ...

It must start with an immediate pause in the fighting. This could allow vital aid to get in to Gaza, where people are starving and disease is spreading.

And it could see the negotiations to free the hostages succeed.

We should all abhor the idea of trading guilty prisoners to bring back these innocent people.

But impossible times make for unpleasant deals – and that’s what needs to happen.

Next we need to turn a fragile truce into a sustainable, permanent ceasefire without a return to more fighting. ...

We have to see the key Hamas leaders leave Gaza. Israel has permitted safe passage for terrorists in the past – and the people responsible for October 7 have to go.

We have to see the instruments of terrorism still in Gaza being dismantled. In the carnage of the past 100-plus days of conflict, it often goes unreported that Hamas rocket attacks against Israel have continued. And Hamas still wants to launch terrorist atrocities again. It must be put beyond doubt that this cannot happen.

These steps would give Israel some of the reassurance it needs to end its military campaign. But the Palestinian people need reassurance too.

We must give the people of the West Bank and Gaza the political perspective of a credible route to a Palestinian state and a new future. And it needs to be irreversible. This is not entirely in our gift. But Britain and our partners can help by confirming our commitment to a sovereign, viable Palestinian state, and our vision for its composition. And, crucially, we must state our clear intention to grant it recognition, including at the United Nations.

The Palestinian leadership must help as well, by forming a new government which can immediately start to deliver. ...

All these things are intricately linked because you can’t get one without all the others.

Arab and other allies in the region won’t help guarantee the end of Hamas terrorism or back a new Palestinian authority unless they see a clear pathway to a state called Palestine.

Israel won’t forswear renewed hostilities unless Hamas are finished in Gaza.

And Palestinians won’t believe life will really be different unless they are governed by other Palestinians and see a long-term future.

There will be many other elements to add to such a plan:

The promise of normalised relations between Israel and countries such as Saudi Arabia ...

Genuine security guarantees for Israel and restrictions on what a future Palestinian state can do in terms of security and alliances;

A programme to end radicalised education programmes that teach children to hate those of a different faith;

A massive international effort to rebuild Gaza and make the most of its pivotal location and brilliant people. ...

It’s only when the prize on offer from peace is more attractive than the potential benefit of continued conflict that we will have the chance of a better future.

And the time to start is now.

To read the full article see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-all-abhor-unpleasant-deals-but-thats-what-must-happen-if-we-are-to-solve-the-gaza-crisis-article-by-the-foreign-secretary>

UK statement on “Settlements Bring Security” conference in Jerusalem

... “The UK is alarmed by the conference in Jerusalem calling for the resettlement of Gaza, and that Israeli ministers participated.

“The UK’s position is clear: Gaza is occupied Palestinian territory and will be part of the future Palestinian state. Settlements are illegal. No Palestinian should be threatened with forcible displacement or relocation.”

Welsh Senedd Petitions Committee

P-06-1387: Provide humanitarian aid to Gaza

Gaza and the Palestinian people are facing a humanitarian crisis as bombs rain down indiscriminately on residential buildings, schools, hospitals, mosques, churches, and refugee camps. Thousands of innocent civilians, including more than 3,500 children, have been killed, with many more seriously injured or displaced. The Welsh Government has previously provided humanitarian aid to Ukraine following the Russian invasion in 2022. It should now do all it can to provide aid to the Palestinian people.

19 Mike Hedges (Labour): First of all, can I thank the petitioners for this? It's almost like a case of déjà vu, because my view on support for a ceasefire is very well known. I know that the Minister for Social Justice has responded, and the Welsh Government has called for a renewed sense of urgency amongst the international community to deliver a full and permanent ceasefire to end the intolerable levels of violence and human suffering as soon as possible, calling for a longer term and determined political process.

20 ... the Welsh Government will focus on areas they have responsibility for, including attacking Islamophobia and antisemitism, to ensure all communities can live together in Wales peacefully and with mutual respect.

21 ... What I would suggest we do is we ask the Minister to confirm whether, in the event of DEC launching an appeal, she would consider providing humanitarian aid, and that's probably as far as we can go.

23 Peredur Owen Griffiths (Plaid Cymru): ... we need peace and an end to the violence and a permanent ceasefire as a way of doing that. Having spoken to some of the humanitarian aid charities, raising money without being able to spend it in Gaza is one of the issues at the moment—having an appeal where you're not able to spend the money on the ground. ...

24 Joel James (Conservative): ... the concern I'd also want to emphasise is—. I think it was just an hour ago the European Union released the news saying it's demanding an audit of all aid being spent in Palestine, to see where it is actually going. We hear the stories about how Hamas are intercepting the aid. We've also heard this week about how members of the United Nations official aid agency out there have been dismissed because of their involvement in terrorist activities, or supposed involvement in terrorist activities. So, I would only just like to urge caution, if we do pursue this, that we make sure that if the Welsh Government does send aid, it goes to those who need it, rather than those who don't.

Jack Sargeant (Labour): ... I think there's an agreement from the committee to certainly write to the Minister noting the caution Joel James mentioned. ...

