



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Holocaust

Israel

Other Relevant Information

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Ministerial Statement and Q&A

Protest Measures

col 379 **The Minister for Security (Tom Tugendhat):** ... In the aftermath of the horrific attacks on 7 October, many people took to the streets to make their views heard. Many did so peacefully and respectfully. I had the great privilege of marching alongside many people, including some in this House, against antisemitism on the streets of both Manchester and London. Sadly, those protests do not tell the whole story.

Over the past few months, we have all seen disturbing and distressing examples of hateful abuse, of serious damage, and of law-abiding citizens being intimidated and prevented from going about their daily life. The right to protest is fundamental to our democracy, but when we see people hurling racist abuse, desecrating national memorials of great significance to our country, or taking flares to marches to cause disruption and fear, the only reasonable response is outrage and disgust. Tolerating these actions would be radicalising in itself. This Government will not stand by and allow a small minority to incite hatred and commit crimes, undermining our proud tradition of peaceful protest.

Today, the Government have announced a package of measures to put a stop to this criminality for good. Protesters have for too long been able to claim in law that protest is a “reasonable excuse” for criminal behaviour. ... The British public certainly do not see an acceptable justification for that level of disruption to their life. That is why we are removing

that defence for relevant crimes. ...

Through the package that we are announcing today, we will crack down on those who climb on war memorials. In recent months, we have seen cases where individuals have broken away from large protests and scaled national monuments. War memorials belong to all of us. They are the altars of our national grief, and it is clearly not acceptable to disrespect them in that way; it is an assault on the memory of so many who gave their life for our freedom and to defend our nation. Attacking our national memorials goes beyond the legitimate exercise of free speech. We must not give those who commit criminal acts at protests the ability to get away with it by simply hiding their identity.

Once the legislation comes into force, the police will have new powers to arrest protesters at certain protests who wear face coverings to conceal their identity. Those who shout racist abuse and extremist rhetoric will no longer be able to hide from justice. We are also protecting the public by putting an end to people bringing flares on marches. ... Anyone who flouts the new rules will face serious consequences, including up to three months in jail and a £1,000 fine for those who climb on war memorials. ...

col 380 As I have made clear, freedom of expression is vital to our democracy ... People must be able to speak without fear, and have their right to peaceful protest protected, but those freedoms and rights are not absolute, for very good reason. There is no freedom to commit violence or intimidation, or to harass others. This country has laws against vocally supporting terror organisations for a very good reason, and last month, the Government proscribed Hizb ut-Tahrir as a terrorist organisation. That group actively celebrated the 7 October terrorist attacks in Israel that led to the rape and murder of many, many people. It is an organisation that has poisoned minds for far too long.

We must, and we will, continue to stand with communities who feel threatened, and ensure their safety wherever they live and work. The Government are sticking to the plan to give police the powers that they need to crack down on crime and keep our streets safe. We will never tolerate hateful, dangerous or intimidating behaviour. We will always put the decent, law-abiding majority first. We will do what is right and fair. ...

Dan Jarvis (Labour): ... The Labour party absolutely respects the fundamental freedom to make legitimate, peaceful protest, but when that freedom is abused to intimidate, harass and harm others, safeguards must be put in place to protect the public. It is essential that the police be able to maintain public order while safeguarding the right to legitimate, peaceful protest. ...

First, there are the new powers for the police to arrest protesters using face coverings to conceal their identity. While we understand the genuine concern about protesters committing public order offences while wearing face coverings, we are also concerned that there might be, at times, legitimate reasons why some protesters would want to wear face coverings. Let me give an example. When dissidents protest outside foreign embassies—the Minister will know which ones I have in mind—they may well want to conceal their identity to protect their family back home. The UK is, and should always be, a safe haven for dissidents opposing oppressive regimes. Can the Minister provide more detail about how that new power will be applied appropriately?

col 381 Secondly, the Opposition welcome a ban on flares and fireworks, which have been used to fuel public disorder and intimidate police officers in recent months. However, the policing of large protests could pose a challenge to enforcing the ban effectively, so I would be grateful if the Minister outlined what guidance will be issued to police forces on enforcing that at large protests with thousands of people in attendance.

Thirdly, on measures to protect the sanctity of war memorials ... They are places to remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of our country, and they must always be respected. During protest activity last year, a very small minority of protesters desecrated the sanctity of war memorials, which understandably sparked outrage right around the country.

Protest activity also raised the issue of what is defined as hateful extremism. Despite promises, the Government have not so far been forthcoming with their definition of hateful extremism, which would help the police forces to police protests better. Can the Minister say when that will be brought forward, and outline when the Government will bring forward an updated counter-extremism strategy? The current one is eight years out of date. The right to peacefully protest is a fundamental freedom in our country. It must not be abused, but it must not be curbed unnecessarily, either. ...

Tom Tugendhat: ... He is quite right that protecting peaceful protest and the right of free citizens to express their views on our streets is essential to the Government's mission, and it is one of our priorities. ...

On face coverings, my hon. Friend raises important questions about when there might be a legitimate reason for somebody to cover their face. The guidelines and the legislation that we are setting out will cover that, because police officers will have discretion to give an order requiring a face covering to be removed. Those commanding the policing of protests will therefore have discretion over when they ask for that instruction to be carried out.

col 382 Secondly, on pyrotechnics, the instruction is quite clear: the measure relates to those participating in the protest. If, particularly around Diwali or Guy Fawkes's day ... people who have bought fireworks happen to pass a protest, they will not be caught by the offence. ...

We ... know that protests on war memorials can tear open extremely painful wounds that have long been closed. ... That is why it is right that the Government act against the small minority desecrating such an important place in our hearts.

... we are doing an awful lot to tighten up various elements of our counter-extremism policy. ... The reality is, however, that it is a very complex subject ... There is an awful lot that we must do to ensure that groups that pose the danger of extremism are addressed in other ways. That is where cross-Government working has been so important in ensuring that groups are transparent in what they are doing, in who is funding them and in where they are targeting their attention.

Peter Bottomley (Conservative): ... I was present at Óscar Romero's funeral, when 14 people died around me from crushing because explosives or fireworks went off.

I was present at the Heysel stadium in 1985 when 39 Italians were crushed to death. Being able to control demonstrations, which should be held by agreement and understanding with the authorities, is vital for them to be safe.

col 383 On a more minor scale, there was a flash protest outside my constituency office yesterday by good-natured people who care about the people in Gaza. Had there been one young worker in that place when suddenly a flashmob appeared around them, it would have been discomfiting. I am sure that that would not be caught by these measures, and nor should it be, but I say to those doing such protests: "Think of others." ...

Tom Tugendhat: ... Every day, many protests happen politely, courteously and in ways that make their point without causing the kind of societal harms that, sadly, some cause. ... My hon. Friend reminds us not only that crying "Fire!" in a crowded theatre is not an expression of freedom of speech, but that, in this context, making an explosion in a crowded area can lead to human tragedy beyond expectation. ...

Amy Callaghan (SNP): We in the SNP oppose these measures to clamp down on people's right to protest, just as we opposed the Public Order Act 2023 and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. On issues such as the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign, Iraq, and Israel and Gaza, people from Scotland travel to London, to Westminster, to make their voices heard. People feel helpless in the wake of the Gaza situation, which is unfolding 24/7 on our social media feeds. They donate what they can during a cost of living crisis, and they boycott and protest. How does Westminster respond? It responds by cutting cost of living support, banning public bodies from investing ethically, and clamping down on the right to protest through measures that will impact

certain people in society, particularly those living with disabilities.

Human rights lawyer Baroness Shami Chakrabarti has called out today's announcement as "more culture war nonsense". She highlighted that individuals may have reasons other than criminality for covering their faces: "Should rape victims or refugees peacefully protesting really be punished for covering their faces to protect their identities?"

col 384 Is this not just another example of the Government pandering to their far-right wing, rather than protecting the legitimate right to protest? ...

Tom Tugendhat: ... At many of these protests, we have seen extremely dignified individuals raising a point, whether about Gaza or antisemitism. We have heard courageous voices speaking out on all sides of these debates—individuals who have made their voices heard extremely clearly and in a dignified way—but sadly, some extremists have chosen this as the moment to spread hatred and fear and to stoke nationalism or division. ...

Greg Smith (Conservative): ... Without seeking to interfere with the operational independence of the police, there should be a presumption of instant and immediate application of these new measures where offences occur. Too often in the protests we have seen since 7 October vile antisemitic posters have been displayed and banners have been carried unchallenged, only for the police—particularly the Metropolitan police—to put out appeals later asking, "Do you know this person?" That emboldens those who have these foul views to carry on, and it sends a much deeper and disturbing message, particularly to Jewish communities across the country, that the police are just letting those offences go by.

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is exactly why the Home Secretary has already been speaking with police chiefs in the United Kingdom about the powers that will be provided. The police chiefs themselves have asked for the powers. He is also absolutely right that the level of antisemitism we have seen on our streets is simply vile and completely unacceptable, and it is also true that some of the symbols that are being carried and some of the flags that are being displayed are themselves radicalising, so action against them is so important. It is quite noticeable how many of the symbols that people claim should be culturally normalised in the UK are absolutely not tolerated in Muslim countries across the world, for the very clear reason that they do not speak for Muslim people—either in the UK or around the world—but are trying to speak for a narrow Islamist fringe that is utterly hateful and has no place in our society.

col 385 **Diana Johnson (Labour):** ... Will the Minister explain how these new laws will be supported with any additional resourcing that the police need? What more can be done to support the wellbeing of officers who are either deployed or abstracted to ensure that these protests can go ahead? ...

Tom Tugendhat: ... It is worth saying that the pressure on policing across the United Kingdom from these protests has been significant. We recognise that, and we have been looking to support police forces, where appropriate, in whatever way is appropriate. ...

col 386 **Bob Blackman (Conservative):** Since the atrocities on 7 October, the regular hate marches that have taken place in London have forced Jewish Londoners to remove their kippahs, remove their Star of David necklaces and, in some cases, even vacate their homes because they are scared—and they are certainly scared to travel to central London when one of these hate marches is taking place. Only 16% of British Jews believe that the police treat antisemitism as equivalent to other forms of hate crime, and two thirds of British Jews believe that the police have double standards on these crimes. When these measures are introduced, will my right hon. Friend make sure that they are actually targeted at the people expressing hatred towards British Jews, and that those people are arrested and taken to court to answer for the charges that are made?

Tom Tugendhat: ... the level of antisemitism we have seen has been utterly

unacceptable and the fear that has been spread, sadly, among the Jewish community in the United Kingdom has been utterly vile. It is simply intolerable to have parts of our community feeling unsafe to walk, shop or do whatever they choose on the streets of our capital. It is completely wrong.

The powers in this instruction or ruling will be for the police to deploy as operationally appropriate. However, I am sure that police officers and police chiefs around the United Kingdom will have heard my hon. Friend's point and will have recognised it. I should point out that, since the 7 October protests began, more than 600 arrests have been made in relation to those protests. The police take this extremely seriously, and about 30 of those arrests have been related to TACT—Terrorism Act 2000—offences. ...

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... The right to protest is an important right in a democratic society and country, but I firmly believe that things should be done decently and in order, which means people having the courage of their convictions and having their face uncovered. People wearing a mask at a protest, whether they be pro-Hamas protesters or hunt saboteurs, are breaking the law, and I would be very pleased to see them jailed and fined for the activity of wearing a mask. ...

col/ 387 **Martin Vickers (Conservative):** ... Although the proposed three months' imprisonment or £1,000 fine might be suitable for some who are caught up in demonstrations, three months seems incredibly lenient for those who we can probably describe as "professional protesters". Of course the final decision rests with the courts, but could a heavier period of imprisonment be available to them?

