



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answers

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### Religion: Education

**Jim Shannon (DUP)** [10815] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department plans to require all students undertaking the Advanced British Standard to study religious education until the age of 18.

**Jim Shannon (DUP)** [10816] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what reason religious education has not been included in the consultation document for the Advanced British Standard.

**Damian Hinds:** The department launched a consultation on 14 December 2023 on our proposals for the Advanced British Standard, seeking views on the design of the overall programme. This includes seeking views on the approach to agreeing subjects included, and on what should be covered in the Employability, Enrichment and Pastoral (EEP) offer for all students.

The government firmly believes that religious education (RE) is important, which is why it remains compulsory for all state-funded schools in England, including academies and free schools, in each year group. Quality RE can develop knowledge of British values and traditions and refine pupils' ability to construct well-informed, balanced, and structured arguments.

The publication of the consultation on 14 December 2023 marks a new phase of working in partnership with students, teachers, leaders, schools, colleges,

universities, and employers to develop these proposals. The department will consult extensively over the coming months, and this will inform our plan for subjects and EEP, which the department will set out in a White Paper this year.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-22/10815>  
and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-22/10816>

*The consultation referred to above can be read at*

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/advanced-british-standards-directorate/the-advanced-british-standard/>

### **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps**

**Jim Shannon (DUP) [11332]** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of proscribing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on national security.

**Tom Tugendhat:** While the UK Government keeps the list of proscribed organisations under review, we do not routinely comment on whether an organisation is or is not being considered for proscription.

The UK Government has long been clear about our concerns over the malign activity of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The UK maintains sanctions on over 400 Iranian individuals and entities covering human rights abuses and nuclear proliferation. The Government has also imposed sanctions on the IRGC in its entirety and on several senior security and political figures in Iran, including senior commanders within the IRGC and its Basij force.

The Government will continue to hold Iran and the IRGC to account. On 14 December 2023, a new sanctions regime came into force, providing the UK extensive new powers to disrupt Iran's hostile activities in the UK and around the world.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-24/11332>

## **House of Lords Written Answer**

### **Armed Conflict: Education**

**Lord Roberts of Llandudno (Liberal Democrat) [HL1655]** To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure school children are made aware of current global conflicts.

**Baroness Barran:** The national curriculum does not mandate teaching about current global conflicts. It is important that pupils understand national and global events and schools are free to teach age-appropriate content on these topics within the context of their citizenship curriculum. The national curriculum for citizenship includes content on the need for mutual respect and tolerance for people of all backgrounds, human rights, the UK legal system, and international law. The citizenship curriculum also develops pupils' skills to research and interrogate evidence, debate and evaluate viewpoints and present reasoned arguments. The national curriculum for citizenship is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study>

As with other areas of the curriculum, the government does not prescribe how citizenship should be taught. Schools are expected to develop a curriculum that meets the need of their pupils, drawing on the expertise and support of subject associations and other organisations that produce and quality assure resources. To support schools to deliver a high-quality curriculum, Oak National Academy, which became an independent Arm's Length Body in September 2022, provides

adaptable, optional and free curriculum resources. On 2 October 2023, Oak launched its second cycle of procurement for curriculum sequences and teaching resources, including for secondary citizenship. Cycle 2 is scheduled for completion by Autumn 2025.

The government has also published resources on the Educate against Hate website to help schools to speak about the news, ongoing conflicts and hold discussions on difficult topics with pupils. The resources are available at:

<https://www.educateagainsthate.com/blog/posts/how-to-speak-about-the-news-ongoing-conflicts-and-hold-discussions-on-difficult-topics-with-students/>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-16/hl1655>

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## Holocaust

### Scottish Government

**First Minister** First Minister @HumzaYousaf signed the @HolocaustUK Book of Commitment after a service in memory of all Jewish and other innocent people murdered and persecuted during the Holocaust. The event also included survivor testimonies from Rwandan and Bosnian genocides. [plus photo]

<https://twitter.com/ScotGovFM/status/1752416047334879680>

**Humza Yousaf** Deeply moving Holocaust Memorial Service tonight. The lives of six million Jews, millions of other innocent people killed in the Holocaust and those killed in subsequent genocides, must not be in vain. I promise to stand up against hatred in all of its forms, wherever I see it. [plus photo]

<https://twitter.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1752430384778809696>

TOP

## Israel

### House of Commons Oral Answers

#### Middle East: Conflict Prevention

**Alan Cunningham (Labour)** [901239] What recent steps [the Minister] has taken to help prevent an escalation of conflict in the middle east.

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Andrew Mitchell):** The Government are engaging extensively to prevent an escalation of conflict in the middle east. The Prime Minister spoke to President Biden last week about that specific issue.

**Alex Cunningham:** I think we can all understand the anger towards Israel for the way it is systematically demolishing Gaza and needlessly killing so many of the people, as well as the need for it to be properly held to account. Does the Minister recognise that we must do everything to protect against others joining the conflict, and that activities such as those against the Houthis must also be proportionate and accompanied by more diplomatic work across the region to stop wholesale killing?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Gentleman is right to make clear that all of us seek that there should not be an escalation of this conflict in the middle east. That is why right

at the start Britain moved military assets to the eastern end of the Mediterranean. More recently, as he alluded to, we are expressing strong support for freedom of navigation on the high seas, stopping attacks by the Houthis. We are degrading their capacity to carry out their attacks, and have made clear that we will not accept that challenge to international freedom of the sea.

**Edward Leigh (Conservative):** One problem with the middle east is the sense of hopelessness among the Palestinian people, which is fuelling terrorist outrages. What steps can the Government take with our American friends to try to put pressure on the Israeli state to stop the imposition of new settlements in the west bank, so that we can gradually reduce tensions in the whole region? Is that not the way forward?

**Andrew Mitchell:** We have made it clear that the settlements are illegal and should not have gone ahead and should not go ahead. On the wider point, we are working closely with our American friends and others through the superb diplomatic network that Britain possesses, to try to lift people's eyes and move to the day after, when a political track can start. That is the answer to my right hon. Friend's question—the political track, which can then start to offer hope in resolving this dreadful and long-standing problem. ...

**Wayne David (Labour):** Today the middle east is in danger of seeing a major escalation of conflict, and whether it is in Gaza, the Red sea, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria or Jordan, we are seeing aggression. If there is a common denominator in those conflicts, it is the malign influence of Iran, usually through its proxies. What are the Government doing to disrupt and stop the disruptive activities of Iran?

**Andrew Mitchell:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had a meeting recently with the Iranian Foreign Minister to set out Britain's view of and requirements from the relationship with Iran, and I think that was a most useful contact to have. The Foreign Secretary is in the region today, trying to ensure that the very points behind this question are accepted and honoured. We are working extensively with Jordan, Egypt, Qatar, Israel, Saudi Arabia and America. Those discussions are ongoing, and will address the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-30/debates/E6D601CA-7CD9-49B4-AD68-A49AA9CF0724/MiddleEastConflictPrevention>

### **Palestinian State: Recognition**

**Hannah Bardell (SNP) [901235]** What recent discussions [the Minister] has had with his Israeli counterpart on Israel's political objectives in Gaza)

**Naz Shah (Labour) [901238]** What plans the Government have to recognise a Palestinian state.

**David Linden (SNP) [901243]** What recent assessment [the Minister] has made of the potential merits of the recognition of a Palestinian state.

**Chris Law (SNP) [901245]** What recent assessment [the Minister] has made of the potential merits of the recognition of a Palestinian state.

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Andrew Mitchell):** We are clear that for a peaceful solution to this conflict there must be a political horizon towards a two-state solution. Britain will recognise a Palestinian state at a time when it best serves the objective of peace. Bilateral recognition alone cannot end the occupation.

