



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: Women and Equalities

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): In the light of some of the commentary about the employment tribunal's judgment in the case of Professor Miller and Bristol University, I want to clarify the fact that antisemitism must continue to be challenged wherever it arises. We have seen people in this country use their views on Israel as an excuse to display antisemitism. We have seen that in protests on our streets, and also in our universities. It is therefore important to stress that this ruling does not change the fact that while academics have the right to express views, they cannot behave in a way that amounts to harassment of Jewish students. Disguising that as discourse about Israel would be no more lawful than any other form of antisemitism. The Government will consider the ruling carefully, and we will continue to do all in our power to protect Jewish people throughout our country.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-07/debates/437BE622-E563-47AA-A1E2-A4CA9678C945/TopicalQuestions#contribution-908FEAF4-BDFE-4DDF-BEA9-19D43124E0E6>

The judgement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Miller-judgment-1400780.2022-JDT.pdf>

Home Office

New protest laws on face coverings and pyrotechnics

The new laws will crack down on dangerous disorder, following warnings from police chiefs that some protesters are using face coverings to conceal their identities, not only to intimidate the law-abiding majority, but also to avoid criminal convictions.

Whilst police already have powers to ask individuals to remove these at designated protests, where police believe criminality is likely to occur, this new offence will empower officers to arrest individuals who disregard their orders, with those who flout the rules facing a month behind bars and a £1,000 fine.

Flares and other pyrotechnics will also be banned from protests, and protesters will no longer be able to cite the right to protest as a reasonable excuse to get away with disruptive offences, such as blocking roads.

Flares and other pyrotechnics have been used during recent large scale protests, including being fired at police officers, posing significant risk of injury. The new offence will make the possession of flares, fireworks and any other pyrotechnics at public processions and assemblies for protest illegal. Perpetrators may be forced to pay a £1,000 fine.

The measures, which will be introduced in the Criminal Justice Bill, will also make climbing on war memorials a specific public order offence, carrying a 3 month sentence and a £1,000 fine. This comes after recent incidents where individuals have broken away from large protests and scaled national monuments, demonstrating brazen disrespect to those who have given their lives for this country.

Alongside the new offences, the ability to use the right to protest as a reasonable or lawful excuse to commit some crimes would also be removed, ensuring that protest is not used as a defence for criminality such as obstructing public highways, locking on, as well as public nuisance. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-protest-laws-on-face-coverings-and-pyrotechnics>

Welsh Senedd Written Answer

Freedom of Religious Expression: Universities

Andrew RT Davies (Conservative) [WQ90081] Will the Minister confirm how many times they have met with representatives from Welsh universities in the last three months to discuss the work being done to safeguard freedom of religious expression for students?

Minister for Education and Welsh Language (Jeremy Miles): ... I regularly meet with representatives from Welsh universities to discuss a range of issues. Welsh universities are autonomous bodies - free and open academic discourse underpinned by the values of freedom is fundamental, and that freedom applies to universities to make their own decisions within the matters that fall within their own ambit.

Universities have a duty to ensure freedom of speech and academic freedom, but they must carry out their functions in full recognition of their obligations under their Public Sector Equality Duty.

In addition, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales is in regular contact with universities to ensure the sector feels supported and is taking all possible steps to support staff and students.

<https://record.senedd.wales/WrittenQuestion/90081>

TOP

House of Commons Oral Answers

Prime Minister's Questions

Fleur Anderson (Labour): ... Last week, the Foreign Secretary said that, with allies, we will look at the issue of recognising a Palestinian state, so that the Palestinian people “can see that there is going to be irreversible progress to a two-state solution.”

Afterwards, it was briefed that these words had not been signed off by No. 10. Does the Prime Minister agree with his Foreign Secretary?

The Prime Minister: Our long-standing position has been that we will recognise a Palestinian state at a time that is most conducive to the peace process. The most important thing is that we are committed to that two-state solution and are working with our allies to bring it about.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-07/debates/832BA7AA-E049-4C3F-98FD-1B677B32A7F7/Engagements#contribution-AC9510CE-5C76-4CA7-AA16-FC29439D4AC2>

The Foreign Secretary's comment, referred to above, which was made to a meeting of the Conservative Middle East Council, has been widely reported but is not available online

Topical questions: Women and Equalities

Mohammad Yasin (Labour) [901460] Will the UK Government redouble their efforts to ensure that the humanitarian needs of women and girls in Gaza are being addressed, in line with the UK's commitments under the international women and girls strategy, the women, peace and security national action plan, and the international development White Paper?