Tom Tugendhat: ... I think this level of punishment represents, rightly, the offence that such actions cause, and the penalty is, I think, appropriate to that. ...

Clive Efford (Labour): ... those memorials are often the only place where those people are commemorated, because they have no grave of their own, and such memorials should be protected in the way the Minister suggests. None the less, the detail of the proposals will require a great deal of scrutiny, so could he say a little more about where we will get that opportunity? The Criminal Justice Bill is now on Report. Are the measures an amendment to that? Will they be statutory instruments? ...

Tom Tugendhat: There will be amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill ...

col/ 388 **Robin Millar (Conservative):** It is expected—and even reasonable—that those who lose the democratic debate in this place will take their protest on to the streets. However, we have seen a recent disturbing trend that the tactics of a minority now undermine and jeopardise the tradition of effective peaceful protest that we enjoy in this democracy. ...

Tom Tugendhat: ... There are many people who served our country in various different ways over two world wars and in conflicts since then, whose memorials are either lost and known only unto God or are many thousands of miles away from their families. Families who have come to share our lives in the United Kingdom may have left behind them the graves of family members who served in those conflicts. I am thinking in particular of the 140,000 or so Muslim servicemen who served and lost their lives in the last two wars, of the many Jewish ex-servicemen who march as well, and of many others from around the world—from Africa, South America and Asia—who served in the pursuit of liberty and the defence of freedom in our country. This is their home now; those memorials remember their relatives and loved ones, and it is absolutely right that, for all communities in this country, we defend those moments of national memorial and the altars to liberty that they represent.

Deidre Brock (SNP): ... The Minister says that enforcement actions will be taken by police officers at their discretion. How will the Government ensure that these measures will be applied uniformly, proportionately and appropriately across all of England's police forces?

Tom Tugendhat: These are police powers, so the enforcement or application of

them is operationally independent and down to the discretion of officers and chief constables as appropriate. ...

To read the full statement and Q&A see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-08/debates/71E44C6F-BD00-48EE-B0CA-42A8FD45C4B7/ProtestMeasures>

House of Commons Written Answers

Metropolitan Police: Israel

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [12322] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has had discussions with the Metropolitan Police on seeking evidence of war crimes committed in Israel on 7 October 2023.

Metropolitan Police: Ukraine

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [12321] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has had recent discussions with the Metropolitan Police on their role in gathering of evidence of war crimes in Ukraine.

Chris Philp: Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) has national responsibility in the UK for investigating war crimes and crimes against humanity and this is carried out by the War Crimes Team (WCT). There is an ongoing operation to identify, capture and triage evidence in support of investigations by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other relevant jurisdictions regarding possible war crimes, crimes against humanity committed in Ukraine since 21st November 2013. The Home Secretary regularly discusses priority security issues with CTP, including War Crimes investigations relating to the war in Ukraine [most recently in January 2024].

To gather evidence of war crimes, the Metropolitan Police SO15 War Crimes Team has worked with Ukrainian Community Groups in the UK, completing a number of appeals for witnesses through traditional and digital media platforms. The UK has embedded a dedicated Met Police liaison officer in The Hague to facilitate information sharing from the UK to the ICC.

The Home Office continues to support the work of the International Criminal Court to ensure allegations of war crimes are fully and fairly investigated, by independent, effective and robust legal mechanisms.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12322>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12321>

Sikhs

Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op) [13040] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the report by the Office for National Statistics entitled Equalities data audit, final report, published on 25 October 2018, how many and what proportion of the datasets audited as part of that process included data on Sikhs.

John Glen: The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority. ...

The purpose of the equalities data audit is to identify which protected characteristics, as identified in the 2010 Equalities Act¹, are collected in the data sources, not the detail of the data within the sources. This reflects its primary purpose as a resource for researchers, signposting them to potential sources of data for use in their work.

In the original 2018 *Equalities data audit, final report*², we identified that almost 60 of the approximately 230 data sources audited at that time (approximately 26%) collected data on the protected characteristic of religion or belief. Just under half of these used the Government Statistical Service's (GSS) religion harmonised

standard³. As “Sikh” is one of the response options within this harmonised standard, this would suggest that they included data on Sikhs. However, no assessment was made of whether these data sources did include data on Sikhs. Equally no assessment was made of whether other sources that did not use the harmonised standard also included data on Sikhs.

Since the publication of this report, the ONS’ Centre for Equalities and Inclusion has continued to maintain the underlying audit, with the latest update⁴ from October 2023, which was published in November 2023. This shows a total of 85 of the 298 entries (29%) include information on the protected characteristic of religion or belief. Of these 85 data sources, six are produced by the ONS and include data on Sikhs. We would expect other sources that use the GSS harmonised standard also to include data on Sikhs. However, the audit makes no assessment of the way in which the information is captured. This means, it is not possible to use the audit to identify whether data on Sikhs specifically are captured within the broader category of religion or belief for data sources not produced by the ONS.

The audit includes UK data sources from across government and more widely, for data sources for which the ONS is not directly responsible, much of this information has been collated from publicly available information. We rely on users to notify us of any incorrect or missing information. As such, there may be additional data sources on religion or belief that are not included in the audit.

As offered when the ONS published our bespoke analysis of people who identified as Sikh using Census 2021 data on 15 December 2023⁵, Deputy National Statistician for Health, Population & Methods, Emma Rourke, is enthusiastic about continuing engagement with yourself and other members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Sikhs. This is to discuss our ongoing work to ensure accurate data on the Sikh community is available. My office will be in touch shortly to make arrangements.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/methodologicalpublications/generalmethodology/onsworkingpaperseries/equalitiesdataauditfinalreport>

³ <https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/religion/>

⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/inequalitiesdataaudit>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-05/13040>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/methodologicalpublications/generalmethodology/onsworkingpaperseries/equalitiesdataauditfinalreport>

House of Lords Written Answers

Religion: Education

Baroness Sherlock (Labour) [HL1965] To ask His Majesty’s Government, further to the Ofsted Annual Report 2022/23: education, children’s services and skills, published on 23 November 2023, what plans they have to implement the recommendation contained in that report to improve the provision of high-quality professional development for teachers of religious education.

Baroness Barran: Religious Education (RE) is an important part of a school’s curriculum and can contribute to a young person’s personal, social, and academic development. When taught well, the subject develops children’s knowledge of British values and traditions, helps them to better understand those of other countries, and refines pupils’ ability to construct well-informed, balanced and structured arguments. This is why it remains a compulsory subject in all state-

funded schools in England for each pupil up to the age of 18.

Department officials read Ofsted's 2023 report with interest. The department is already providing support for RE teaching in a number of ways. The department is offering a £10,000 bursary for RE trainee teachers starting Initial Teacher Training courses in the 2024/25 academic year. It has published this information on the 'Get Into Teaching' website and will be marketing the offer to prospective teachers through other channels.

To support teachers when they are in post, and to ensure high standards and consistency of teaching, RE resources will be procured by Oak National Academy during the second tranche of its work. Oak will work closely with the sector and utilise sector experience when producing new materials for RE. This will ensure that high-quality lessons are available nationwide, benefitting both teachers and pupils, should schools opt to use them. Oak RE resources will be available for teaching from autumn 2024, with full packages expected to be available by autumn 2025.

The department also continues to offer eight week subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses in the 2022/23 academic year for candidates who have the potential to become outstanding teachers but need to increase their subject knowledge. The eight week SKE course, available in religious education, can be undertaken on a full time or part time basis, but must be completed before qualified teacher status can be recommended and awarded. Eligible candidates could be entitled to a SKE bursary of £175 per week to support them financially whilst completing their SKE course.

More information on these courses is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/subject-knowledge-enhancement-an-introduction>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/hl1965>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Religion: Education

Baroness Sherlock (Labour) [HL1966] To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Ofsted Annual Report 2022/23: education, children's services and skills, published on 23 November 2023, what plans they have to implement the recommendation contained in that report to ensure curriculum publishers identify clearly what pupils will learn and when, in relation to religious education.

Baroness Sherlock (Labour) [HL1967] To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Ofsted Annual Report 2022/23: education, children's services and skills, published on 23 November 2023, what plans they have to implement the recommendation contained in that report to clarify expectations about the level of religious education provision in schools.

Baroness Barran: Religious Education (RE) is an important part of a school's curriculum and can contribute to a young person's personal, social and academic development. When taught well, the subject develops children's knowledge of British values and traditions, helps them to better understand those of other countries, and refines pupils' ability to construct well-informed, balanced, and structured arguments. This is why it remains a compulsory subject in all state-funded schools in England for each pupil up to the age of 18.

Whilst the department read Ofsted's recommendations with interest, the department believes that RE curricula should continue to be designed at a local level, whether that is through locally agreed syllabuses or by individual schools and academy trusts developing their own curricula. It will remain for individual schools to plan, organise, and deliver their curriculum, so that local demographics can be appropriately accounted for.

In maintained schools without a religious designation, Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACRE) should monitor the provision and quality of RE taught according to its agreed syllabus, together with the overall effectiveness of the syllabus.

Academies are accountable for the quality of their curricular provision, including for RE. They can choose to adopt a locally agreed syllabus or develop its own, as long as it meets the requirements of a locally agreed syllabus.

The department does, however, welcome the work that the Religious Education Council (REC) has done to assist curriculum developers by publishing its National Content Standard for RE in England. This is not in itself a curriculum but, without specifying precisely the content that schools should teach, provides a non-statutory benchmark against which syllabus providers and others could choose to inform and evaluate their work.

To support teachers, and to ensure high standards and consistency in RE teaching, resources will be procured by Oak National Academy during the second tranche of its work. Oak will work closely with the sector and utilise sector experience when producing new materials for RE. This will ensure that high-quality lessons are available nationwide, benefitting both teachers and pupils, should schools opt to use them. Oak RE resources will be available for teaching from autumn 2024, with full packages expected to be available by autumn 2025.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/hl1966>
and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/hl1967>

The Ofsted Annual Report 2022/23, referred to above, can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/655f2551c39e5a001392e4ca/31587_Ofsted_Annual_Report_2022-23_WEB.pdf

The National Content Standard for RE in England, referred to above, can be read at

<https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/rec/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/National-Content-Standard-for-Religious-Education-for-England.pdf>

Crown Prosecution Service

Man who commented online "Britain needs 650 Thomas Mairs" sentenced for posting extremist content

A far-right extremist who posted offensive content on social media and glorified the murderer of Jo Cox MP has been jailed for two years and eight months. ...

Kieran Turner, from Earby, Lancashire, began his offending in 2016 when he opened an account on alternative social media platform GAB.

In 2019, Turner commented "Britain needs 650 Thomas Mairs" in reference to Thomas Mair who murdered Jo Cox MP in 2016 and the number of MPs who sit in the House of Commons.

Between 2016 and 2020, Turner, 36, posted and re-shared material expressing antisemitic, transphobic, misogynistic, homophobic, racist and islamophobic views.

He also used video sharing platform 'Bitchute' and Facebook to post offensive content that included live-streamed video footage of the 15 March 2019 terrorist attack – the day of the Christchurch mosque shootings. ...

Nick Price, Head of the CPS Special Crime and Counter Terrorism Division, said: "Kieran Turner's extreme views and his relentless attempts to stir up hatred have no place in society.

"His online posts and comments were abhorrent and far-right extremists such as Turner have the potential to threaten public safety and security.

“The CPS will always seek to prosecute such appalling online criminal behaviour, and it is only right that Turner has been sentenced today for his crimes.”

To read the full press release see

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/man-who-commented-online-britain-needs-650-thomas-mairs-sentenced-posting-extremist>

University Jewish Chaplaincy – Leeds University

University Jewish Chaplaincy With much appreciation to Minister @halfon4harlowMP for asking to meet with our Leeds chaplains, Chairman Uri Goldberg and CEO @SophieDunoff this evening.