**Hannah Bardell:** Given the evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel, and now recognition by the International Court of Justice of the risk of genocide being committed by Israel, have the UK Government sought to ascertain what the Israeli military objective is in Gaza, and does the Minister agree with the motion tabled by the Scottish National party at the Council of Europe last week, supported by nine nations and 20 members, that an immediate ceasefire and a resettlement scheme for

those bombed out of Gaza by Israel are absolutely essential?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I have not seen the motion tabled by the SNP—and I probably would not agree with it if I had. We are always focused on addressing the points that the hon. Lady has made. When it comes to the International Court of Justice, and indeed international humanitarian law, the Government's view is not the same as hers, but she may rest assured that we keep these things under very close review.

**David Linden:** There is now a live ongoing investigation by the ICJ into genocide in Gaza. Given the British Government's reluctance thus far to recognise the state of Palestine, does the Minister not understand that failure to do so will soon result in the UK Government just recognising a cemetery?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The Government's position—and indeed, I believe, the position of those on the Opposition Front Bench—has always been clear: we should recognise the state of Palestine when the time is right. The Foreign Secretary last night added some further words to that commitment, but that is the commitment of the British Government.

**Chris Law:** Last night the Foreign Secretary indicated that the UK Government will consider recognising the Palestinian state in order “to give the Palestinian people a political horizon so that they can see that there is going to be irreversible progress to a two-state solution”.

Can the Minister explain how that is possible when both the Israeli National Security Minister and the Finance Minister have advocated using the ongoing war as an opportunity to permanently resettle Palestinians from Gaza and establish Israeli settlements there, and the Israeli Prime Minister has openly said he is proud to have prevented the establishment of a Palestinian state?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The Foreign Secretary was making it clear that we need a credible route to a Palestinian state and the offer of a new future. It is very important to lift people's eyes to the possibilities once a political track is established. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that progress has been made. Progress that was made at Oslo took place on the back of appalling events when people reached for a political solution. The same is true of what followed the second intifada. The aim of the British Government is to get a sustainable ceasefire and move to that political track.

**Stephen Crabb (Conservative):** My right hon. Friend's comments about a big leap forward are noble—I recognise that—but as long as Hamas, who believe not in a two-state solution but in killing and raping Jews, cling on in Gaza; as Fatah is barely able to control the west bank; and as Israel is still in trauma, still trying to get 130 hostages, including babies, back from Gaza, what does he think that talk about early recognition of Palestinian statehood can achieve?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I recognise the voracity [*sic*] of what my right hon. Friend says, but there is no change in the policy. He is right that Hamas must agree to the release of all hostages, that Hamas can no longer be in charge of Gaza, and that we need an agreement to provide governance, service and security there, which will involve the Palestinian Authority. The Foreign Secretary, in his meetings with President Abbas last week, sought to advance that agenda.

**Flick Drummond (Conservative):** On Sunday, a third of Knesset Members attended a conference calling for the return of settlements to Gaza and to the north of the occupied west bank. Some of those Members have also asked for a voluntary migration of Palestinians from Gaza, with Israel taking over control. Does the Minister agree that that is not in the best interests of Israel and that there should be a return to the pre-1967 borders, with both countries working together to maintain peace in the interests of their citizens?

**Andrew Mitchell:** Yes, I do. The only viable long-term pathway is a two-state



solution based on 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as a shared capital, that guarantees security and stability for both Israelis and Palestinians.

**Greg Smith (Conservative):** Surely the only political objective in Gaza is inextricably linked to the security objectives, because the grim reality is that Hamas do not seek a ceasefire, and Israel cannot be reasonably expected to pursue one with a group who actively seek its destruction, not least the commitment made by a senior Hamas official, Ghazi Hamad, who recently said: “We must teach Israel a lesson, and we will do this again and again”, and that the 7 October massacre was “just the first time, and there will be a second, a third, a fourth.” The only political solution must be the elimination of Hamas and the release of the hostages.

**Andrew Mitchell:** That is why the Government have made it clear that calls for a ceasefire on its own will simply not work. First, Israel absolutely has the right of self-defence, to address and deal with the cause of the terrible events of 7 October. Secondly, Hamas have made it absolutely clear that they do not want a ceasefire; they want to replicate the events that took place on 7 October. ...

**David Lammy (Labour):** For a decade now, the Labour party has supported Palestinian recognition. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) has said, “statehood is not in the gift of a neighbour. It is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people.”

I welcome the Foreign Secretary adopting that position and rejecting the notion that recognition can only follow the conclusion of negotiations. After the unacceptable comments by Prime Minister Netanyahu, does the Prime Minister agree that no country has a veto over the UK’s decision to recognise Palestine?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I can tell the shadow Foreign Secretary that we will pursue the policy that we think is right. The Foreign Secretary set out clearly in his remarks last night the importance of a credible route to a Palestinian state and a new future. In respect of the conversations that the Foreign Secretary will have had last week with Prime Minister Netanyahu, I cannot trade the details across the House, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that the Foreign Secretary will have represented the British position with Prime Minister Netanyahu, whom he knows very well, with great accuracy. ...

**Brendan O’Hara (SNP):** Palestinian recognition is an inalienable right, not a privilege to be conferred by others. Although I was pleased to hear the Foreign Secretary say last night that the UK, “with allies, will look at the issue of recognising a Palestinian state”, I feel we have been here before, most notably in 2014. Given Netanyahu’s categorical rejection of a Palestinian state, what are the next steps? When will we hear about them, and how confident can we be that we will not be sitting here in another 10 years, wishing we had acted to prevent a genocide?

**Andrew Mitchell:** It is not easy to sustain the view that we have been here before—at least not to this extent. The British Government’s policy has been clear on the recognition of the state of Palestine. We are working extremely hard in the region and more widely internationally to secure a political track. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that that will be in the mix once that political track is able to start.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-30/debates/C91967C7-45F4-44F2-A026-64EEA2D75F0E/PalestinianStateRecognition>

*The Council of Europe motion referred to above is not currently available online*

## Gaza

**Clive Betts (Labour) [901233]** What recent diplomatic steps [the Minister] has taken to help secure a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza.

**Jamie Stone (Liberal Democrat) [901246]** What diplomatic steps [the Minister] is taking to help end the conflict in Israel and Gaza.

**Yasmin Qureshi (Labour) [901254]** What recent discussions [the Minister] has had with his counterpart in Israel on the number of civilian deaths in Gaza.

**Paul Blomfield (Labour) [901257]** What recent diplomatic steps [the Minister] has taken to help secure a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza.

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Andrew Mitchell):** We are calling for an immediate humanitarian pause, in order to get aid in and hostages out as a vital step towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.

**Clive Betts:** That is all very well, but the problem is that Netanyahu and the Israeli Government are simply ignoring all the pleas for restraint—those pleas have become empty words. What will the Government do to put real pressure on the Israelis to stop the unacceptable killings, enter into negotiations for a permanent ceasefire and stop the threats to permanently annex and occupy Gaza? Has the time come to stop selling to Israel arms that are being used to raze Gaza to the ground?

**Andrew Mitchell:** As I told the House yesterday, the Foreign Secretary is in the region today and will pursue the vital policies that the hon. Gentleman has set out. The hon. Gentleman will know that it is an absolute priority for Britain to ensure that more aid gets in, but the Israeli Government have the right of self-defence and, as the UK Government continually make clear, they must exercise that right within international humanitarian law.