Kemi Badenoch: I am working closely with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on this issue. We are very concerned about the events taking place in both Israel and Gaza and we want to see the violence end. The hon. Gentleman will know about all the work we have been doing on preventing sexual violence in conflict, for example, and we will continue to do everything we can to minimise any impact on women and girls.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-07/debates/437BE622-E563-47AA-A1E2-A4CA9678C945/TopicalQuestions#contribution-36726961-9DDC-4705-A1F7-2B2FCCE60CEB>

The Strategy referred to above can be read at

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/640a0bb1d3bf7f02f7d9db18/international-women-and-girls-strategy-2023-2030.pdf>

The Action Plan referred to above can be read at

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/645d2d94ad8a03001138b33c/uk-women-peace-security-national-action-plan-2023-2027.pdf>

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>

House of Commons Written Answers

UNRWA: Finance

Beth Winter (Labour) [12054] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the Oral Statement of the Minister of State of 29

January 2024, on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Official Report, columns 620-622, if he will publish the dates when (a) his Department and (b) other Government departments released funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in each of the last 10 years.

Leo Docherty: We have made disbursements to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) every year in the past ten. This includes core contributions through the multilateral budget and bilateral payments. We are not aware of other UK Government departments having made payments to UNRWA. Obtaining the detail for the requested timeframe could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12054>

The Statement referred to above can be read at

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

UNRWA: Finance

Beth Winter (Labour) [12057] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the Oral Statement of the Minister of State of 29 January 2024, on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Official Report, columns 620-622, and with reference to the Government's pause in funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), announced on 27 January 2024, what assessment he has made of the capacity of (a) other UN agencies, (b) international NGOs and (c) UK NGOs to deliver aid previously delivered by UNRWA.

Leo Docherty: We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands. The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza. We will continue to support and have supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. 750 tonnes of life-saving food aid arrived in the first delivery and 315 tonnes in the second delivery. We have and will continue to support the Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS). The ERCS has a long standing and trusted role as auxiliary to the Egyptian authorities in the humanitarian field. Egyptian Red Crescent is part of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies with whom FCDO has due diligence in place.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12057>

The Statement referred to above can be read at

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

UNRWA: Staff

Beth Winter (Labour) [12058] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the Oral Statement of the Minister of State of 29 January 2024, on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Official Report, columns 620-622, what his planned timetable is for the completion of his Department's review of the Office of Internal Oversight Services' investigation into the employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Leo Docherty: As we have said, we are pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review the concerning allegations. Any future funding decisions will be

taken after this point. We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, including through other UN agencies.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12058>

The Statement referred to above can be read at

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

UNRWA: Finance

Claire Hanna (SDLP) [12194] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will resume the funding of UNRWA.

Leo Docherty: We are appalled by allegations that United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. We are pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations.

As we have said, the pause will remain in place until we are able to review the allegations. Any future funding decisions will be taken after this point.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12194>

UNRWA: Finance

Beth Winter (Labour) [12056] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the Oral Statement of the Minister of State of 29 January 2024, on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Official Report, columns 620-622, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the temporary pause in funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), announced on 27 January 2024, on humanitarian conditions in Gaza.

Leo Docherty: The UK is appalled by allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. The UK is pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations.

However, we remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it. Our commitment to providing aid to Gaza still stands. The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12056>

The 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 following four questions all received the same answer

Gaza: Israel

Afzal Khan (Labour) [12066] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the Israeli government's compliance with the provisional measures set forth by the International Court of Justice in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

UNRWA: Finance

Afzal Khan (Labour) [12067] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of funding for

the UN relief and works agency for palestine refugees in the near east (UNRWA) in the context of Israeli military action in Gaza and the West Bank.

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [12185] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of some countries pausing funding to the UN relief and works agency for palestine refugees in the near east (UNRWA) on the humanitarian response in Gaza.