In response to the antisemitic abuse and violent threats directed at our Chaplaincy couple, their family and Jewish students in Leeds, Skills and Higher Education Minister Robert Halfon asked to meet with Rabbi Zecharia and Nava Deutsch together with our Chair and CEO. The Minister expressed his utmost support for the couple and their continued role at the university together with the Jewish student community. He also reaffirmed the Government's commitment to do everything possible to combat antisemitism on campus. We deeply appreciate his support.

[plus photo]

<https://twitter.com/JewishChaplain/status/1756816094554186196>

Robert Halfon MP Working Hard for Harlow Many in the Jewish Community feel let down by inaction by some Universities on antisemitism - their view is that at best some Universities are turning a blind eye to extremism on campus or at worst just appeasing it. The increase in antisemitic intimidation and threats that we've seen on campuses since October 7th make me deeply angry. Antisemitism must never be tolerated on campuses or across society.

As a Jewish person myself, I have found some of the events we've seen on the streets of the UK really hurtful. The division, the misinformation, the violence and the intimidation - it sometimes doesn't feel safe to be Jewish. This cannot be allowed to happen.

The freedom of speech we need in society is not a freedom to incite violence or hate speech. Yet unfortunately, across society & our universities, this line is being overstepped – big time. The rise in antisemitism we have seen in recent months is not acceptable.

I am disturbed at alleged threats made to the Jewish Chaplain at Leeds University. What happened to the British values of respect and tolerance?

I spoke directly with the Vice Chancellor of Leeds University to unambiguously express the Government's concerns. And to personally remind the University of its responsibility to protect their Jewish students and university community from antisemitism.

Unfortunately, since October 7th, it has become all too common for me to have to personally call Vice Chancellors to remind them of this. Whilst universities are independent institutions, here are some of the other actions the government is taking to tackle antisemitism.

I was grateful to @RishiSunak & @Jeremy_Hunt for giving an extra £7 million in the budget to tackle antisemitism in schools and universities.

While most universities have adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism, some have still not. And some that have are not acting on it. So we're creating an antisemitism charter so universities can demonstrate an active commitment to tackling antisemitism.

Alongside @GillianKeegan, I have written to all universities to underline they should take

immediate disciplinary action if a student is found to be inciting racial hatred or violence. And yes - if they are suspended, their student finance could be, too.

Studying in the UK is a privilege, not an entitlement. Any foreign national with a student visa who incites racial hatred or violence can have their visa revoked and be expelled from the country.

@GillianKeegan and I are in open dialogue with Jewish education and community groups so we can understand what they are facing and how we can do more to help them. I've been grateful to the @UJS_UK, HE Jewish Chaplaincy and @Chiefrabbifor meeting us recently.

I'm grateful to be working with @RishiSunak and @GillianKeegan on this - who care deeply about the Jewish community. One antisemitic act is one too many. We do not tolerate antisemitism. I will continue to work flat-out to protect our Jewish communities on campuses.

As my hero Sophie Scholl said - the real damage is done by "those with no sides and no causes... Those who don't like to make waves - or enemies." I want Sophie Scholls to exist in every university. Non-Jews standing-up for Jewish students against the hatred they endure.

I have welcomed statements condemning antisemitism from vice chancellors across the country. But we need to be proactive, not just reactive. That's why the secretary of state and I have written twice to universities on this. And why we're looking [to] introduce an antisemitism charter to give teeth to the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism.

Sophie Scholl once said that the real damage is done by "those with no sides and no causes ... Those who don't like to make waves – or enemies.

I want Sophie Scholls to exist in every university. Non-Jews prepared to stand-up for their Jewish friends, who's done nothing to deserve the stigma and hatred they've endured.

Government can only do so much. Action against antisemitism needs to come from within.

Sophie Scholl and antisemitism

I want to turn now to someone else who, like William Beveridge, was trying to make the world a better place in 1942. Someone who ultimately paid for it with her life.

My political hero is a young woman called Sophie Scholl. Again, I expect 20th Century historians will recognise the name. She was a member of the White Rose resistance group who distributed anti-Nazi leaflets in Germany. She was a university student in Munich, where her final act of defiance led to her arrest and execution.

The White Rose called on citizens to resist the Nazis and denounced the murder of Jewish people. But Sophie wasn't Jewish – one of the reasons I admire her so much. She didn't lose her life through any self-interest. She and her comrades knew what was happening was wrong, and did something about it.

So why mention Sophie today? Because the antisemitism in our universities this autumn has been horrific. Since the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel, the University Jewish Chaplaincy has documented threatening door-knocking – "we know where you live" – verbal and physical abuse, graffiti, Palestinian flags draped over Jewish students' cars ...

<https://twitter.com/halfon4harlowMP/status/1756657089861026051>

Hilary Benn MP [for Leeds Central] The abuse and threats being directed at the Jewish Chaplain and his wife and at Jewish students at Leeds University is anti-semitism. I've contacted the university to ask what they are doing to protect and support Jewish staff and students.

<https://twitter.com/hilarybennmp/status/1755995924935901458>

University Jewish Chaplaincy Statement regarding the antisemitic graffiti plastered across the Hillel House in Leeds, and the despicable torrent of horrific antisemitic hate and threats of violence being directed at our Jewish Chaplain and his family.

“We are deeply shocked and appalled by the antisemitic graffiti plastered across the Hillel House in Leeds, and by the despicable torrent of horrific antisemitic hate and threats of violence being directed at our Jewish Chaplain and his family. UJC is working with the CST, West Yorkshire Police, Government, UJS, the JLC, BoD, the authorities at Leeds University and Leeds JSoc to ensure the safety of our Jewish students and Chaplaincy staff on campus. It is devastating to find ourselves in this situation in the UK in 2024.”

<https://twitter.com/JewishChaplain/status/1755946980855967946>

Union of Jewish Students We are heartbroken and angry that after an uplifting and inspiring Challah Bake, our JSoc Hillel House was defaced with antisemitic graffiti. [plus photos]

https://twitter.com/UJS_UK/status/1755904880810606796

Leeds University – updated statement

Israel and Gaza: a message of support for all in our community

The University and LUU continue to express their support for all in our community who are being affected by the terrible ongoing situation in Israel and Gaza and its devastating impact on all in the region.

We know that many of our staff and students are finding this to be an incredibly difficult and distressing time and some are experiencing significant anguish and upset. The University and LUU are working closely to maintain the cohesion, safety, and support of our student and staff communities including meeting regularly with student societies, our chaplaincy colleagues and local, regional and national representatives to listen to concerns and identify what more we can do. ...

At this incredibly difficult time, we urge everyone to understand that staff and students may be feeling afraid, uncertain, or unsafe. We celebrate the fact that we are a diverse and inclusive community, and this is demonstrated in our compassion and providing support for one another. ...

We would also remind staff and students that antisemitism, Islamophobia, abuse, or harassment of any kind is not acceptable – on campus or on social media. In the current context we would highlight that support for [proscribed organisations](#) such as Hamas is illegal. ...

We would urge the reporting of all incidents as this is a key way in which we can understand experiences and take appropriate action. ...

There have been expressions of solidarity through vigils, and protests on or close to campus, where supporters have freely voiced their opinions and expressed their feelings. The University is committed to supporting free speech within the law, which means a shared tolerating of a wide range of views while respecting the rights of others. Our position is underpinned by our [Freedom of Expression Protocol](#).

However, we would remind everyone of the legal limits of free speech. Antisemitism, Islamophobia, abuse, or harassment of any kind is not acceptable. The University does not support any views or actions which seek to exclude or make Jewish, Muslim or any other people unwelcome on campus. We therefore remind all members of our community that they must treat each other with respect and courtesy, be mindful of the language they use and consider the impact that it can have on others, whether unintended or not. ...

The strength of our community is rooted in its diverse and global nature and we benefit

hugely from that rich diversity. This is something that we must value, cherish and protect through difficult times. We urge all in our community to stand together and support each other, a key part of our University values of compassion and inclusivity. ...

To read the full statement see

<https://forstaff.leeds.ac.uk/news/article/8271/israel-and-gaza-a-message-of-support-for-all-in-our-community>

Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis The shameful antisemitic abuse and violent threats directed at the Jewish Chaplaincy couple in Leeds, their young children and the Jewish students, are emblematic of the extremism which stains our society. These attacks are motivated by a hatred which might appear to be targeted at Jews, but which are ultimately a threat to all of our society. I call on the University of Leeds to be unequivocal in the face of such brazen intimidation and hateful extremism.

<https://twitter.com/chiefrabbi/status/1756713309062017235>

Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) @UniversityLeeds Why have you allowed Zechariah Deutsch to return to the university as a chaplain after serving in the IDF? You have a duty of care towards your students to ensure their safety at all times. How can your students feel safe with a war criminal complicit in genocide roaming your campus? [plus link to Middle East Eye post, plus video]

<https://twitter.com/MABOnline1/status/1755508715053027764>

Change.org petition – alumni of the University of Leeds

Demand the Dismissal of Zecharia Deutsch from the University of Leeds and others

<https://www.change.org/p/demand-the-dismissal-of-zecharia-deutsch-from-the-university-of-leeds-and-others>

TOP

Holocaust

House of Commons Written Answer

Genocide

Neale Hanvey (Alba) [12668] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps the Government takes to meet its legal obligation to prevent genocide.

Leo Docherty: As a party to the Genocide Convention, the UK is fully committed to the prevention and punishment of genocide as appropriate under the Convention.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12668>

The Genocide Convention, referred to above, can be read at

https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf

Holocaust Memorial Bill Committee

Petitions against the Bill: 23 January 2024

The Thorney Island Society and Residents of Westminster [Petitioners]. Submissions by Mr Doctor.

11 Ms Annamalai [Witness]: ... My name is Clare Annamalai. I have lived half a mile from Victoria Tower Gardens for the last 15 years and have been a frequent visitor to the park. I am a member of the Thorney Island Society. ...

12 I am going to focus my evidence on item (a) of our petition, namely that the Bill should be amended to require the learning centre to be built outside Victoria Tower Gardens. ...

18 This is what we are trying to safeguard: a multi-purpose green space that is used for a huge range of activities, all of which co-exist quite happily. And yes, of course, it is a local park but it is much more than that and it is used by people from far beyond Westminster.

19 In February last year, Felicity Buchan MP sent a pamphlet to her fellow MPs as context for this Bill. ... She said, 'The objective is to make sure that all current uses can continue after the memorial is constructed'. ... It seems obvious to me that Ms Buchan's statement is based more on wishful thinking than common sense. Perhaps that is why she used the word 'objective' rather than the more binding 'commitment' or 'assurance'.

20 It is also interesting to note that Ms Buchan refers to 'the memorial', even though what you can see here is the memorial and learning centre. It is quite easy to slip into that kind of shorthand because 'UK Holocaust memorial and learning centre' is quite a mouthful. But referring to the memorial obscures the fact that this is actually a collection of buildings. This is not a memorial on the scale of the cenotaph or Bomber Command memorial. It is an entrance pavilion, a large overground courtyard, an array of fins the size of a substantial building, 13 metres from top to bottom, and then behind and beneath it, an underground building.

23 Next slide, please. We have a playground of 1,185 square metres. It was thoughtfully designed in consultation with users and it is responsive to its surroundings. It is screened from the road by shrubbery and is distinct from, but not separated from, the rest of the park. ...

24 And what are we being offered instead? ... whether it is Baroness Scott's 945 square metres or our own 815 square metres, we can all agree that the playground will be smaller. ... Children and families will have to contend with coaches parked on the road outside, the presence of security guards, queues around and possibly through the playground and, potentially, a very different, more sombre atmosphere. ...