**Jamie Stone:** Like many other Members, I am sure, I have received an extraordinary number of emails from constituents who are deeply concerned about what is going on—these are people who would never normally get in touch with their MP. We must stop the killing. My party and I believe that an immediate bilateral ceasefire is the way forward. What steps are the Government taking with partners in the region and around the world to achieve that end?

**Andrew Mitchell:** All of us want a ceasefire, but it must be sustainable. That is why the British Government are bent on ensuring that we get a humanitarian pause so that we can get far more supplies into Gaza, and, on the back of that, a sustainable ceasefire. As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), we need a pause in order to get aid and support in and the hostages out.

**Yasmin Qureshi:** According to the UN World Food Programme, over half a million Palestinians in Gaza are starving. A famine is imminent. Allegations against 12 United Nations Relief and Works Agency staff are rightly being investigated, but cutting aid to UNRWA entirely is disproportionate and punitive. Has the Minister even considered the consequences of those cuts on women, babies and the seriously injured, and does he understand that they would breach the measures issued by the International Court of Justice to ensure that aid flows into Gaza?

**Andrew Mitchell:** As I have set out to the House repeatedly, we are doing everything we can, along with others, to ensure that vital supplies get into Gaza, for the very reasons that the hon. Lady sets out. On UNRWA, it would be impossible for any of us to continue business as usual, given the appalling events outlined over the weekend. That is why we have made it clear that we will not produce further finance until we are satisfied that those matters have been addressed. With regard to what we are seeking to do through UNRWA now, we have provided additional funding in the past, and that will ensure that aid and vital supplies get into Gaza.

**Paul Blomfield:** The Government have consistently repeated their commitment to a two-state solution, and that is right, but for 30 years Israel has deliberately undermined that through the settlement of the west bank, in contravention of international law. Now Netanyahu has come clean and ruled out a two-state solution, so does the Minister agree that, if the UK's policy is to be seen as anything more than empty words, we need to demonstrate our commitment to a viable Palestinian state by recognising it and by upgrading current Government advice against trade with the illegal settlements

to a full embargo?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The Government's position on the issue of illegal settlements is absolutely clear. In respect of the two-state solution, I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that progress has been made previously, in particular after grievous acts of terrible conflict and terrorism; that is when the big leaps forward towards a resolution of this desperate problem have been made. We hope that on the back of the horrendous events that have taken place on 7 October and since, additional progress can be made as soon as the political track can be restarted.

**Michael Ellis (Conservative):** The Palestinian Authority's grip on security control across the west bank has been pushed out by the malevolent forces of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and local terror groups funded by Iran. Is it not the case that unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state now would risk equipping those dangerous actors with the trimmings and capabilities of a state?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The British Government have always been clear that we intend to recognise a Palestinian state when the timing is right. My right hon. and learned Friend will have heard the comments that the Foreign Secretary made last night, which in no way deviate from that policy; the Foreign Secretary is pointing out how important it is to ensure that people can see that when a political track gets going, real progress can be made.

**Kit Malthouse (Conservative):** If we cannot have a ceasefire, a humanitarian pause would of course be very welcome, but it will only be of any use if we can get the aid that is so urgently required into Gaza. What are the Government doing to overcome what the Foreign Secretary has described as the "ludicrous" checking regime put in place by the Israelis, and what more can we do to stop or avoid crowds of Israelis from gathering at crossings into Gaza, aiming to prevent aid from entering, and so obviate a famine?

**Andrew Mitchell:** On my right hon. Friend's second point, I can assure him that we are in regular touch with all the relevant authorities to try to ensure that does not hinder the entry of aid. On his first point, we should all be aware that the issue is not that there is not enough aid in the region, but that it is not getting in. That is why the Government, under the Prime Minister's specific instruction, have been investigating how to get aid in through all means, including from the sea and from a naval corridor.

**Theresa Villiers (Conservative):** It is really disturbing that BBC Online is reporting that the Foreign Secretary has changed the UK Government's approach on recognition of a Palestinian state. Does the Minister agree that bringing forward and accelerating unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state would be to reward Hamas's atrocity?

**Andrew Mitchell:** My right hon. Friend will be aware that there is no question of rewarding Hamas for the appalling acts they perpetrated in a pogrom on 7 October. The point that the Foreign Secretary has been making is that we must give the people of the west bank and Gaza a credible route to a Palestinian state and a new future, but we must do so when the time is right. ...

**Lisa Nandy (Labour):** The Minister will know that there is rising anger in the region about the desperate situation in Gaza, which makes a ceasefire much harder to achieve. More people are now dying of hunger and thirst than from bombs and bullets. He said yesterday that the UK is pausing funding to UNRWA, not cutting it, but given its critical role, will he reassure us that nothing will disrupt the supply of aid—not just into Gaza, but through Gaza—now and in the months ahead? He is right that these are serious allegations and we should be robust about how UK aid money is spent, but it would be unconscionable if we allowed anything to stand in the way of UK aid reaching those children right now. Will he promise that the UK will move heaven and earth to get that aid to them?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The shadow Minister for development is absolutely right about the balance that has to be struck. Of course, we need to investigate rapidly the very serious allegations that have been made against UNRWA, but the assets we use



for getting aid and support into Gaza depend on the assets that UNRWA owns—warehouses, vehicles and the other distribution mechanisms. As such, we need that inquiry to be completed as rapidly as possible. In the meanwhile, Britain was not intending to give any further support to UNRWA in this financial year; in the next financial year we will consider the position in precisely the way the shadow Minister sets out.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-30/debates/552C5585-E486-4CC4-8906-BA51073EC8E1/Gaza>

**Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**  
**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Andrew Mitchell):** ... We support Israel's right to self-defence and are working towards a sustainable ceasefire and tackling the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. ...

**Ian Byrne (Labour):** The United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri, said at the weekend that more than 2 million people in Gaza were facing “inevitable famine”. Now that the Government have opted to halt funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, how do they intend to ensure that the urgently needed humanitarian aid—as called for in the International Court of Justice ruling last week and which was central to the ruling—will continue to be delivered to the innocent men, women and children in Gaza, who must have a right to food?

**Andrew Mitchell:** As I set out, the Government's highest immediate priority is to ensure that aid and humanitarian support get into Gaza. We are relentlessly pursuing that objective. I have set out where we are on UNRWA, but there is no immediate effect on the food that it seeks to deliver in Gaza today.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-30/debates/7B7FC5F3-91A6-4B89-8FC6-0737C77A0C7D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-E446EF0C-6080-459A-948B-BA356272A6B0>

*The International Court of Justice ruling 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>

**Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

**Alan Brown (SNP) [901263]** The decision to pull funding from UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the day after the International Court of Justice called for increased aid to get into Gaza has been branded reckless by 21 aid agencies, including Oxfam. What assessment have the Government made of the number of additional Palestinians now at risk of death from disease or starvation as a result of pulling that funding?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The Government have been very clear about the position with UNRWA. We cannot overlook the appalling events that have been reported, but we are seeking to ensure that they are properly investigated. Britain has no additional funding plans for this financial year. We have already funded UNRWA, as have others, so I have no doubt that UNRWA's support, getting food to those who desperately need it, will continue, but we cannot ignore the information that was brought to our attention.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-30/debates/7B7FC5F3-91A6-4B89-8FC6-0737C77A0C7D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-8D62F8AC-A5DD-41DE-88C4-432EB9EB54CE>

**Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

**Sarah Dyke (Liberal Democrat) [901266]** Women are unequally affected in conflict. We have heard accounts of horrific rapes perpetrated by Hamas, of women assuming heavy

care responsibilities due to failing medical infrastructure in Gaza, and of women being trafficked out of Nigeria, to name three recent examples. Will the Minister comment on the Department's work to provide a better future for women in conflict zones? (901266)

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Lady has raised a most important matter. Women bear the brunt of poverty, conflict and starvation. That is why the British Government have made it clear, particularly in the White Paper, that this matter remains a top priority. The White Paper announced £38 million of additional spending to support women's rights organisations. As we know, women's rights are under threat all around the world, and we are doing everything we can to support girls and women.