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [12186] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of funding for the UN relief and works agency for palestine refugees in the near east (UNRWA) in the context of Israeli military action in Gaza and the West Bank.

Leo Docherty: The UK is appalled by allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. The UK is pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations. Any future funding decisions will be taken after this point. Further questions on the investigation are a matter for the UN.

However, we remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands. The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12066>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12067>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12185>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12186>

The International Court of Justice provisional measures (Order) 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>

Gaza: Israel

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [12187] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the Israeli government's compliance with the provisional measures set forth by the International Court of Justice in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

Leo Docherty: We respect the role and independence of the ICJ. However, we have stated that we have considerable concerns about this case, which is not helpful in the goal of achieving a sustainable ceasefire. Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas in line with International Law, as we have said from the outset. Our view is that Israel's actions in Gaza cannot be described as a genocide, which is why we thought South Africa's decision to bring the case was wrong and provocative.

The court's call for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza is a position we have long advocated.

We are clear that an immediate pause is necessary to get aid in and hostages out, and then we want to build towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to the fighting.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12187>

The International Court of Justice provisional measures (Order) referred to above can be read at

Israel: Palestinians

Daisy Cooper (Liberal Democrat) [11444] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has sought legal advice on the forcible removal of civilians from Occupied Palestinian Territories by Israel.

Andrw Mitchell: 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. We regularly review advice about Israel's capability and commitment to International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and act in accordance with that advice. We continue to call for IHL to be respected and civilians to be protected.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-24/11444>

Gaza: Israel

Zarah Sultana (Labour) [12871] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 24 January 2024 to Question 10673 on Gaza: Israel, whether his Department has logged alleged instances of breaches or violations of International Humanitarian Law by Israel in its military engagement in Gaza since October 2023.

Leo Docherty: As stated in answer to PQ 11448, we regularly review advice about Israel's capability and commitment to International Humanitarian Law (IHL). We act in accordance with that advice.

As the Foreign Secretary has said, Israel has the capability and commitment to act within IHL. We continue to call for IHL to be respected and civilians to be protected.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-02/12871>

The answer referred to above can be read at

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

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

Mary Kelly Foy (Labour) [12851] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department is providing emergency humanitarian assistance to help avert famine in Gaza.

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Mary Kelly Foy (Labour) [12852] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure the continued supply of aid to Gaza.

Leo Docherty: There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza. The Foreign Secretary discussed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation there with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 24 January. He reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza, for Nitzana and Kerem Shalom to be open for longer, and for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza. An immediate 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. We have supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. 750 tonnes of life-saving food

aid arrived in the first delivery and 315 tonnes in the second delivery. The Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Mark Bryson-Richardson, is based in the region and is working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-02/12851>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-02/12852>

Gaza: Hospitals

Mark Hendrick (Labour Co-op) [11960] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the safety of (a) staff, (b) patients and (c) displaced people in hospitals in Gaza.

Leo Docherty: Israel has a right to defend itself against Hamas, in line with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians. The Prime Minister has made this clear to Prime Minister Netanyahu and has been in close contact throughout. 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/11960>

Gaza: Children

Mary Kelly Foy (Labour) [12853] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department is providing support for unaccompanied children in Gaza.

Leo Docherty: From our £60 million of committed aid, we have provided targeted support for children through our £5.75 million contribution to UNICEF. Our funding is supporting their work to amongst other things, assist over 5,800 children with severe malnourishment and 853,000 children, adolescents and caregivers affected by the conflict, to receive emergency and child protection services, including mental health and psychosocial support. The UK is a founding member and key donor to Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. ECW is supporting education preparedness work in Gaza. We continue to support the wider delivery of education in Gaza, including through NGOs, UN partners, the World Bank, and the Global Partnership for Education.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-02/12853>

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

Andrew Lewer (Conservative) [12079] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the accuracy of reports that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has provided (a) support and (b) funding to (i) Hamas, (ii) Hezbollah and (iii) the Houthis in the last 12 months.