26 I would suggest to the committee that the designers and promoters of this proposal are well aware of the extent to which the memorial, but particularly the learning centre, will change the nature of the whole park, not just the area shaded on their plans and not just the infamous 7.5%. ...

33 The current proposal for Victoria Tower Gardens is inconsistent with the Department's own recommendations for park design ...

38 Mr Katkowski KC [for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities]: ... as far as the promoter is concerned, the amendment which is sought is out of scope, so there is no point in me taking time asking questions about the evidence which underpins an out-of-scope amendment.

44 Mr Peck [Witness]: ... My name is Donald Peck. I am a member of the Thorney Island Society [TTIS]. ... My chief use of VTG in the 25 years since I moved to a flat in this area has been as a grandparent, since I became one 10 years ago and a bit. ...

46 TTIS does not object to the concept of – as the Bill has it – a Holocaust memorial and a centre for learning relating to the memorial. Our position, in line with other petitioners, is that it would be entirely appropriate to locate, within VTG, a Holocaust memorial of a

size and nature in keeping with the park, but without the learning centre and the attendant buildings and infrastructure. ...

47 First of all, I would like to remind the Committee that VTG is a grade II registered park and that there should be no building construction in parks. This principle was supported at and before the public inquiry by every statutory consultee involved, bar none, including Westminster City Council, Historic England, the Royal Parks and UNESCO. UNESCO has sternly warned ... DCMS ... about the threat that the proposed development of the LC would pose to the world heritage site of the whole Palace of Westminster. ...

48 ... The promoter has ... very reluctantly, admitted in writing that there was none at all of the required prior consultation on the choice of VTG as the site for this project. No public meetings at all were conducted until the competition designs ... had been submitted and the underground option offered by David Adjaye, his version of it, had already been chosen.

49 ... The LC is projected to attract lots of visitors. The promoter has never disclosed any kind of business plan for the LC [Learning Centre] so there are few figures to illustrate the LC's numerical impact on the ground. However, in the promoter's January 2019 planning application – that's the old one, five years ago – the promoter said that peak usage would be more than three times the current peak usage of VTG. ...

50 The promoter went on to say that he expected 1 million visitors a year entering the LC ... and in addition to that, over twice that number of additional visitors who would view the outside of the LC but not enter it. That makes a total of 3 million new visitors to the park. The number of VTG park users today has been estimated at close to, but less than, 1 million and, even now, space is sometimes at a premium in the park. Clearly, if there are ... 2 million or more, new visitors attracted by the LC ... VTG will be completely swamped ...

51 As the planning inspector's key conclusion said ... 'With VTG no longer a space primarily offering quiet relaxation, local residents and users would perceive a distinct change to the form and function of VTG. The addition of security and visitor management facilities would alter its current relaxed and informal character and also the playground area ... would be separated from the wider park'. ...

53 My next issue is security ... not the perspective of terrorism and anti-terrorism ... but simply because of the major effects security will have on park users like me and my grandchildren. From the beginning ... there will be uniformed security staff ... patrolling the park 24 hours a day. ... whenever the threat level increases, this initial intrusive security around VTG will actually increase significantly further. So either intermittently or even perhaps permanently – we have no idea – there will have to be security checks, not just at the entrance pavilion as there are now for visitors to the LC, but for all park users whenever they come into VTG. ...

55 ... there are real concerns about whether the entire LC project is in fact viable. It is not just the building costs which have now, if you include contingency, risen to over £150 million, most of which is public money. It is also the running costs: £6 million a year we are told they cost, but there is a lot of flexibility around that number ... The LC will not charge for entrance and therefore will not generate any revenue of any significance. ...

56 If you, the Committee, are not prepared to recommend that the LC should not be permitted to proceed at all, we ask you to recommend an amendment that will ensure that the LC does not proceed until proper governance arrangements and a business plan have been published and approved by Parliament. On this, also we ask you to recommend that governance should at least involve clear separation of the management of the park from that of the LC, as the two have quite different interests ...

58 If the LC is built, the playground is actually going to be reduced by 370 square metres. That is by 31%, not about 15% as noticed and remarked on by the inspector, or 10% in the figures given by Baroness Scott in her 2023 parliamentary answer, or even zero reduction, as stated by David Adjaye, misleadingly, to the inquiry. ...

59 The playground would actually therefore be scaled down and also moved further into the furthest corner of VTG and located right next to the crowds of visitors entering the LC. For obvious reasons, we petition that the playground must be separated from those crowds very clearly.

60 We have a pragmatic enhancement proposal ... That would be that we remove the café entirely from the park altogether. Today, it is very little used and usually shut. So then, giving the café area back to the playground, we could help restore part, almost half, of the lost area of the playground. ...

67 Mr Doctor KC: ... since the last hearing, we wrote to the promoters proposing some amendments and a meeting. The Committee itself wrote to the petitioner asking a series of questions. Unfortunately, we did not receive that letter so we were unaware of it until yesterday. The promoter then replied to us on 31 January. We held our meeting, I think, on 31 January but no agreement was reached. The main reason for that is that the promoter takes the view that most of our suggestions and so on are matters outside the scope, as they call it, and so no area for compromise. They did, however, propose two amendments, which I will come back to in a moment. There was no agreement on them. They were not amendments as such; they were undertakings. ...

71 ... Another legal point has arisen out of the exchange between the Committee and the promoter, which I think I will need some time to respond to, which is that the Committee cannot consider any amendments to clause 1 of the Bill because, so it is said, only clause 2 was ruled to be hybrid.

72 I do not want to go into that now, just because there is a way of answering it, but just briefly, the examiners who looked at the Bill did not rule that clause 2 was hybrid; they ruled that the Bill was hybrid. They expressly said that they took one argument based on clause 2. They found that local residents had a special interest, different from that of the special interest of the public at large, and they said that, 'Given that it is only necessary for us to find one special interest to make a Bill hybrid, we do not deal with all the other submissions we have had and the other petitioners – or would-be petitioners – who have put in comments' and they left it at that. So there is no ruling, as it were, that clause 1 is not hybrid or that somehow or other, by ruling that a Bill is hybrid, you cannot make suggestions which would affect an amendment to some part of it, even the part that the examiners did not look at or did not expressly look at ...

73 The practical effect of this is actually very little because my primary suggestion is that whether you make amendments, as we suggest, to clauses 1 or 2 or add another clause, which is neither 1 or 2, it will have an effect on both clauses and that is well within your scope for the reasons I have already given you. ...

75 As you know, our primary concern is the existence of the learning centre in the park. Whether this can be excised, as I have suggested, by an amendment to said clause 1, or whether you do it by an amendment to clause 2, making the lifting of the 1900 Act relate only to a memorial and not to a learning centre, or whether you put in some other clause or whether it is done by way of an assurance, that I am not concerned with at the moment ...

76 ... the learning centre was an afterthought; it was squashed in to fit under the memorial, which itself was located in the park by a moment of genius. It was not a site chosen by the property consultants employed by the Holocaust Foundation, who had been set up to implement the Holocaust Commission's vision. It was identified by Lord Feldman and put before the commission, which simply decided that it would be suitable to locate it there, without asking the consultants to study it with the other 29 sites that were identified.

77 The promoter has admitted ... that there was no consultation with anyone before the decision to locate the memorial and the learning centre in the park was taken. ...

78 The inspector found that the structures themselves, the learning centre and the Holocaust memorial, would harm the park and the enjoyment of the park, but the public

interest in building a Holocaust memorial during the lives of some of the survivors outweighed that. Well, as we will see, all the delay has arisen as a result of the decision to put the learning centre in the park and it no longer makes any sense to say that this can all be achieved during the lives of some of the survivors. The Holocaust memorial and learning centre are intended as a destination for tourists, schoolchildren and so on. It is intended to disrupt the park, not enhance it as all the other memorials do. ...

79 According to our leading historian of Germany and the Holocaust, the learning centre, such as it is, will add nothing to existing learning and teaching already carried out by dozens of institutions and memorials in the UK. ...

80 It takes up the bulk of the space. It causes the maximum disruption of the park during building and operating for all time. It results in the mound, thus affecting even the parts it is not supposed to be in. Parts of the mound are going to be inaccessible. Parts of it will not be accessible to people who cannot climb heights. It increases the need for fencing the area off. It causes the problems in relation to the Buxton memorial. ...

81 It is going to cost the overwhelming bulk of the public money that is going to be used on this. It is going to require increased security and the ongoing costs associated with this project will mostly be spent because of the learning centre. It is going to take up the bulk of the building time. ...

82 A key point is, of course, that the 1900 Act would not even have been in play or in issue if all that had been decided was to build a suitable memorial, appropriate to this park, because if it enhances the park, it does not in any way attract the prohibition under the 1900 Act. ...

84 Now, in the alternative, on the assumption that that does not find favour with you, or you find it difficult to find a way of somehow influencing amending the Bill, or requiring the Secretary of State to give an undertaking, we have a number of alternatives, which, of course, by putting them forward, does not, I need hardly say, detract from the force of the argument that we put forward in relation to its total removal....

86 The promoter agrees, or in our view concedes, that it is within your scope to cut down the size of the land in VTG which is to be excluded from the operation of clause 2 of the Bill, so that the 1900 Act would continue to operate in that area. Effectively, what the promoter is saying, that it is within your scope of your functions to consider excluding from the operation of clause 2 92.5% of the land from both the Holocaust memorial and a learning centre but not just the learning centre from 100%.

87 ... if you agree with the promoter, then we say that you can recommend provisions which will deal with the size of this thing and the effect it will have on the rest of the park. ... It has been said that there is an area of 1,429 square metres and it was that area which the Government's representative told the House would constitute 7.5% of the park. ...

88 ... we said ... that the 1900 Act restrictions shall be lifted to a limited and defined area of such a maximum of 1,429, as will appear on a plan, which the Secretary of State should provide, such area to include all the items referred to in the answer by Baroness Scott of Bybrook on 12 April 2023 ...

89 ... So Baroness Scott told the House and we say the 1,429 will include items A, the entrance pavilion, the courtyard, the ramp, the hardstanding, service access. We leave out the new access path that we are prepared to drop, that these paths should be in the 1,429, but, for the rest, we simply quote from Baroness Scott, 'the parts of the mound which will not be accessible to the public', that also should be in the 1,429; the areas to be enclosed to ensure the security of the learning centre; the generator attached to the café – that's an extra one but it is obvious it should be included; the fins as they appear on that diagram; and the reduction in the size of the playground certainly should be investigated and should not be allowed. ...

92 ... They have offered ... that all the structures and permanent buildings will be contained in the blue plan ... proposed by the current planning application awaiting redetermination or they reserve the right to include ... 'that the 1900 Act would also not

apply in respect of any permitted planning application for any other, i.e. modified or replacement, scheme for a Holocaust or learning centre for the siting of the permanent elements’.

93 So the offer really says nothing. It says, ‘Well, for the moment we will agree that the 1900 Act will not apply to the area outside the area marked in blue but it also will not apply in respect of any further planning application we might make. So we could actually apply for a planning application in respect of the rest of the park and the 1900 Act will not then apply’. ...

94 We cannot agree to this because, if we were ever to agree to it, it would be said against us when we objected to these future plans that we had agreed to them. ...

96 ... If I can now move on to ... the Buxton memorial ... There is no question that it is not just as the inspector found, that the Buxton memorial will suffer harm. ...

97 We have suggested ... two ways of dealing with this. One is certainly to ensure that the Buxton memorial is not moved, that the Committee should provide that it is not to be moved, and, secondly, that whatever is built, including the fences, the fins and whatever else, should not be nearer than five metres. It may be that, in fact, eight metres is more appropriate but we are trying to be conciliatory ...