**Greg Smith (Conservative):** As new heartbreaking testimonies of Hamas's use of sexual violence and rape come to light from survivors of the 7 October attack, what assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the silence of many international organisations, such as the International Red Cross, on that appalling issue?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I hope that my hon. Friend will draw strength and satisfaction from the fact that the British Government are not silent on that very important matter.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-30/debates/7B7FC5F3-91A6-4B89-8FC6-0737C77A0C7D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-DA1C74AE-847C-4D07-9417-15BC5C322D62>

*The White Paper referred to above can be read at*

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6576f37e48d7b7001357ca5b/international-development-in-a-contested-world-ending-extreme-poverty-and-tackling-climate-change.pdf>

#### **Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

**Mary Kelly Foy (Labour):** As the death toll rises in Gaza, so does the misery of women and girls in the occupied territories. I am increasingly concerned that aid is not getting to them. The United Nations says that there is a chronic aid access problem, and that women are having caesarean sections without anaesthetic. What is going on? Is the aid not getting to them? What steps is the Department taking to ensure that it does?

**Andrew Mitchell:** Tackling this is Britain's central aim; the aim is to get humanitarian aid into Gaza, but also to ensure that there is a plan on the west bank to take forward a political initiative. Everything that we are doing is bent on trying to get the aid that is in the region through the narrow entrances into Gaza. We will continue to do that.

**Tommy Sheppard (SNP):** The Minister has said several times in the last few days that the Government's decision to suspend funding for UNRWA should not affect that agency's ability to deliver immediate aid in the region. If it transpires in the days and weeks ahead that the opposite is the case and the agency is being compromised, will the Government immediately review their decision?

**Andrew Mitchell:** Yesterday, I spoke to the head of UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini. I made the point that it is essential that his review—which of course he is not conducting; the UN is conducting it—is completed as fast as possible for the reasons the hon. Gentleman set out. I am reasonably confident that it can be conducted within the next two months, and the British Government are watching this carefully.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-30/debates/7B7FC5F3-91A6-4B89-8FC6-0737C77A0C7D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-515F74C9-E0AD-4B82-936E-25C5D108266E>

#### **Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

**Andy Slaughter (Labour):** I have 10 and 11-year-old constituents—British citizens—who are stuck in the Israeli fire zone in southern Lebanon. The Foreign Office is urging them to return to the UK, but as their mother is not a British citizen, the Home Office is preventing

that. Will the Minister help me to persuade the Home Office to relent on this issue?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I am happy to look at the case that the hon. Gentleman raises immediately after Question Time, if that is convenient to him. The Foreign Secretary is in the region today, not far away from the country that the hon. Gentleman mentions, and I am sure that we will be able to advance the talks that are going on.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-30/debates/7B7FC5F3-91A6-4B89-8FC6-0737C77A0C7D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-A9C8EC0A-CF22-48CA-97D7-62F19A9BD543>

## House of Commons Written Answers

### Gaza: Israel

**Dan Carden (Labour)** [10878] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will publish legal advice received by the Government relating to the conflict in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We regularly review advice about Israel's capability and commitment to International Humanitarian Law (IHL). We act consistent with that advice, for example when considering export licenses. Legal advice to Ministers on Israel's commitment, capability and compliance with regard to IHL is confidential.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-22/10878>

### Gaza: Israel

**Dan Carden (Labour)** [10889] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of advice received on Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law.

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-22/10889>

### Military Aid: Israel

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [10892] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 12 January 2024 to Question 7392 on Military Aid: Israel, when offensive military equipment was last provided to Israel.

**Greg Hands:** HM Government publishes data on export licensing decisions on a quarterly basis in the Official Statistics, including data on outcome, end user destination, overall value, type (e.g. military, other) and a summary of the items covered by these licences. This data is available at:

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

The most recent publication was on 16 January 2024 and covered licensing decisions made between 1 April - 30 June 2023.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-22/10892>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

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

### Gaza: Israel

**Richard Burgon (Labour)** [11372] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what legal advice he has received on the risk that UK manufactured (a) arms and (b) components have been used during the conflict in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** It is the long-standing policy of the Government not to comment on the legal advice it receives. Nevertheless, we are monitoring the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories very closely. All export licences are kept under careful and continual review, and we can amend, suspend, refuse or

revoke licences as circumstances require.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-24/11372>

### **Gaza: Israel**

**Drew Hendry (SNP)** [901249] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of levels of international support for South Africa's referral of Israel to the International Court of Justice.

**Andrew Mitchell:** This development is unhelpful and we do not support it. As we have said previously, we recognise that Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas, in accordance with IHL. Ultimately, it is for courts to decide on matters of genocide, not for states. We of course respect the role and independence of the ICJ.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-24/901249>

### **Hamas: Hostage Taking**

**Bob Blackman (Conservative)** [901255] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to help secure the release of hostages held by Hamas in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The UK government has been working with partners across the region to secure the release of hostages, including British nationals and their families. Release of hostages was a priority for the recent Foreign Secretary visit to the Middle East where he held high level talks with regional leaders and met with hostage families. We are calling for an immediate humanitarian pause now to get aid in and remaining hostages out, and as a vital step towards building a sustainable, permanent ceasefire. To achieve that, Hamas must agree to the release of all hostages.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-24/901255>

### **Gaza: Humanitarian Pauses**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [9624] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make representations to his Israeli counterpart on implementing a new humanitarian pause in the conflict in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are calling for an immediate humanitarian pause to get aid in and hostages out. We are clear that 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/9624>

### **Palestinians: Health Services**

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op)** [9546] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will hold discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of arranging for Palestinians in Gaza who are in need of urgent healthcare to (a) be brought to the UK and (b) access healthcare on the NHS.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are currently supporting NGO and UN partners to deliver medical aid and care in the Gaza Strip. This includes support for primary healthcare, trauma and emergency care services, disease surveillance and outbreak response, and deployment of Emergency Medical Teams. We are also exploring further options to help meet the medical needs of Palestinians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/9546>

## Ramzi Abu Sahloul

**Andy McDonald (Independent)** [11347] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the fatal shooting of Ramzi Abu Sahloul.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to be respected and civilians to be protected. Too many civilians have been killed and we want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. The Foreign Secretary continues to make these points in discussions with his Israeli counterparts.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-24/11347>

## House of Lords Ministerial Statement and Q&A

### Situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

*The Minister's Statement in the House of Commons was read in the Lords.*

*col 1140* **Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour):** My Lords, the horrors of recent months in Israel and Gaza have been intolerable. Millions are displaced, desperate and hungry, and Israel continues to use devastating tactics that have seen far too many innocent civilians killed. With unacceptable blocks on essential aid and nowhere safe for civilians, there is a humanitarian catastrophe and, now, warnings of a deadly famine. Meanwhile, Hamas terrorists continue to hold hostages, hide among civilians, and fire rockets into Israel.

The need for a sustainable ceasefire is clear. The fighting must stop urgently; we need a humanitarian truce now. A humanitarian truce leading to a sustainable ceasefire is a necessary step from which we can begin a bigger push towards a political solution and a just and lasting peace. A sustainable ceasefire means that Hamas must release all remaining hostages and end attacks on Israel, and that Israel must end its bombing campaign and allow full humanitarian access to Gaza. I hope the Minister will be able to update the House on the latest negotiations to secure the hostages' release and a humanitarian truce. There must be a new political process to turn the rhetoric around two states living side by side in peace into a reality. Israeli and Palestinian leaders must engage with this process as the only long-term hope of delivering peace and stability.