Leo Docherty: We continue to condemn Iran's political, financial, and military support to several militant and proscribed groups, including Hamas, Hizballah and the Houthis. Such activity compromises the region's security and further escalates tensions. The Foreign Secretary raised Iran's ongoing support to its destabilising proxies and partners directly with the Iranian Foreign Minister on 31 December and 17 January. The UK's new sanctions regime designed to target Iran and its proxies' hostile activity came into force on 14 December and was immediately used to sanction individuals and one entity linked to Iran's support to Hamas.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12079>

Jerusalem: Ethnic Groups

Tommy Sheppard (SNP) [11824] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the (a) recent physical assault on Hagop Djernazian and (b) safety of Armenians in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Andrew Mitchell: We have not held discussions with Israeli counterparts on the situation in the Cow Garden site of the Armenian Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem. The UK is monitoring the situation and is clear on the need to avoid any further rise in tensions. British Consulate General staff in Jerusalem met members of the community on 19 January, discussed the current situation and visited the Cow's Garden site. The UK's position on the status of Jerusalem is clear and long-standing: it should be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states. The UK is a strong supporter of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and an advocate for the integrity of cultural important areas to be respected. The UK continues to take a strong stance against settler violence and urges Israel to take stronger action to stop settler violence and hold the perpetrators accountable.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-29/11824>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Zarah Sultana (Labour) [377] **International Court of Justice Ruling on Gaza and the UK's duties under the Genocide Convention** – That this House notes the ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 26 January 2024, which found that it is plausible that Israel's ongoing attacks on the Palestinian people in Gaza are in breach of the Genocide Convention; further notes that the ICJ issued provisional measures, including ordering Israel and its military to prevent acts against Palestinians in Gaza prohibited by Article II of the Genocide Convention, such as killings of Palestinians in Gaza, as well as ordering Israel to prevent and punish incitement to genocide and to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza; supports the ICJ call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages; notes that as a signatory to the Genocide Convention the UK has a duty to prevent genocide and to ensure that the Convention is not breached; believes the UK has a responsibility to act to ensure this ruling is upheld, and not to undermine it; therefore calls on the UK Government to support the ICJ's provisional measures; further believes that it is not possible for Israel to fulfil the ICJ's order without an immediate end to its military assault on Gaza; and therefore, in light of plausible breaches of the Genocide Convention, further calls on the UK Government to demand an immediate ceasefire and suspend all arms exports to Israel.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61869>

The ICJ ruling (Order) 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>

Layla Moran MP

Layla Moran You may have seen Members wearing this at PMQs today. I was unfortunately unable to make it, but had I been there, I would've done the same. We need to see the hostages freed immediately. #BringThemHomeNow [plus photo of Bring Them Home Now 'dog tag']

<https://twitter.com/LaylaMoran/status/1755267719807602716>

Humanitarian Aid (Funding Criteria)

Bill Kidd (SNP) [S6O-03082] To ask the Scottish Government what criteria it considers when determining how to allocate funding for humanitarian aid in situations such as those in Gaza.

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie): The primary mechanism through which the Scottish Government responds to a humanitarian crisis is the humanitarian emergency fund. Decisions on which crises to respond to through the HEF are made by the Scottish ministers, based on recommendations from a panel of eight leading humanitarian aid organisations.

We have recently responded to emergencies in Pakistan, Malawi, Ukraine, Turkey and Syria, and Gaza. Key considerations in those cases were which organisations were already on the ground and able to provide a rapid response and value for money. That was the case for Gaza and, similarly, for Zambia, for which I announced last week £500,000 to respond to a deadly cholera epidemic through the Red Cross.

Bill Kidd: The humanitarian crisis that we have seen unfold in Gaza is harrowing and is worsening by the day, underscoring the need for urgent action. Does the minister agree that the only way to ensure mutual peace and security is through the recognition of a Palestinian state, alongside a binding commitment to the two-state solution? Can she say what representations the Scottish Government has made to the United Kingdom Government with regard to such recognition?

Christina McKelvie: I do not think that anyone can look at the images that we are seeing on our TV screens every day and not realise that we need a ceasefire now in order to bring about progress to peace. I wish all the sides well, and I will continue to do that.

We would add our voice to that aim. The Scottish Government supports a two-state solution. We think that it is the only way to progress to peace. In November last year, the First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister in those terms. We will continue to make such representations to the UK Government as the issue continues. Today is another example of the Scottish Government calling on the UK Government to get round the table, call for a ceasefire and make some progress to peace in order to support the people—the civilians—in Gaza.