98 We also hope that the Committee will stress to the House and the promoters that any proposed scheme must not overshadow or detract from the Buxton memorial ...

99 Next, governance. ... it is imperative that the Select Committee require undertakings, or even an amendment, that the governance of the park and the Holocaust memorial be separated, so that the park is not thought of as a setting for the Holocaust memorial but as an independent and valuable asset in itself. ...

100 The playground ... should not be reduced in size and it should be kept separate from the crowds who will gather to move into the courtyard leading into the learning centre. ...

101 And I would add, we suggested to the promoters that one way of dealing with this would be to allow no vending in the park, which would mean the closure of the café, which would, if that were incorporated in the playground – it is right next to the playground – would at least go some way to restoring some of the land of the playground but they take the same view: that is something for planning and so we must be left to that. ...

102 And, finally ... the last item on my list is that the learning centre must be restricted to the Holocaust per se. Baroness Deech has addressed you on this. They fear that the learning centre will be used to advance controversial viewpoints and propaganda for numerous other causes and that there is no reason at all why, if public money is going to be spent on a learning centre, Parliament should not specify how the money should be spent. And one only has to think about the implications of this. The question of genocide is, of course, currently in the air. Leave aside that example of what some may and some do not consider to be a genocide. Can one imagine what would happen if some smart Alec in the Holocaust learning centre management decided to commemorate the alleged genocide by Turkey in relation to the Armenians?

103 Do not think it ends there. The United States Government hesitated for almost 40 years before it signed the Genocide Convention in 1948 because of fears it would lead to the usual lawfare contending that the United States had and was continuing to commit genocide in relation to its black population and its American Indian population. ...

104 This is an area which would just completely destroy the whole purpose of this Holocaust memorial, which is stated in the Act to be a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. ...

110 The Chair (John Stevenson, Conservative): ... Would you ... agree that many of the comments that have been made by petitioners have been on planning issues and that, as a general observation, this Committee is not meant to have a remit relating to planning issues?

111 Mr Doctor KC: ... just because something could be the subject of a planning application, does not mean that it is not within the remit or scope of the Committee because

the Committee is not sitting as a planning inspector or planning authority. It is sitting to hear objections. And just because something could also be dealt with somewhere else does not, as it were, detract from the Committee's scope and, we would say, duty to consider these objections. ...

115 ... of course, there are some items which obviously are trivia and detail. These can be dealt with by a planning committee, and you could legitimately take the view, 'We cannot consider every item of that sort ... But I would hope that the arguments, the submissions and the evidence you have heard would not lead you to the conclusion that everything can be dealt with in planning. Effectively, you are saying, 'Well, none of this will have any effect because all of it, no matter how damaging it is, will be outweighed by the advantage of the national interest of building a Holocaust memorial and learning centre'.

116 ... We are not asking you to deal with, in so far as there was a reference to how the planning decision ought to be made, or the nature of the planning decision. We accept that that is not within your remit, that you cannot determine how it is going to be made and whether it consists of a full inquiry, a call-in or whatever. ...

117 I also point out that I have said nothing about security. We do not add anything to what Lord Carlile has said and we just associate ourselves with what he said. ...

125 Mr Katkowski KC: ... We are here for one reason, and one reason only, and that is because the High Court ruled that section 8, and two particular parts of it, of the 1900 Act, stands in the way of building, not any old thing in the gardens, but the proposed Holocaust memorial and learning centre in Victoria Tower Gardens.

126 The fundamental purpose of the Bill, its underlying principle and the public policy it expresses, is to remove the statutory obstruction of section 8. ... 'The Government intends to disapply the relevant sections of the 1900 Act so that they do not constitute an obstacle to construction and operation of the Holocaust memorial and learning centre'. It could not be clearer.

127 That is why I formulated my acid test ... namely if any amendment sought by the petitioners would result in section 8 in any way still standing in the way of building the proposed Holocaust memorial and learning centre in Victoria Tower Gardens, then you know at once that the amendment is out of scope for this Select Committee, as it goes against the very purpose and principle and public policy of the Bill. And that is because at the Hybrid Bill Select Committee stage in parliamentary proceedings, in contrast to other stages of a Bill's progress through Parliament, the purpose, principle and public policy of the Bill are not up for grabs.

128 The instruction is clear and any reading of it which would lead to a different outcome to the one I have set out would be to misread it in a fallacious manner. ...

129 ... Many – I would say nearly all – of the various petitioners' various proposals for amendments to the Bill would stymie the promoter's ability to obtain planning permission for the proposed Holocaust memorial and learning centre. ...

130 The arguments put forward to support such amendments are all planning arguments. They are the ones that have already been considered through the planning process to date, and doubtless they will be raised again in the planning process yet to come. ...

132 It is also important to bear in mind that because we, the promoter, have stuck rigidly to the proper scope of this Hybrid Bill Select Committee's remit, we have very deliberately not replayed our side of the planning narrative, of the case for the Holocaust memorial and learning centre in Victoria Tower Gardens. The result of the petitioners straying far and wide outside scope is that you have heard only one side of that narrative. ...

133 Now, I do wish to say a few words, sir, with regards to the Holocaust survivors you have heard. Having heard them, who could fail to be moved, and who could fail to question, 'Why is the Government so determined that the Holocaust memorial and learning centre should be built in Victoria Tower Gardens, why?' One has to pause and

keep in mind that at the planning inquiry testimony was heard from several Holocaust survivors, some against and some in favour. Those who spoke in favour gave very powerful testimony too, in their case explaining why, as far as they were concerned, the Holocaust memorial and learning centre is the right thing to do, and Victoria Tower Gardens is the right place to do it.

134 All of the survivors' testimony ... is transcribed word for word in the inspector's report ...

136 ... Our case is that an amendment regarding territorial issues, or indeed timing issues – temporal issues – have not been shown to be necessary for the following reasons. All of this will be dealt with via the planning process. We will not be able to do anything in Victoria Tower Gardens, which is territorially beyond our planning permission, assuming we get one. In terms of time, the planning permission will control when we have to start by, and the planning system has the power to force us to complete building the structure within a certain period of time if we drag our feet. All of that is controlled via planning.

137 Also, the construction of the Holocaust memorial and learning centre would be tightly controlled under a construction management plan which would be secured, just as it was last time round, by any planning permission we obtain. ...

138 ... I just want to add that if, in any way, the Committee is at all attracted by restricting the lifting of the 1900 Act in some territorial way, I would put my plea in, which I have made many times at this Committee: that has to be done, with great respect, by reference to a plan, and the plan has to show the full extent of the project which the promoter is proposing. Please, please, do not consider doing it by reference to any square meterage, because each and every square meterage which is put forward is controversial. ...

143 the Chair: ... You have mentioned temporal and territorial issues on several occasions. You seem to have implied that in principle they are in scope. ...

146 Mr Katkowski KC: ... We are seeking to remove the restrictions of section 8 from the gardens. It is patently in scope to ask oneself, 'Do you need to remove the restriction across the entirety of the gardens?' That is the territorial point. And it is patently in scope to ask yourself the question, 'Well, if there is to be a removal of these restrictions, a lifting of them, should that be limited in some way in time terms?' ...

147 The Chair: On territorial then, are you saying that, if there was a suitable plan identifying the area that 'the' planning permission would be within, you would accept that?

148 Mr Katkowski KC: ... I was about to go on to say that the issue of in scope and out of scope is not to be morphed into the different question of whether, even if something is in scope in principle, is it necessary to do it? And my answer to, 'Is it necessary to do it?', is, 'No, it is not', because planning will actually control all of this. In principle, it is in scope. The idea, the notion, if you are to lift section 8, shouldn't you only lift section 8 so that it fits with the thing that needs section 8 to be lifted? In principle, that is in scope, but one doesn't really have to worry oneself about it, with great respect, because we are not going to be able to do anything in these gardens beyond the extent of the planning permission, if we get one. ...

151 The Chair: If it was lifted for the whole area, a subsequent different planning application could come along and do something entirely different.

152 Mr Katkowski KC: Well, obviously, the restriction would only be lifted so as not to stand in the way of building a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, and a centre for learning relating to that memorial. So obviously it would only ever be a Holocaust memorial and learning centre.

153 The Chair: I understand that the petitioners are asking for a limitation, or a territorial limitation, on the basis of 'the' planning permission that you are promoting. My question to you is, if you are promoting 'the' planning permission, why would you not accept their proposal?

154 Mr Katkowski KC: ... If there is to be a territorial restriction – we would say an assurance or, failing that, an undertaking is perfectly good enough to do it – but if there is to be a territorial restriction, it has to do two things, with great respect. Number one, it has to entirely respect the project which we are taking through the planning system currently. That is the point about the plan, and that is the plan that the Committee has, and that plan literally draws a line around every part of the project that we are putting forward. That is the first thing it has to do. Otherwise, this Bill would be pointless.

155 The second thing we say it should do is to deal with this eventuality: what if we don't get planning permission for that project? ... I cannot sit here and say we are definitely going to win the second time round. I sincerely hope to heavens we do but I cannot say that we will. Therefore, there has to be some catering for the eventuality that we do not get permission for this particular Holocaust memorial and learning centre. In those circumstances, obviously we would consider the decision letter. If the decision letter said, 'Well the problem is' – I do not know – 'the memorial is too big', then obviously we would have to consider a project memorialising the Holocaust in a different way.

156 We have to, with great respect, have the ability to do something else and not have to go through all of this all over again because we will be here in 20 years' time.

159 The Chair: ... do you think it was a mistake not to have had an initial consultation on location prior to the planning application? ...

162 Mr Katkowski KC: ... I suspect the Secretary of State might say, 'If we could have our time again, heavens knows what we might have done'. ...

164 Angela Richardson (Conservative): ... You asked us not to consider particular square footages. If the Committee was minded to put an amendment down, what sort of measurements should we use?

165 Mr Katkowski KC: Do not use any measurements at all; just refer to a plan. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14247/html/>

Baroness Scott's answer, referred to in para 88 above, can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-03-28/hl6911>

The Inspector's Report, referred to above, can be read from p26 onwards at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6102679e8fa8f50428d10083/Combined_DL_IR_R_to_C_Victoria_Tower_Gardens.pdf

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Lord (Tariq)Ahmad of Wimbledon Great to meet @EricPickles and the UK delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance today before the UK assumes the presidency of @TheIHRA in March. We discussed plans for the UK's presidency and the delegation's work on Holocaust remembrance and education. [plus photo]

<https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1755685319775490133>

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Israel

See also Commons statement and Q&A “Protest Measures”, Commons written answer 12322 “Metropolitan Police; Israel”, and “University Jewish Chaplaincy – Leeds University” that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid and Children

col 145WH **Apsana Begum (Labour):** ... Before the war began, Gaza's streets were alive with the sound of children. Roughly half the population are under 18, but unlike children in the UK, Gaza's children have had to endure so much in their short lives. A 15-year-old will have lived through five wars, including the current conflict. Many have been displaced several times. Even so, they have never experienced destruction and death like this.

Since October, it has been clear that children have been affected by the conflict on an unprecedented and unparalleled scale. We know that the Hamas attacks involved the killing of Israeli children, and that an estimated 40 Israeli children were taken captive in Gaza. Nevertheless, more than 11,500 children have since been killed in Gaza by Israeli airstrikes and ground operations. The phrase "war on children" is echoing across the international community. Lost in the numbers are the faces, the names, the lives and the moments of joy that those children brought ... More than 24,000 children have lost one or both parents.