Last night, the Foreign Secretary, the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, said that the United Kingdom has "a responsibility" to set out what a Palestinian state would look like. He stressed that the Palestinian people would have to be shown "irreversible" progress towards a two-state solution, and that "as that happens, we with allies will look at the issue of recognising a Palestinian state, including at the United Nations".

This morning, in FCDO Questions, my right honourable friend [David Lammy welcomed this](#), arguing that recognition should not wait for the final status agreement but should be part of efforts to achieve one. Can the Minister tell us how we will take this forward at the United Nations, and which allies will be backing the Foreign Secretary's call?

The International Court of Justice's interim ruling under the genocide convention on the situation in Gaza is a profoundly serious moment. International law must be upheld, the international courts must be respected, and all sides must be accountable for their actions. The ICJ's interim ruling does not give a verdict on this case, but it sets out urgent provisional measures that must be followed. Andrew Mitchell said yesterday that he welcomed the ICJ's call for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza, making it clear that an immediate pause is necessary to get the aid in and the hostages out. He then stressed that the United Kingdom regularly calls on Israel "to uphold its obligations under international humanitarian law, and ... will continue to do so".

—[[Official Report, Commons, 29/1/24; col. 623.](#)]

Can the Minister confirm that this included calling on Israel to comply with the orders in this ruling in full? Have we made that call?



The allegations that a number of UNRWA employees were involved in the appalling 7 October terror attacks are truly shocking. Anyone involved should be held to account in full by law. It is right that contracts have been terminated and UNRWA has launched an investigation. However, Gaza is in a humanitarian emergency, and aid getting in must surge, not stop. UNRWA plays a vital role in providing life-saving assistance.

col 1141 Yesterday, Andrew Mitchell said that he had [spoken to Sigrid Kaag](#), the humanitarian and reconstruction co-ordinator for Gaza, and that “she made it clear ... that while we have zero tolerance of these dreadful things that are alleged to have been done, we cannot operate at zero risks”.

In confirming that the United Kingdom will suspend any future funding until we have the reports of the investigation, Andrew Mitchell recognised that UNRWA assets are absolutely “essential to delivering in Gaza”. [[Official Report, Commons, 29/1/24; col. 628.](#)] Will the Minister this afternoon outline a clear and fast pathway for future funding to return, so that aid can get in? We cannot let innocent Palestinians lose life-saving aid because of the actions of the Hamas terrorists.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat):** ... The Foreign Secretary made a very significant contribution to this debate, outside this House, to the Conservative Middle East Council ... I think it would be appropriate for the Foreign Secretary to be in this House, of which he is a Member, to take questions on speeches that he makes—especially those which could make a significant change to policy ... We can now only go on a speech made at a Conservative Party event and an article in the *Daily Mail* in trying to elicit whether the Government’s policy on the recognition of the state of Palestine has changed.

If it has changed, these Benches will welcome it. ... This House has debated recognition of the state of Palestine. Is it the Government’s intention that, in government time, we will be debating this again? That would be a natural corollary of what the Foreign Secretary’s speech last night indicated.

With regard to the ICJ, it was regrettable from our perspective that the Government rather undermined the processes, but it is welcome that they have accepted what the rulings are: the recognition of the atrocities committed by Hamas and the responsibilities now upon Israel. Previously, I have asked the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, what data and information the UK Government are collecting from our monitoring, both in the skies and through other monitoring, with regard to activities. Will we be participating in the work of the ICJ now, given its ruling, to ensure that proper information is collated about the tactics of the Israel Defense Forces within Gaza? We know, even just today, from BBC Verify, of the estimate that between 51% and 61% of all buildings in Gaza have now been destroyed or damaged; that is between 144,000 and 175,000 buildings. It is estimated that 26,000 Palestinians have been killed, 70% of them being women and children. The need for adherence to the ruling is incredibly important.

col 1142 On the UNRWA situation and the very serious allegations, I agree with the noble Lord that the investigation needs to be expedited and clear, and that those responsible need to be prosecuted. I welcome the Minister’s Statement that 13,000 staff are providing life-saving services for the people within Gaza. As we know, UNRWA is operating outside Gaza too. Can the Minister clarify what the UK “pause” means in reality? Have we stopped co-ordinating on the delivery of aid with UNRWA, given that, in many areas, it continues to be the only provider of assistance? Is our pause open-ended, or will it be contingent on whether the report has been made or any prosecutions carried forward?

Finally, there is now likely to be US retaliation for the attacks and the deaths of their service personnel. There is likely to be political change in the Israeli Government, depending on coalition partners’ response to the latest talks in Paris. This is a time of great volatility and concern. What role is the UK playing overall? Is it a leading role, if we are changing our position on the state of Palestine, to ensure a collective approach to not just a full bilateral ceasefire, but a regional partnership for peace, in what may be a very dangerous time ahead?

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Benyon):** ... I agree wholeheartedly with the analysis of the current situation given by the noble Lord, Lord Collins. The whole House shares his and my horror at the impact of this war. It is 115 days since Hamas's attacks against the State of Israel. Hamas continues to hold more than 130 hostages, and innocent Palestinians are suffering, with over 25,000 people killed. Israelis must be able to live in security and Gazans must be able to rebuild their lives. ...

The United Kingdom is involved, at the highest levels, in setting up a contact group with key partners. We are in the key position of having friends across the region and being a friend to the State of Israel. We are working closely with everyone. ... *col 1143* We have called for an immediate pause to get more aid in and hostages out. We want this pause to turn into a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to fighting. We have identified five steps for this to happen, which answers one of the crucial questions that both noble Lords asked. A political horizon will provide a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution. We can then form a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank in Gaza, accompanied by an international support package. Key to that is removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel, the release of all Israeli hostages and Hamas leaders agreeing to leave Gaza.

The noble Lords asked about the ICJ ruling. The United Kingdom is a firm supporter of the rules-based order and has been for decades. We respect the ICJ ruling in its entirety. One cannot pick and mix on this. There is a question about whether it came at a time when such sensitivities were manifest in the region, but we absolutely accept this ruling.

My right honourable friend Andrew Mitchell spoke to Philippe Lazzarini, the head of UNRWA, the day before yesterday. The inquiry that he announced goes much further than a normal UN inquiry; it is independent and we must let it take its course. I share everyone's view that it is wrong to have people who are alleged to have been perpetrators of the 7 October attacks in this organisation. It is right to cease their employment and to investigate further.

I give the House this clear commitment. First, our contributions to UNRWA have been made for this financial year and our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands. The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support other partners, including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme and the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, in order to respond to the critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

We will continue our support for the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. Some 750 tonnes of life-saving food aid arrived in the first delivery in December. The second delivery of 315 tonnes was made earlier this year. We will continue to support the Red Crescent Society, with which we have a long-standing, trusted relationship, to make sure that this happens. But for this to happen, we need to see border crossings open on a more sustained basis. We are calling for the Ashdod port to be opened as a route for aid to reach Gaza, and to extend the opening hours and the capacity of the Nitzana screening facility and the Kerem Shalom checkpoint so that more trucks, aid and fuel can enter Gaza. This requires the Kerem Shalom crossing to be open seven days a week. My noble friend Lord Cameron has raised this at the highest levels in Israel.

I cannot give the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, a complete answer today to his question about data collection. There is a variety of different sources—some open, and some requiring other forms of data. We are monitoring what is going on, and we are concerned about the scale of the tragic loss of life. We want to make sure that we

are encouraging Israel to defend its borders, as it has the absolute right to do, but to do so proportionately. ...