Jamie Greene (Conservative): All of us despair about the on-going conflict and crisis that is happening the world over, but that is my point—there is conflict the world over. In that vein, what criteria does the Scottish Government use to decide where and to whom it sends financial aid and what due diligence does it undertake before and during such financial payments?

Christina McKelvie: I will ensure that Jamie Greene gets more details on our humanitarian emergency fund and our partners in it. Eight leading humanitarian aid organisations are involved in the decision-making process. When they alert us to an on-going or a possible crisis, we take their advice and decide whether it meets the criteria for funding from the humanitarian emergency fund.

The system that we have in place is well rehearsed and organised. I will ensure that Jamie Greene gets more detail on the HEF and conversations with key partners such as Oxfam, which gives us a sitrep almost every day on the situation in Gaza.

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15698&i=133932#ScotParlOR>

Scottish Government FoI Release

Humanitarian relief in Gaza

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202300388758/>

United Nations

In Today's Troubled World, Building Peace 'Humanity's Greatest Responsibility', Secretary-General Stresses, Outlining Organization's Priorities for 2024

... Our Organization was founded on the pursuit of peace. Peace is our raison d'être. Yet as I scan the landscape of today's world, the one thing missing most dramatically is peace. And by that, I mean peace in all its dimensions.

As conflicts rage and geopolitical divisions grow, peace in our world is threatened. As polarization deepens and human rights are trampled, peace within communities is undermined. As inequalities explode, peace with justice is shattered. ...

The situation in Gaza is a festering wound on our collective conscience that threatens the entire region. Nothing justifies the horrific terror attacks launched by Hamas against Israel on 7 October. Nor is there any justification for the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

Yet, Israeli military operations have resulted in destruction and death in Gaza at a scale and speed without parallel since I became Secretary-General. I am especially alarmed by reports that the Israeli military intends to focus next on Rafah — where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been squeezed in a desperate search for safety. Such an action would exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold regional consequences.

It is time for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. This must rapidly lead to irreversible actions towards a two-State solution, based on United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements. ...

Humanitarian workers are saving lives and easing suffering around the world. I pay tribute to their heroic efforts and to those aid workers who have paid the ultimate price, most recently and tragically in Gaza. ...

We also need peace within communities.

Around the world, we are seeing communities divided by rising hate speech, discrimination, extremism and human rights abuses. Antisemitism, anti-Muslim bigotry, the persecution of minority Christian communities and white supremacist ideology are on the rise. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22127.doc.htm>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Turk warns Israeli extensive destruction near Gaza border "grave breach" of Geneva conventions, possible war crime

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) are reportedly destroying all buildings within the Gaza Strip that are within a kilometre of the Israel-Gaza fence, clearing the area with the objective of creating a "buffer zone". I stress to the Israeli authorities that Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits destruction by the Occupying Power of property belonging to private persons "except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations".

Destructions carried out to create a "buffer zone" for general security purposes do not

appear consistent with the narrow “military operations” exception set out in international humanitarian law. Further, extensive destruction of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly, amounts to a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and a war crime.

Since late October 2023, my Office has recorded widespread destruction and demolition by the IDF of civilian and other infrastructure, including residential buildings, schools and universities in areas in which fighting is not or no longer taking place. Such demolitions have also occurred in Beit Hanoun in North Gaza, As Shujaiyeh in Gaza City, and An Nuseirat Camp in Middle Gaza. Demolitions have been reported from other areas as well, with reports of destruction of many residential buildings and blocks taking place in Khan Younis in recent weeks.

Israel has not provided cogent reasons for such extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure.

Such destruction of homes and other essential civilian infrastructure also entrenches the displacement of communities that were living in these areas prior to the escalation in hostilities, and appears to be aimed at or has the effect of rendering the return of civilians to these areas impossible. I remind the authorities that forcible transfer of civilians may constitute a war crime.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/turk-warns-israeli-extensive-destruction-near-gaza-border-grave-breach>

The Fourth Geneva Convention, referred to above, can be read at

https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.33_GC-IV-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>

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

**** closes in 4 days**

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>

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill - Standard Tier (closing date 18 March 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/martyns-law-standard-tier-consultation>

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