Gaza's hospitals have treated so many wounded children arriving alone for treatment after Israeli airstrikes that, chillingly, medical workers have coined a new abbreviation — WCNSF: "wounded child, no surviving family". ... will the Minister clarify whether the Government have considered allowing children into the UK for their safety and wellbeing during this conflict, as per the petition which has been signed by over 17,000 people? ...

col 146WH The healthcare system in Gaza is in crisis due to major shortages of doctors and nurses, the lack of medical supplies and the destruction of hospitals. Small children caught up in explosions are particularly vulnerable to major life-changing injuries, and more than 1,000 children have had one or both legs amputated. According to the World Health Organisation, many of these operations on children were done without anaesthetic. ... Many children are accessing well below the recommended water requirements for survival, and those under five are at high risk of severe malnutrition and preventable death due to famine. ... It brings to mind Israel's Minister of Defence's announcement on 9 October: "We are putting a complete siege on Gaza...No electricity, no food, no water, no gas—it's all closed."

Can the Minister update us on the Government's understanding of the legality of what many are arguing is the collective punishment of civilians and how this has affected children? ...

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour): The horrors of recent months have literally been intolerable. Israel continues to use devastating tactics that have seen far too many innocent civilians—including children—killed, with unacceptable blocks on essential humanitarian aid. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need the fighting in Gaza to stop immediately, with a humanitarian truce now, and not just a temporary ceasefire but a lasting, sustainable ceasefire that leads to a viable two-state solution?

Apsana Begum: I agree with my hon. Friend that without an immediate and permanent ceasefire, it is hard to imagine how we can turn around this situation and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the places where it is most needed.

The chief executive officer of Save the Children also said: "Children are enduring and witnessing horrors, while the world looks on." ...

Why is humanitarian aid not getting to children who need it? What are the blocks on humanitarian aid? ...

col 147WH Although around 500 trucks per day are needed to meet basic needs, most days fewer than 200 actually make it inside, and on one day this month it was reported that only 30 crossed into Gaza. Human Rights Watch argues that the blocking of humanitarian assistance amounts to collective punishment of the civilian population and poses further grave risks to children. ...

Then there is the question of funding itself. The United Nations Children's Fund has

requested \$168.3 million to support its response in the Occupied Palestinian Territories for 2024. On 17 January, it said there was a funding gap of \$55.5 million. Shortly after the International Court of Justice's plausible genocide ruling, the UK stopped funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the largest UN agency operating in Gaza, due to allegations from Israel that 12 of the agency's more than 13,000 staff were involved in the 7 October attacks. ...

Amnesty International has said that while allegations against individuals must be independently investigated, cutting lifesaving assistance to millions could amount to collective punishment in and of itself. ...

What is the latest evidence the Government have seen regarding the allegations, and how are they being investigated further? What assessment have the Government made of the consequences of their decision for the children in Gaza? I know that many of my constituents are appalled that it appears the UK is continuing to send weapons to potentially kill children while withdrawing funding that saves children's lives. ...

All children should be cherished, Israeli and Palestinian. We know that children in Gaza should not be slaughtered, but they continue to be by Israeli forces in unprecedented numbers. ...

col 148WH Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): ... Obviously what happened on 7 October was appalling by any stretch of the imagination, and the continued hostage-holding of a number of children obviously has to be brought to an end as quickly as it possibly can. But as the Secretary-General of the United Nations pointed out at the time, this did not all come from nowhere; it comes from the siege of Gaza, which has gone on for a very long time, and also, of course, the occupation of the west bank. ... Every time I have been to Gaza, I always felt, "It can't get any worse." Then you go back there and it is even worse. ...

The International Court of Justice hearing was a seminal moment in many ways. ... There was a certain synergy about South Africa, a country that had come out of apartheid, presenting a case, essentially on behalf of the Palestinian people, that the behaviour of the Israel Defence Forces in Gaza was tantamount to acts of genocide against the Palestinian people. ...

There are now more than 1 million people around the Rafah crossing. It is a small town. It is grotesquely overcrowded and has a shortage of absolutely everything. One can cite many images, but I saw one the other day of two children—they looked five or six—walking down the road together, hand in hand. They were a boy and a girl. The girl was holding a bottle with a small amount of water in it, and they were aimlessly wandering about. When they saw anyone, they said, "Do you know where we can get food?" The world should not treat children that way, particularly when a few kilometres away there is plenty of food, medicine and clean water deliberately being denied to those people. ...

col 149WH The UK Government's decision to withhold further funding to UNRWA until the inquiries have taken place is beyond regrettable. ...

The case against the people who are alleged to have taken part in the 7 October event has not yet been backed up with evidence, not yet been presented and not yet been concluded. In any event, if there is a case against individuals who were employed by UNRWA, let us bring it forward, bring it into the open and have the hearing. But to deny the whole organisation funding and to deny the staff of UNRWA continued employment all across the piece—in the refugee camps and the west bank as well as in Gaza—seems to me to be totally wrong and unfair. ...

It is an underfunded organisation, anyway. It performs superhuman tasks just to provide food, medicine and education for Palestinian people. ...

The question of food supply to Gaza is obviously critical. The population is very young and possibly half of the 27,000 recorded deaths in Gaza will be of young people or children. The number who are still under the rubble is enormous. There is very limited access for outside help to get in. The numbers of medical staff who have been killed are huge, as are the numbers of journalists who could report on the situation—80 journalists have already

lost their lives in Gaza. This is a horror show on live TV all over the world.

The idea that, somehow or other, this country can adopt a policy of not funding the one agency that can deliver help, food, aid and medicine to the children of Gaza I find to be completely unconscionable.

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: ... Does my right hon. Friend agree that with so many displaced, desperate and hungry people and with potential aid cuts and continuing conflict, there is a real danger of a deadly famine engulfing Gaza as well?

Jeremy Corbyn: ... Frankly, the famine is already there. The number of people dying from wholly preventable conditions in the southern part of the Gaza strip is already greater than the number who have been killed by the daily bombardment there. ...

col 150WH I talked to a doctor who I met in Leeds two weeks ago ... He told me that he had done something that he had hoped he would never, ever have to do in his life: perform an amputation on somebody without anaesthetic — on a child. ... He told me of cases where he has performed a successful operation, in the sense that the operation was carried out, but the patient has then died of a heart attack because of the pain inflicted on them. ...

Currently, in the southern end of the Gaza strip there are reported to be 135,000 cases of diarrhoea ... That is 13.5% of the people around Rafah and possibly even more than that. Diarrhoea is a killer, particularly of children, because it means that they cannot feed food down or keep their body hydrated; it is an absolute killer.

In addition, no child has been to school anywhere in the Gaza strip since November—so that is three months of education already lost. Even if the bombardment and fighting stopped tomorrow, there is no school to be reopened ...

Surely, therefore, it is incumbent on all of us to do everything we can to bring about a ceasefire in Gaza and save the lives of children. ...

The most important role that any of us anywhere else in the world can play is absolutely to demand peace in the region and a solution to this crisis, starting with an immediate and permanent ceasefire to stop the killing of so many children in Gaza. ...

col 151WH Let us give all the aid we can to UNRWA now and give all the support we can now to the people of Gaza—particularly the children, so that they may grow up to at least live without the threat of being bombed day in and day out. But above all, get off the fence and get on the side of supporting a ceasefire now to save life in Gaza ...

Rachel Hopkins (Labour): ... The horrors of recent months in Israel and Gaza have been intolerable, and there has been no let-up in the suffering in Gaza and no end to the cruel treatment of hostages. Millions of people are displaced, desperate and hungry. ...

Israel continues to use devastating tactics that have seen far too many innocent civilians and children killed. There have been unacceptable blocks on essential aid, with nowhere being safe for civilians. It is a humanitarian catastrophe, and now there are warnings of a deadly famine. Women, children and newborn babies bear the brunt of the violence in Gaza. ...

... without an immediate and permanent ceasefire, the numbers dying of hunger, malnutrition, disease and unmet medical needs could far exceed those that have already been caused by the bombardment. ... we will see children dying from preventable diseases and lack of simple medicines such as insulin for diabetes. ...

col 152WH Alongside the horrific physical impacts, Oxfam has reported that about 1 million children are in need of mental and psychosocial support. The deep trauma of Palestinian children will stay with them for the rest of their lives. ...

It has been reported that all children under five are at high risk of severe malnutrition, as that risk of famine conditions continues to increase. ...

Like others, I have heard first hand from doctors who have, sadly, had to do medical procedures in Gaza without anaesthetic, including the amputation of children's arms and legs, because there is a critical shortage of drugs and medical supplies. We also hear

about babies being born on the streets, and the umbilical cords being cut with whatever sharp object is to hand.

The constant, indiscriminate bombing, the debris, the electricity blackouts and the lack of fuel make it extremely dangerous to distribute any aid and make many parts of the Gaza strip inaccessible. ... to meet the need for humanitarian aid, an estimated 800 trucks of aid would have to enter Gaza daily; since 7 October, however, the highest daily average has been two trucks. ...

Unfettered access for humanitarian aid is needed at scale to meet the desperate need of the children in Gaza. The UN Relief and Works Agency is the largest agency operating in Gaza: 80% of aid to the Gaza strip is delivered through it. ...

Channel 4 has reported on the document in which Israeli officials alleged that a dozen UNRWA employees were involved in the 7 October attack, led by Hamas. Channel 4 reported that the document “provides no evidence to support its explosive new claim that UNRWA staff were involved”. ...

If this key UN agency is not funded, how do they intend to fill the gap for humanitarian aid in Gaza? ...

col 153WH **Andy Slaughter (Labour):** ... Everyone around the world was horrified by what happened on 7 October, but everyone—or almost everyone—has watched with increasing horror the effect in Gaza over the ensuing months. ...

My starting point for dealing with what is different between Gaza and some other conflicts is that there was a long period before the current hostilities—since at least 2007—when Gaza was under siege, so these depredations are happening not to a robust society, but to one that has already been depleted in many ways. ...

What impresses me most about Gaza, as others have mentioned, is the resilience of its people, despite the utter squalor of life, caused by occupation and the control of land, sea and air borders for a long period, such that most are reliant on aid, cannot leave the country, except in very few cases, and have been living almost as stateless citizens, in limbo, for nearly a generation now. Gaza has a highly educated population, and it has become clear during the current conflict, as we have seen hospitals and other civilian infrastructure destroyed, that it was there. Indeed, many doctors and other specialists have gone out from this country to assist medics and others in Gaza in running the health service as best they can, despite the deprivation of supplies. At the same time as being horrified by the conditions that people had to live in, one could not help but admire the fact that life continued as normally as it could under the circumstances. Not only did a siege go on, but there were four or five separate land or air assaults by Israel on Gaza between 2008 and the current conflict. Life had been worn down, and people had been worn down, not just physically but mentally, over that period.

col 154WH The other aspect of Gaza that is perhaps unique is that there is nowhere to flee to. There is no route out of Gaza. Gazans do not want to leave Gaza. They do not want to be forced into Sinai or elsewhere, or into any of the mad schemes that extreme members of the Israeli Government have come out with. Undoubtedly, there are those who would like to be able to cross the border, perhaps because they are wounded or injured, they are foreign nationals or have family abroad, or they simply cannot stand what is happening, but they are simply unable to. That adds another dimension of horror to the situation. ... we see that whole districts and neighbourhoods, and the majority of residences, have been damaged or destroyed in what would be an extraordinary level of bombardment in any war but is particularly so in such a narrow and small piece of land. ... The fact that 85% of the population have been displaced is extraordinary. Some 27,000 people have been killed, over 11,000 of them children, and we have heard about the half a million people who are in the most severe level of food crisis. A very substantial proportion of people around the world who are in that highest level of crisis are now living in Gaza, which previously had a first-world economy, in many ways, and first-world education and skills. ...