*col 1144* **Lord Hannay of Chiswick (Crossbench):** My Lords, does the Minister accept that there was a very warm reaction to the reports of what the Foreign Secretary said to the Conservative Middle East Council dinner? Does this not show that the old approach to a two-state solution—whereby Palestine is recognised as a state and Israel is fully recognised by the Arabs at the end of the process—is not going to work? This is a very difficult issue. What is probably needed is a process which, from the start, makes it clear that Arab participants should recognise Israel and that all of us, including Israel, should recognise Palestine as a state. This is the only viable outcome.

Do the Government share the view of the US Secretary of State, who said that UNRWA's ability to provide and distribute various forms of aid in Gaza was "absolutely indispensable"? This is surely covered by the ruling of the International Court of Justice that all must do their best to increase the flow of aid into Gaza—including UNRWA, even though what some of its employees have been accused of is quite horrible and must be punished following an inquiry.

**Lord Benyon:** ... It is absolutely clear that Gaza and the West Bank are occupied Palestinian territory and will be part of a future Palestinian state. We support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and the Palestinian people. Recently, I read a most interesting quote from former Mossad director, Meir Dagan. Commenting on the two-state solution, he said: "We have no other way. Not because the Palestinians are my top priority but because I am concerned about Israel's well-being and I want to do what I can to ensure Israel's existence."

That shows a real depth of understanding of the importance of working towards that conclusion.

On the noble Lord's point about UNRWA, we are not alone in having paused our financial support for UNRWA. The United States, Germany, Australia, Italy, Canada, Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands have all temporarily paused funding. I gave a list of other organisations that we are using. The noble Lord is absolutely right that UNRWA has the facilities on the ground and many thousands of people working in and around Gaza who have the ability to get food, fuel and all other humanitarian items to the people of Gaza. We want to be back working with it when this inquiry has worked out who precisely was involved in the attacks to get back international confidence in it as an organisation to deliver aid.

*col 1145* **Lord Wolfson of Tredegar (Conservative):** ... In order to start the process, do we not need to recognise two things? First, the world of 8 October is a fundamentally different world from the world of 6 October. Secondly, Israel is a democracy, unlike Hamas in Gaza or the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. That means that if we are going to be realistic about encouraging Israel to start that process, we need to recognise that, even today, well over 100 of its citizens are still being held hostage. ...

**Lord Benyon:** ... That is the first step in a road out of this sorry saga that we all want to see achieved. I cannot imagine—well, I can imagine what it is like for the families, because on two occasions I have met them, and I am due to meet some more this week. ... When you meet them, it is absolutely a searing realisation of the true brutality of those events and the continuous misery for those families, including the parents of a child who is around one year old. ...

On my noble friend's point about democracy, he is absolutely right. As we can see daily in our newspapers, Israel is a vibrant democracy. There are future changes perhaps—we do not know—but we will support whoever is the legitimate Government of Israel to help to find a solution to this. My noble friend is also right that it has been 18 years, I think, since free and fair elections, or elections, have taken place in Gaza. The Hamas controlling body has no democratic authority. We

want to make sure that the future of Gaza does not have Hamas anywhere in it.

**Baroness Blackstone (Labour):** My Lords, while welcoming much of what the Minister has said, will he tell the House what steps the Government are taking to ensure that the Israeli Government actually respond to the request that the UK Government and the Foreign Secretary are now making about an immediate cessation of hostilities to allow for more aid to get in, for hostages to get out and above all for the slaughter to stop with a view to turning this into a permanent sustainable ceasefire, which is demanded by more and more countries and by public opinion in this country? Has the time not come for the UK to cease trading in arms with Israel while it continues to kill thousands of civilians, as we have heard, 70% of whom are women and children, which my noble friend Lord Collins has described from the Front Bench as a humanitarian disaster?

*col 1146* **Lord Benyon:** ... First of all, we absolutely accept that Israel has the right to defend itself against the vile terrorism that it suffered on 7 October. We have very strict rules in this country and fantastic oversight, in this place and beyond, of our arms trading arrangements. Any Government should apply those oversights to it, and we do. But it is absolutely vital that we concentrate on the immediate problem, which is getting those hostages released. ...

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat):** ... I also pay tribute to workers in Gaza, particularly, and in the West Bank, many of whom are risking their own lives to provide support and medical help for the victims of the bombardments. Does the Minister appreciate that UNRWA apparently does not have enough money to see it through February, to provide aid in Gaza and in the West Bank? Will he look into, or have the Government looked into, the fact that medical facilities for victims are being denied and systematically destroyed, according to the reports coming to us from Medical Aid for Palestinians? ...

**Lord Benyon:** It is crucial to get the right amount of medical aid and food, and all the other types of sustenance the people of Gaza require. That means more trucks, more ships and more material getting across borders. That is our priority, and there are a great many organisations that can assist with the delivery of that; I listed them earlier. But the noble Baroness is right; UNRWA employs 13,000 people in Gaza and has provided essential basic healthcare, education, protection and vital humanitarian assistance for hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza. Some 1.7 million Palestinians in Gaza are eligible for UNRWA support. In Gaza, it operates 183 schools and two primary healthcare facilities. We want to make sure that we can use this agency as quickly as possible, but that is not stopping the level of compassionate support that the British people are giving to the people of Gaza. We are getting that aid in as quickly as we can, but we need those border crossings to be more functional.

*col 1147* **Lord Pickles (Conservative):** ... Does my noble friend remember that, when the International Court of Justice announced its inquiry, Hamas pledged to honour those interim judgments? The court has asked for the release of hostages. Is my noble friend disappointed that that has not happened—that Hamas has broken its word? If we are to recognise an independent Palestinian state before there is a lasting peace and mutual recognition of boundaries, what assurances does my noble friend intend to put in to ensure the safety of Israel? Or would the British Government be content, for example, with a sovereign Palestinian state entering into a defence arrangement with Iran?

**Lord Benyon:** ... In Israel we have seen rising incomes and a state that is very advanced in its security, trade and the living standards of its population, but one thing that has not been delivered to the people of Israel, and which really matters to them and to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, is security. That is what we want to achieve. We want a lasting security, and then Israel can continue to be a real force, both economically and culturally, around the world.

**Baroness Uddin (Non-affiliated):** My Lords, no democratic country should have the mandate to mercilessly kill another nation. What advice have our Government received



since the ICJ interim ruling as to whether they will also be dragged into complicity should the international court determine that there have been war crimes and breaches of the genocide convention?

**Lord Benyon:** The British Government have never defined what genocide is; we leave that for a court to do. However, we do not believe that this qualifies as genocide. We accept, and are pleased by, the ruling of the court in its calls for the release of the hostages and for the necessity of getting aid into Gaza.

**Lord Dobbs (Conservative):** My Lords, the Minister referred to the failure of the international community for 30 years or more in this matter. That implies that, if a two-state solution is to be brought about, as the Foreign Secretary said last night—and I very much welcome his remarks, and indeed the very balanced remarks of the Opposition, if I may say so, this afternoon—that surely implies that simply asking them to bring about a solution is not going to be enough. It requires more than just persuasion, and possibly a degree of international coercion on both sides, to bring about a solution in the wider interest. That is difficult when the Israeli Government, as at the moment, do not believe in and have rejected a two-state solution. Does the Minister have any ideas how the real problem of Hamas might be dealt with in this ongoing discussion?

*col 1148* **Lord Benyon:** ... It comes down to really hard work and old-fashioned diplomacy. ... If you just think of the world as it exists—my noble friend referred to 8 October, the day after the attack—it is so bleak and depressing that you can hardly see a way forward. But there is a solution and we know it can work. ...