<https://record.senedd.wales/Committee/13677#C561412>

The petition discussed above can be read at
<https://petitions.senedd.wales/petitions/245909>

A Senedd Research briefing can be read at
<https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s144207/Research%20brief.pdf>

A letter from Jane Hutt, Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip, can be read at
<https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s144206/Correspondence%20from%20the%20Minister%20for%20Social%20Justice%20and%20Chief%20Whip%2017%20January%202024.pdf>

The ICJ Order (interim judgement) referred to above can be read at
<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

Scottish Parliament Motion

Ross Greer (Green) [S6M-11877] Condemning UK-US-led Bombing in Yemen – That the Parliament is concerned by reports of the recent and ongoing UK-US-led bombing campaign in Yemen, and what it sees as the dangerous escalation of conflict in the Middle East; considers that this comes after almost a decade-long, Saudi-led bombardment and blockade of Yemen, which was reportedly supported by British arms sales, military advice and logistical support, and which, it understands, led to the deaths of thousands of civilians, widespread famine and cholera outbreaks; believes that the UK Government should not have acted without first consulting the UK Parliament; is extremely alarmed by the reported admission of President Biden that the airstrikes are not stopping Houthi attacks on shipping but that they will continue regardless; believes that a lasting resolution to the conflict between Hamas and Israel, and to Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, does not involve expanding the conflict further at the cost of more innocent lives, and further believes that the top priority of both the US and UK governments should be securing a lasting ceasefire in Gaza.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-11877>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

“Gaza is a massive human rights crisis and a humanitarian disaster”

... What is the human rights situation in Gaza?

Ajith Sunghay [head of the UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory]: It is extremely grim. The numbers are staggering. Some 25,000 people have been killed, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health, and more than 65,000 wounded. Several thousand are still under the rubble, so the figures will likely go up. There are 1.9 million people displaced out of a population of 2.3 million. There is no safe place in Gaza. Bombardments by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are relentless, in the north and in Khan Younis in the south. There is also a massive scarcity of food, water, medicines, tents and other basic necessities.

The existing shelters are cramped and the sanitary conditions are disastrous. In Rafah and Khan Younis, sewage is flowing out in every corner. This is a ticking time bomb for an epidemic to happen.

What is life like for civilians?

Ajith Sunghay: Life for civilians in Gaza is miserable. Thousands of people are constantly on the move from places they have been told are safe, living in constant fear. People make tents with plastic bags and wood they can find. People are living on one meal a day if they are lucky. ...

What has the work of our office been since the start of this crisis?

Ajith Sunghay: When the crisis started, we immediately focused on monitoring and documenting violations ... For us it is extremely important to provide international humanitarian law and human rights guidance and analysis. ...

How is local staff coping and doing its work in the light of the situation?

Ajith Sunghay: It's been extremely difficult for staff for the last three years. The visas of international staff have not been renewed for the past three years, so they have been working from Amman. ...

What is the security situation of local staff?

Our national staff have lost family members and homes and were on the move, living like internally displaced people, crammed in shelters in unsanitary conditions, with lack of food and water and under a constant threat for their safety. ...

What are the most urgent needs in terms of humanitarian assistance that you have seen during your visit?

... There is a desperate need for all sorts of humanitarian assistance, starting with food. People are desperate for medicines. Similarly, clean water and clean drinking water. Lack of sanitary products is another massive problem. ...

What is the situation in the occupied West Bank?

Since 7 October 2023 the international focus has been on Gaza, but the human rights situation in the occupied West Bank has been rapidly deteriorating. We have seen over 500 Palestinians killed mainly due to excessive use of force by Israeli Security Forces, the highest number since the UN began keeping such records in 2005. Palestinians are subject to discriminatory movement restrictions and arbitrary detention, with reportedly over 6,000 people at this point in time detained. Settler violence against Palestinians has also increased. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2024/01/gaza-massive-human-rights-crisis-and-humanitarian-disaster>

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Foreign Affairs

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UK and US step up action to tackle domestic threat from Iran

... The UK and US have announced new sanctions to tackle the domestic threat posed by the Iranian regime, which seeks to export repression, harassment and coercion against journalists and human rights defenders.

The UK will today sanction 7 individuals and 1 organisation, including senior Iranian officials and members of organised criminal gangs who collaborate with the regime, in order to expose and disrupt Iran's activities in the UK and overseas.

The Iranian officials designated today are members of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Unit 840, which was exposed in an ITV investigation into plots to assassinate 2 television presenters from news channel Iran International on UK soil. This plot was just the latest credible reporting of the regime's attempt to intimidate or kill British nationals or UK-linked individuals, with at least 15 such threats taking place since January 2022. ...

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said: The Iranian regime and the criminal gangs who operate on its behalf pose an unacceptable threat to the UK's security.

Today's package exposes the roles of the Iranian officials and gangs involved in activity aimed to undermine, silence and disrupt the democratic freedoms we value in the UK.

The UK and US have sent a clear message – we will not tolerate this threat. ...

To date, the UK has more than 400 sanctions designations in place on Iranian individuals and entities in response to the regime's human rights violations, nuclear weapons programme and malign influence internationally. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-us-step-up-action-to-tackle-domestic-threat-from-iran>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

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

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

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

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

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

Genocide Determination Bill

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

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

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

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

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

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