Whatever the Government say about aid shipments that they have authorised, it is clear that aid is not getting into Gaza in anything like the amount that is needed. UNRWA is not the only aid agency; there are many others, such as Islamic Relief and Medical Aid for Palestinians, whose local staff are working on the ground under appalling conditions. Those charities do a very good job, but they do not do what UNRWA has done since 1949 and provide whole-infrastructure support for a population that, through no fault of its own, is unable to supply it itself. ...

Let us not disguise the fact that what some UNRWA staff—a very small number—have been accused of has to be investigated. Those staff, quite rightly, are out of a job while that is being investigated, and if it can be proven that they played any part in the 7 October events, they must be punished with the full severity of the law. But the idea that the whole organisation should be effectively brought to a halt by being defunded seems extraordinary. ...

col 155WH It is so obvious—and I think this is the Government's position—that aid cannot be got into Gaza in any meaningful way without the cessation of hostilities. We may differ on what that cessation should involve and on the terminology, but it would be good to hear from the Minister that the Government wish to see an end to the hostilities between Gaza and Israel until such time as the famine and disease that are running rife are ended, and the wounded and others who are suffering in Gaza have received proper medical attention, food and other supplies. ...

The way that Ukraine is reported in the UK differs from the reporting of Gaza. There is rightly a high degree of access to what is happening in Ukraine, so we get a good picture of the atrocities visited on the Ukrainian people by Putin and his forces. Despite the brave efforts of many journalists, many of whom have been killed, we do not get a full picture of what is happening in Gaza. ... The suppression of information coming out of Gaza is being used to disguise the full horror of what is happening there. ...

Despite that, it is clear from every polling exercise and from the correspondence that every MP receives ... that the public in this country are deeply concerned about what is happening and want to see their Government take action to stop the killing, particularly of children, and the destruction of a whole civilisation. There is clearly a targeting of civil society bodies, records, courthouses, Parliaments and business districts, which can have no military significance whatever, in a way that punishes and degrades the entirety of the Gaza strip. ...

col 156WH **John McNally (SNP):** ... the situation in Gaza is nothing short of a humanitarian catastrophe. Children, of course, are bearing the brunt of the crisis, facing unimaginable horrors every single day. That those children—and adults—are having to go through this is not the mark of a civilised world. ...

Jeremy Corbyn: Surely the issue now is that as the weather gets warmer, without any sewage facilities or clean water, the next thing will be cholera.

John McNally: ... Disease is only going to worsen over the next period. ... After the war is finished, we will still have to deal with the situation that is left, so the quicker we intervene, the better.

There are reports of deliberate strikes on civilian safe zones and hospitals—deeply disturbing accounts have been heard. Let us be clear: aid efforts, while crucial, are no substitute for a ceasefire. ... The ongoing suffering of children in Gaza is heartbreaking. It is unthinkable in this day and age that it is going on. More than 1,000 children have had their limbs amputated—hundreds without anaesthetics, proper medical care, running water, electricity, food or shelter. ... The blockade imposed by Israel only exacerbates the situation, leaving more children vulnerable to infections and untreated injuries.

Furthermore, education has come to a total standstill in Gaza, with thousands of children deprived of their right to learn. The UNRWA schools—a lifeline for many—have closed their doors, robbing children of their future ... Entire families have been wiped out, leaving

children orphaned and traumatised through no fault of theirs. ...

It is unconscionable that the UK Government should continue to support Israel's actions under the guise of self-defence. ... It is downright wrong. ...

col 157WH We cannot stand by idly while innocent children suffer. The international community cannot afford to remain silent in the face of such atrocities. The UK Government, among others, must heed the calls for a ceasefire, and prioritise humanitarian aid to alleviate the suffering of Gaza's most vulnerable inhabitants. Resuming funding for UNRWA is not just a matter of humanitarian obligation, but a moral imperative. We must also recognise the psychological toll of war on children. The trauma they endure leaves scars that may never heal. ...

Wayne David (Labour): ... it is important that we do not become desensitised to the appalling suffering taking place in Gaza. ...

It is important to recognise that the people who have been killed and severely injured are primarily not terrorists or their supporters. The people of Gaza ... are highly educated, resilient and wish to live in peace. ...

col 158WH We are all acutely aware that the only way to resolve this appalling humanitarian crisis is through a sustainable ceasefire. This will allow the return of all hostages and an immediate concerted international effort to take into Gaza the greatest possible amount of humanitarian aid: food, water, fuel and medical supplies. ...

As we all know, serious allegations have been made against 12 UNRWA employees. The Government must ensure that they have robust processes in place regarding the use of UK aid. However, it would be wrong if anything were to stand in the way of crucial aid reaching Gaza in the midst of this terrible crisis. ...

There are, of course, other aid agencies working in Gaza. ... However, UNRWA's role is absolutely central to the humanitarian effort in Gaza and across the entire region. ... Their work is essential, especially when we remember the appalling fact that more people are dying from hunger and thirst in Gaza than from bombs and bullets. Let me be clear: if UNRWA's vital work is disrupted, the consequences for the people of Gaza will be further death and suffering. ...

col 159WH **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty):** ... Four months have now passed since Israel suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas, who still hold more than 130 hostages. Meanwhile, as has movingly been laid out this afternoon, Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis inside Gaza. Children in particular are bearing the worst consequences of the conflict, as we have heard. We want to see an end to the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible. An immediate pause is now necessary to get aid in and hostages out, and the UK is engaged in sustained efforts to achieve that and to build towards a lasting solution. ...

The number of people killed in Gaza has reportedly surpassed 27,000, and more than 67,000 have been injured, according to the Hamas-run Ministry of Health in Gaza. As we have heard, the vast majority are women and children. Many people, including children, are still missing, presumed dead and buried under the rubble.

Of the 1.7 million people who have been displaced, more than half are children. Tens of thousands of those children have been orphaned or separated from their family. Hunger and disease are spreading rapidly, which has been made worse by overcrowded shelters. There are reportedly more than 223,000 cases of acute respiratory infection, to which children are particularly vulnerable, and over 158,000 cases of diarrhoea, more than 50% of which are in children under the age of five, as colleagues have referred to. Many of these children are likely to be malnourished, making the effects of disease more severe. ... Only 13 of 36 hospitals are even partially functional, and even those are without enough specialised medical staff to manage the scale of the crisis. ...

We are focused on practical solutions to get more aid into Gaza. ... we have trebled our

aid this year for the Occupied Palestinian Territories to £87 million, of which £60 million is for Gaza specifically. We continue to call for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out.

col 160WH **Jeremy Corbyn:** I understand the figure that the Minister has just given, and I understand that a third is allocated for Gaza, but I would be grateful if he let us know exactly how that aid will be administered. Who will actually deliver it? ...

Leo Docherty: ... Colleagues will know that we are a long-standing donor [to UNRWA]. The £35 million that we have given this year is for this financial year and will last until March. But, of course, we are appalled by the allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attack. That is why we are pausing, and that is why a pause has been announced of any future funding, while we review these very concerning allegations. ... In addition to the UK, 16 countries have paused funding temporarily. The pause will be in place until we are satisfied that we have been able properly to review the allegations. A future funding decision will be taken after that point ...

Apsana Begum: ... Belgium, Spain, Norway and Ireland—while calling for, and endorsing the need for, a swift and serious investigation into the allegations—have maintained their funding. ...

Leo Docherty: ... Up until the point at which we are satisfied, the pause will remain in place ...

In terms of our calls for increased border crossings and access, children need additional food and shelter and the health support that we are providing through our partnerships with all the UN agencies, NGOs and Red Crescent societies. From the £60 million that I mentioned, we have provided specific, targeted support for children through our £5.75 million contribution to UNICEF. ...

col 161WH We are also a founding member of and a key donor to Education Cannot Wait, the global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. The fund is supporting several education interventions in Gaza. However, its ability to reach children who so desperately need help is, of course, restricted by the very grave security situation. ...

Apsana Begum: ... agencies such as Oxfam have reported to me that they are experiencing delays in aid actually getting through, because of the excessive checks at the crossings. Some trucks have been checked up to eight times at the Kerem Shalom crossing.

The agencies have also raised with me a lack of clarity about which items are able to pass through. The Minister may be aware of Israel's dual-use policy, which strictly controls which items may or may not enter Gaza. For example, people are being told that they are not allowed through with olives with stones; only pitted olives are allowed. ...

Leo Docherty: ... We have made these specific points to our Israeli counterparts. We believe that there are 10 steps that they should be taking to increase the flow of aid. Primarily, of course, we need a humanitarian pause ... We need to ensure effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys, humanitarian operations and IDP returns and facilitate access. We need to ensure that the UN has the people, the vehicles, the equipment and the fuel to distribute aid safely across Gaza once it is inside Gaza. That includes the issuing of visas.

We need to extend the opening hours and the capacity of the Nitzana screening facility and Kerem Shalom checkpoint so that more trucks, aid and fuel can enter Gaza. It needs to be open seven days a week, not just five. We need to remove restrictions in order to ensure greater consistency on the goods allowed in ... We need unencumbered access to aid coming in from Jordan. The Israelis need to open Ashdod port as a route for aid to reach Gaza. The Israelis need to open the Erez crossing to allow direct access to north Gaza. And, of course, there needs to be a restitution of water, fuel and electricity connections. ...

We are clear that Israel must take steps, working with other partners including the UN and

Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid, including by allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses, opening more routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity. Above all, the best way to address the humanitarian situation is by bringing an end to the fighting as soon as possible ...

col 162WH The Foreign Secretary was in the region last week to urge de-escalation and build towards a sustainable and permanent ceasefire without a return to the fighting. We have identified five steps to allow that to happen—first, the release of all Israeli hostages; secondly, the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the west bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; thirdly, removing Hamas’s capacity to launch attacks against Israel; fourthly, Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; and fifthly, a political horizon that provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution. ...

Andy Slaughter: I doubt that there is anybody here who does not fully agree with those five points, beginning with the release of the hostages; it is indefensible that they should continue to be held. Realistically, however, given the nature of the Netanyahu Government, does the Minister expect those things, including looking forward to a new peace process, to happen before there is a sustained ceasefire?

Leo Docherty: ... it is clear that children are the worst-hit by this conflict. Even though too much of the humanitarian relief that children need is not getting into or across Gaza, UK aid is saving children’s lives and we are doing everything we can to get more of it into Gaza. We are working hard to generate momentum towards a permanent peace, as difficult as it may seem. That is the only way we can give the children and the people of Gaza hope for the future and a better life.

Apsana Begum: ... all children, Israeli and Palestinian, should be cherished. We need aid to be made available and distributed so that children in Gaza get the food, health-care, shelter and water that they so desperately need. We need clarity about the situation of any remaining Israeli children who are held captive, and we need all hostages to be released. ... only an immediate and permanent ceasefire can end the suffering of children affected by all these decisions. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-08/debates/8B805D09-6994-4CA9-AF93-5638E6F0E4EE/GazaHumanitarianAidAndChildren>

The petition referred to above by Apsana Begum can be read at

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/649371>

Information about the International Court of Justice case referred to above can be read at

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

House of Commons Oral Answer

Business of the House

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): It is both intolerable and heartbreaking that hostages remain in captivity in Gaza after more than 100 days. Who knows what horrors are being inflicted on them as we sit here today? Can a Minister come to the House to make an urgent statement on what the Government are doing to get the hostages home?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for what she has just said and for her ongoing work to keep our eyes focused on those individuals. Yesterday marked four months that they have been in captivity.

This week, I met Annabel, who is helping the Sharabi family, who lost multiple members of their family in the 7 October attack. Very sadly, the family recently confirmed that another relative, Yossi, who was taken hostage, has been murdered. Yossi was described as a pillar of their family; he was also a football fan, and a

supporter of Manchester United. The family are hoping that Eli Sharabi, who was also taken hostage, will be returned to them, and that eventually Yossi's body will be returned to them so that they can bury him. Sadly, Eli's ordeal will not end there, as his wife and two daughters were among those murdered in the attack, which I do not think he will know yet.