**Lord Anderson of Swansea (Labour):** My Lords, do the Government assume that alternative sources of finance for humanitarian aid, which the Minister mentioned, will make up for the loss of financial aid currently going to UNRWA? Clearly, the Government are radically revising their policy at the moment ... What will they deem to be necessary before they accept a two-state solution? On the other matter, is the Minister confident that the Palestinian Authority is ready to assume responsibility for the West Bank and Gaza?

**Lord Benyon:** My noble friend the Foreign Secretary met the President of the Occupied West Bank Territories, Mahmoud Abbas, and will continue to talk to him to find, I hope, precisely that solution. ... we have given to UNRWA what we were going to give this financial year, and the additional sums that we are promising will still get, in aid, to the people of Gaza through a variety of sources that I listed earlier.

**Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative):** My Lords, can my noble friend the Minister clarify his last remarks? When he said that my noble friend Lord Cameron has had discussions with the Prime Minister of Palestine, can we be crystal-clear that the United Kingdom will not recognise a state of Palestine that is led by the current Palestinian Authority and the Fatah organisation, which has been so involved in terror, and will not recognise a Gaza-led Government where Hamas has either control or power?

**Lord Benyon:** ... We will recognise a Palestinian state as part of a two-state solution at the time that is right and with the leadership in place. We have already talked about needing a technocratic Government who will resolve the issues that exist within Gaza in particular, and we want to make sure that that Government do not have Hamas anywhere near them, or as part of them, and that they are trusted in those territories but also by the people of Israel, who want to live in peace with their neighbours.

*col 1149* **Lord Grocott (Labour):** My Lords, for as long as most of us can remember, Ministers at the Dispatch Box, of both parties, have reiterated the commitment to a two-state solution ... It is only at times of awful violence, such as we have seen in the last few months, that the attention of the international community is focused on what the two-state solution actually means and whether we will work for it as soon as the violence ceases. What is new is not just that Israel has been moving towards making a two-state solution more difficult but that the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, has made it quite clear that he simply will not accept a Palestinian state. ...



**Lord Benyon:** ... There are different voices in Israel, and we will work with whoever is in government to achieve what we, with our partners in the region and with countries such as the United States, think is the best way forward for the people of Israel and those living in the Occupied Territories. The noble Lord is right: that is very difficult to achieve, particularly when people at the top of the Government are saying that our policy is not right for them. However, there are plenty of people who believe—I earlier quoted somebody deeply involved with the security of the State of Israel—that it is fundamentally important not just for the Palestinians but for the future of Israel. It is that which we want to secure. Israel is our friend; we can speak frankly with friends, and that is what we do in diplomatic terms. We do not cut ourselves off from it just because there might be some side to an argument that we disagree with. We will work with Israel to try to achieve what we think is best for the long-term security of the region, which affects us all.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-01-30/debates/57EFC255-E40E-4BE4-B551-F1CAAF661EA0/SituationInIsraelAndTheOccupiedPalestinianTerritories>

*The International Court of Justice ruling 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>

## House of Lords Written Answers

### Middle East

**Lord Roberts of Llandudno (Liberal Democrat)** [HL1653] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ease the escalation of tensions in the Middle East.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** 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. It is in all our interests to work together to avoid regional escalation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-16/hl1653>

### Gaza: Israel

**Lord Roberts of Llandudno (Liberal Democrat)** [HL1654] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to encourage a full ceasefire in Gaza.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** No-one wants to see this conflict go on a moment longer than necessary, and an immediate pause is now necessary to get aid in and hostages out. To achieve that, a number of things would need to happen: Hamas agreeing to the release of all hostages, and no longer being in charge of Gaza; the threat from Hamas terror and rocket attacks ending; and an agreement for the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza in order to provide governance and services and, increasingly, security.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-16/hl1654>

## UK Parliament Petition

### Ceasefire and the State of Palestine

**Patrick Grady (SNP)** [P002908] This petition, on behalf of the residents of Glasgow North, was drafted before the ruling of the International Court of Justice and the decision of the UK Government to cut funding to that United Nations Relief and Works Agency, but that

makes the petition calling for an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people, the urgent release of all hostages and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach civilian populations all the more urgent.

The petition also recognises the resolution of the House on 13 October 2014, calling on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine, alongside the state of Israel. The petition states:

“The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to join with others in the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, and to call on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.

And the petitioners remain, etc.”

*Following is the full text of the petition:*

*[The petition of residents of the constituency of Glasgow North,*

*Declares that the attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7th October 2023 were acts of terror, and unequivocally condemns the taking of hostages and the loss of innocent lives in those attacks; further that the petitioners condemn the disproportionate response of the Israel Defence Forces, and affirms that there must be an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people; further declares for the urgent release of all hostages and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population; further declares support for the calls by the United Nations and many other international actors for an immediate ceasefire on all sides of the conflict and supports the global consensus in support of a two-state solution with a sovereign, prosperous Palestinian state, living side by side with a safe and secure Israel; and notes the resolution of the House of Commons on 13th October 2014 calling on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.*

*The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to join with others in the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, and to call on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-30/debates/94381A0B-3854-4386-890E-EE2F74E8F287/CeasefireAndTheStateOfPalestine>

*The International Court of Justice ruling 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 funding decision relating to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-allegations-about-unrwa-staff-and-7-october-attacks>

*The Commons debate and concluding resolution of 13 October 2014, referred to above, can be read at*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2014-10-13/debates/14101322000001/PalestineAndIsrael>

*The Daily Mail article referred to above can be read at*

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

## House of Commons Library Briefing

### UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip: FAQs

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9900/CBP-9900.pdf>

## Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

### **We continue to work intensively with the UN and partners to get more aid into Gaza: UK statement at the UN Security Council**

... On the 7th of October, Israel suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas. The UK wants to see the hostages taken on that day released as soon as possible. And an end to the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible. The humanitarian situation is desperate. We are calling for an immediate suspension of fighting in order to get vital aid in and hostages out, that progresses towards a permanent, sustainable ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting, and loss of life.

We continue to work intensively with the UN and all partners on practical solutions to get more aid into Gaza. During his visit to the region last week, my Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron, again pressed Israel to allow unhindered humanitarian access. We are supporting the World Food Programme to deliver a humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. And the UK has trebled our humanitarian aid commitment to the Occupied Palestinian Territories this year.

The UK continues to engage closely with Israel on the conduct of their military campaign, including on IHL, and to call for Israel to take greater care to avoid harming civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The UK respects the role and independence of the ICJ. We welcome the ICJ's call for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza, as well as the Court's reminder that all parties to the conflict are bound by international humanitarian law. It is for the Court, not countries, to determine genocide.

Nevertheless, we were troubled by the way in which this action was taken, and we've made our views about this very clear. As Lord Cameron said in the Middle East last week, echoed in the Minister of State Lord Ahmad's intervention at the Security Council also last week, we believe the five following steps are vital.

First, a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution. Second, the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package. Third, removing Hamas' capacity to launch attacks against Israel. Fourth, the release of all Israeli hostages, and finally, Hamas no longer in charge of Gaza.

As my Foreign Secretary has said, it is only when the prize of peace is more attractive than the potential benefit of continued conflict that we will have the chance of a better future for Israelis and Palestinians.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-continue-to-work-intensively-with-the-un-and-partners-to-get-more-aid-into-gaza-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

## Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

### **Gaza (Humanitarian Assistance)**

**Rona Mackay (SNP) [S6O-03024]** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its funding for humanitarian assistance in Gaza.

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie):** In November 2023, we provided £750,000 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to ease the suffering of innocent civilians caught up in the conflict in Gaza. We do not regularly fund UNRWA, but in that case we responded to a flash appeal for the current crisis. We do not currently have plans to make further contributions, not least because of broader budgetary pressures.

Given that more than 2 million people are at imminent risk of starvation, the United Kingdom Government and the international community must work with the UN to find mechanisms to increase the level of life-saving aid that is getting into Gaza,

which Israel must facilitate.

**Rona Mackay:** As convener of the cross-party group on men's violence against women and children, I wrote to the UK Government and the British Medical Association to request urgent aid for the thousands of women and children, including pregnant women, who have been disproportionately affected by this horrendous war. I have yet to receive a reply from either. Does the minister agree that an urgent ceasefire is the only way in which lives can now be saved?

**Christina McKelvie:** The situation in Gaza is catastrophic, particularly for women and children, who make up 70 per cent of those killed. More than half of the hospitals in Gaza have ceased to function, and the remaining hospitals provide vastly reduced services. The United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food has warned that famine is now inevitable. If the bombs and bullets do not get those women and children, malnutrition, disease and starvation will get them.

The only way to bring a stop to the horror and bring the hostages home is an immediate and permanent ceasefire on both sides. The international community cannot stand by while women and children starve, knowing that it could have done so much more to save them.

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15683&i=133775#ScotParlOR>

### **Gaza (Humanitarian Aid)**

**Kaukab Stewart (SNP) [S6O-03026]** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the funding that it has made available for humanitarian aid for people affected by the conflict in Gaza.

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie):** We have been in continued discussions with the UK Government on that matter, and we welcome the additional £60 million that has been committed for the humanitarian response in Gaza, which Scottish taxpayers have, of course, contributed to. However, unless there is an immediate ceasefire and sufficient aid is allowed to enter Gaza, thousands more will die from bombardment, starvation and disease. That is why the First Minister has called on the UK Government to make it clear to the Israeli Government that it must comply with the International Court of Justice ruling or face being held accountable for the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians.

**Kaukab Stewart:** Over the weekend, the UK Foreign Office announced that it was pausing funding aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. What effect will that have, given that by far the largest and most effective aid delivery was through UNRWA and that that leaves the 81 per cent of the Gazan population who are already refugees without support? What is the Scottish Government's response to the appeal by the secretary general of the United Nations, António Guterres, to countries that have suspended funding to the United Nations agency that is assisting Palestinian refugees to reconsider their decisions to ensure the continuity of its vital humanitarian operations?

**Christina McKelvie:** We recognise the swift action taken by UNRWA to dismiss the implicated employees and to launch a full independent investigation. UNRWA has sufficient funds to cover its humanitarian operations until the end of February. The situation must be resolved before then. The UK and the international community must work with the UN to ensure that aid can be provided to the population to avoid mass starvation, which we are warned is imminent. Israel must facilitate and secure sustained delivery and distribution of vastly increased levels of aid in Gaza, in line with last week's ruling by the International Court of Justice. We remain mindful of the words of António Guterres and the UN community.

**Foyso Choudhury (Labour):** At the end of last year, the Integrated Food Security Phase

Classification warned of a very high risk of famine in the Gaza strip. The report advised that more than half a million people were facing emergency levels of food insecurity, which led to all children in Gaza being at high risk of severe malnutrition and death. What specific discussions is the Scottish Government having with the UK Government about provisions to prevent famine from causing serious malnutrition and preventable deaths in Gaza?

**Christina McKelvie:** The UN special rapporteur on the right to food has already laid out the concerns that I think that everyone has about imminent starvation, particularly for women and children, in Gaza. Foyso Choudhury will have heard in my answers to previous questions on the topic that we remain committed to working with the UK Government and speaking with it about ways to ensure that aid gets to the people who need it.

The situation needs to change, and it needs to change now. The only way to do that is through a ceasefire, the hostages coming home, and aid going into Gaza to support the civilians who are impacted by the situation and prevent famine from arising in the next few weeks.

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15683&i=133776#ScotParlOR>

*The UK Government announcement referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-allegations-about-unrwa-staff-and-7-october-attacks>

*The UN Secretary-General's appeal, referred to above, can be read at*

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2024-01-28/statement-the-secretary-general-unrwa>

*The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1156749/>

## UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

### **Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee: We cannot abandon the people of Gaza**

The allegations of involvement of several UNRWA staff in the heinous attacks on Israel on 7 October are horrifying. As the Secretary-General has said, any UN employee involved in acts of terror will be held accountable. However, we must not prevent an entire organization from delivering on its mandate to serve people in desperate need.

The harrowing events that have been snowballing in Gaza since 7 October have left hundreds of thousands of people homeless and on the brink of famine. UNRWA, as the largest humanitarian organisation in Gaza, has been providing food, shelter and protection, even as its own staff members were being displaced and killed.

Decisions by various Member States to pause funds from UNRWA will have catastrophic consequences for the people of Gaza. No other entity has the capacity to deliver the scale and breadth of assistance that 2.2 million people in Gaza urgently need.

We appeal for these decisions to be reconsidered.

UNRWA has announced a full, independent review of the organization, and the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services has been activated.

Withdrawing funds from UNRWA is perilous and would result in the collapse of the humanitarian system in Gaza, with far-reaching humanitarian and human rights consequences in the occupied Palestinian territory and across the region.

The world cannot abandon the people of Gaza. ...

**To read the full statement see**

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/01/statement-principals-inter-agency-standing-committee-we-cannot-abandon-people>



## **Gaza: ICJ ruling offers hope for protection of civilians enduring apocalyptic conditions, say UN experts**

... “The ruling is a significant milestone in the decades-long struggle for justice by the Palestinian people,” the experts said.

The ICJ found it plausible that Israel’s acts could amount to genocide and issued six provisional measures, ordering Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent genocidal acts, including preventing and punishing incitement to genocide, ensuring aid and services reach Palestinians under siege in Gaza, and preserving evidence of crimes committed in Gaza.

“We echo the sense of urgency demonstrated by the Court in its short, two-week deliberation, as hundreds of Palestinians, primarily women and children, are being killed by Israeli forces every day, resulting in a death toll of 26,751 people in Gaza over the past three months. This amounts to over 1% of the population.

“The court order is urgently needed to protect the very existence of the Palestinian people from potentially genocidal actions the Court has ordered Israel to halt and prevent,” the experts said. “Given the dire situation on the ground and the careful wording of the Court, we believe that the most effective way to implement the provisional measures is through an immediate ceasefire.” ...

“We see the decision as dismissing Israel’s justification of its actions as self-defence in compliance with international humanitarian law,” the experts said. “The Court found that Israel cannot continue to bombard, displace, and starve the population of Gaza, while allowing its officials to dehumanise Palestinians through statements that may amount to genocidal incitement.” ...

“We call on Israel to adhere to the ICJ order. The burden now shifts to Israel, to show that it has effectively eliminated the risk of genocide that the Court found to be plausible. By the time Israel reports to the Court in one month, Palestinians must have access to food, water, healthcare, and safety, that have long been denied to them,” they said. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/gaza-icj-ruling-offers-hope-protection-civilians-enduring-apocalyptic>

*The International Court of Justice ruling 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>

## **UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**

**Preliminary Assessment of the Economic Impact of the Destruction In Gaza and Prospects for Economic Recovery**

[https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osginf2024d1\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osginf2024d1_en.pdf)

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## **Relevant Legislation \*\* new or updated today**

### **UK Parliament**

**Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill**

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

**Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill**

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

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

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

House of Lords Library Briefing

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2024-0003/LLN-2024-0003.pdf>

## **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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