I thank all those working to bring the hostages home, and all Members working to keep the spotlight on these individuals and to resolve the tragedy continuing to unfold in Gaza. I will ensure that the Foreign Office has heard what my right hon. Friend has said today and that this House is kept informed.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-08/debates/DF967E8A-6CD4-4447-80EC-A4A5DFFF9FFE/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-9C8C7AB1-5394-4552-9748-69DE6A8F2D2B>

House of Lords Debate

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

col 1794 **Baroness Hussein-Ece (Liberal Democrat):** ... The scale of the Hamas attack and the number of killings in a single day were truly shocking. There has been global condemnation of and revulsion at the events of 7 October, when more than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals in Israel were killed. An estimated 240 people were taken prisoner. To date, at least 105 of those hostages have been released by Hamas during a six-day ceasefire.

Since that day, Israel has killed at least 20 times that number and more than 200 times as many children. The latest figures show that Israeli attacks have killed approximately 27,500 Gazans in 17 weeks. That is 15 times the rate of killing of civilians in Ukraine over 18 months.

The UN says that, since the start of the war, about 100,000 people in Gaza have been killed, injured or are missing as Israel continues to press what has become one of the most destructive military campaigns in modern history. Some 70% of those killed have been women and children. Although Israel says it avoids civilian casualties, 12,000 children have been killed—that is 136 children killed per day. Nearly 85% of the total population of Gaza have been forced to leave their homes. Many of these people have been forced to move to seek new shelter several times. Exhausted men, women and children have walked for many miles past dead bodies lying in the street. Shocking photos of starving dogs and cats scavenging dead bodies have gone around the world. Since 7 October, more than 10 children per day on average have lost one or more of their limbs, according to Save The Children, and more than 1,000 children have had one or both legs amputated. Many of these operations on children were done without anaesthetic.

The healthcare system is crippled, there are severe shortages of doctors and nurses and there is a blockade on vital medical supplies such as anaesthesia and antibiotics. The healthcare infrastructure has been all but destroyed. Almost all the hospitals in northern Gaza have been shelled, besieged or occupied by Israeli forces, who are also cutting off supplies of fuel, water, electricity and food. The UN's assessment is that one-quarter of the total population is suffering catastrophic famine ...

Eighty per cent of people worldwide currently in that category are from Gaza. This is a man-made famine. The Israeli Government are using the starvation of civilians as a weapon of war, which is a war crime ... The naval blockade could easily be lifted to allow aid to be shipped in. Hundreds of trucks of aid and food wait in Egypt but are prevented from entering while people nearby are starving. ...

col 1795 Yesterday, we saw reports and footage of snipers positioned outside Nasser Hospital, which thousands of starving and thirsty people sheltering in a nearby school are trying to reach to get water. A young woman was shot dead yesterday trying to get water.

These are truly sadistic crimes. Not one person can ever justify them, and they are nothing to do with eliminating Hamas.

Israel, recognised as the occupying power, has a legal obligation to provide for the well-being of those under its occupation. Some have disputed the State of Israel's occupation prior to 7 October, but nowhere could be more occupied than Gaza right now. ... Will the UK Government increase pressure on Israel to comply with international humanitarian law in terms of the provision of humanitarian assistance and the conduct of hostilities? Will they publicly support the work of the International Criminal Court across all situations under its jurisdiction, including the ongoing investigation into serious crimes committed by all parties in and from Palestine?

On the allegations around UNRWA, have the UK Government been given Israel's dossier of allegations? Have the Government requested what evidence Israel has, as opposed to allegations? Will the Government reverse their decision to temporarily pause funding to UNRWA and state clearly that they will continue to fund the agency as it investigates the serious allegations brought by the Israeli Government? ...

The noble Lord, Lord Cameron, was quoted as saying: "We are trying to separate the Palestinian people from the terrorists that have been running their government in Gaza and the way to do that is to say there is a better" way if they choose it. He has also stated his intent on recognising a Palestinian state. I agree, as many do. There is clearly no military solution ...

Mr Netanyahu has reportedly just rejected a ceasefire deal that would have seen the release of hostages. He claims he wants to go for full victory, which is within reach—apparently, within months. He, along with his far-right coalition Government and his ambassador to the United Kingdom, have made it clear they do not support a two-state solution, making Israel at complete odds with the United States, the UK and the United Nations, as well as Saudi Arabia and all the key players in the region. ...

col 1796 What we now need, from the United Kingdom perspective, is an immediate ceasefire, with mutual exchange of hostages and a staggered Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. A massive international effort would be needed to rebuild Gaza ... There should be full accountability under international humanitarian law for all violators.

Will the UK increase its diplomatic pressure on Israel, and publicly and privately call on it to end the unlawful attacks on hospitals and ambulances? We should also condemn Israel's cutting-off of essential items as collective punishment and use of starvation as a weapon of war. The Hamas leaders of today were once children in refugee camps. What do we think the thousands of children and young people who have just seen their entire families wiped out—their mothers and siblings blown to pieces—will become without some hope of a future? ...

Lord Pickles (Conservative): ... There is consensus about the urgent need to increase the flow of aid into Gaza. Equally, there is a need to ensure that the aid goes to Gazans and is not stolen at gunpoint by Hamas and its kleptocratic leadership in Qatar. Aid cannot be used to prop up Hamas's failing leadership, nor to facilitate a future that permits Hamas to play any role in the rebuilding of Gaza. The road to peace is straightforward. Hamas must cease using civilians as human shields, surrender its arms and release the hostages. ...

Lord Turnberg (Labour): My Lords, the citizens of Gaza are suffering terribly, as we have heard, and deserve all our sympathy and support, but let us look at who is to blame for their disastrous situation. I have no doubt that it sits squarely with Hamas. Those who have any doubt that Hamas are a terrorist group need just to look at their own bodycam recordings of their atrocities on 7 October. If that is not terrorism, I do not know what is. They are not simply militants, as some in the media suggest, and it is they who stand behind their citizens as they fire their missiles; it is they who use their schools, hospitals and mosques as their military bases; it is they who are holding over 100 Israeli hostages. ...

col 1797 Lord Lee of Trafford (Liberal Democrat): ... Netanyahu's vengeful bombardment after the barbaric events of 7 October has been disastrous for Israel, for the hostages, for the region and for world Jewry, and it has been catastrophic for the Palestinians. ... Destroying Hamas and freeing the hostages were obvious incompatible objectives, but Netanyahu is uncompromising. ...

Lord Pannick (Crossbench): My Lords, the plight of the Palestinian people in Gaza is tragic indeed, but the House needs to focus on the causes of this tragedy. Gaza has received billions of dollars, pounds and euros in aid over the past decades, but this has not been used to improve education, health or the economy of Gaza. Much of it has gone into the Swiss bank accounts of Hamas leaders, and most of it has been used to build tunnels and attack Israel. If Hamas were now to release the hostages, and if Gaza were no longer used as a military base for attacking Israel, there would be no war in Gaza.

The Lord Bishop of Norwich: ... I visited Gaza on 4 October, just three days before Hamas's evil attacks, to see the Anglican-run 80-bed al-Ahli hospital. The World Health Organization reported on Tuesday that there are 150 patients there—all are critically ill. Everyone is fearful, stressed and exhausted. Medical staff have been detained, shackled and blindfolded by the IDF, and, on release, they are deposited in Rafah and not allowed to return to the hospital. ...

Baroness Warsi (Conservative): ... a population being starved, a people on the brink of famine, pregnant women undergoing C-sections without anaesthetic, newborns with starving mothers and babies orphaned at birth, with no access to baby formula. There are no period products, basic medication or clean drinking water. Despite miles and miles of aid trucks on the Israeli border ... what barriers are being created by the Netanyahu Government to getting aid in? Why are more than 50% of trucks cleared and allowed into the north of Gaza still being stopped by the Israeli army inside Gaza? Why is the northern Gaza water pipeline—the only source of clean water for the most desperate civilians—still switched off by Israel, in direct breach of the ICJ ruling, in breach of a Security Council resolution on the use of hunger as a weapon of war, and in breach of international humanitarian law?

col 1798 Lord Wood of Anfield (Labour): ... First, did the UK Government see any direct evidence provided by the Israeli Government, and was that the basis of their decision to suspend funding [to UNRWA]? Secondly, at the time, the Government said they were temporarily pausing funding of UNRWA "whilst we review these concerning allegations". Can the Minister update us on what the review has shown? Thirdly, why did the UK suspend funding in advance of the investigation or its conclusions, rather than deciding, as France, Switzerland, the EU, Denmark and lots of others have done, to wait for its findings? Fourthly, is it right to axe funding for UNRWA when the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza relies so heavily not just on the aid it provides but on the physical infrastructure and logistical services that it provides for almost all other aid agencies?

Lord Austin of Dudley (Non-affiliated): ... When Israel pulled out of Gaza in 2005, it had a successful economy, control over imports and exports, open borders and plans for a seaport. Hamas staged a vicious coup, murdered moderate Palestinians and launched a wave of terror acts against Israel—and that is why Israel had to build a fence, not as a blockade but as a defence. Instead of building hospitals and schools, the murderers steal funds to make rockets and tunnels to attack Israeli civilians. Instead of improving the lives of people in Gaza, the corrupt gangsters stole billions and live in luxury in Doha. Now they steal fuel, food and aid meant for starving civilians. ...

col 1799 Lord Frost (Conservative): ... everyone should read the excellent article by Stephen Daisley in the *Spectator* yesterday, in which he wrote: "Time and again, Israel was urged to make concessions ... In each case, the promise from foreign capitals was the same: do this and, if the Palestinians exploit these concessions to attack you, we will back your right to self-defence. Well, Israel made the concessions, the Palestinians

exploited them, and, with some honourable exceptions, the international community went wobbly whenever Israel mounted a military operation". ...

Israel has an absolute right to act to remove the threat of terrorism from its borders and topple Hamas. In doing so, it goes out of its way to prevent civilian casualties and takes precautions that no other military in the world takes. ...

The Lord Bishop of Bristol: ... Total victory within months—what does that mean for the hostages held in tunnels, for the women who are pregnant without medical support, for babies whose mothers have no breast milk? What we see is a horrible inversion of the word of the prophet Joel: the dreams of old men are shattered and the visions of young men are betrayed. The hopes of so many Jews, Muslims and Christians are destroyed. ...

Baroness Helic (Conservative): My Lords, Gaza's children are innocent. They are the future of the Palestinian state, which must become a reality. ... Their lives are being shattered, more than 10,000 have been killed, and every day in Gaza more than 10 children on average have one or both of their legs amputated, often due to being injured by heavy weaponry and often in procedures carried out without anaesthetic due to the blockade. ...

Will my noble friend therefore commit to supporting efforts to provide specialist medical treatment on a temporary basis to a limited number of children from the region in the United Kingdom?

col 1800 **Lord Hussain (Liberal Democrat):** ... Loss of innocent lives is condemnable, regardless of their faith, ethnicity or origin, and those responsible need to be brought to justice. It is regretful to note that the British Government are falling short of asking for an immediate ceasefire and have stopped supporting the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine. ... I urge an immediate release of all Hamas-held hostages, and all the Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. ...

Lord Young of Norwood Green (Labour): My Lords, we need to remind ourselves again that there are still 136 hostages with no access to the Red Cross. The appalling discovery that UNRWA participated in the Hamas massacre has meant that not only the UK but most countries around the world have suspended aid. ... Aid has been diverted by Hamas, which is using civilians; it does not care about the price that the civilian population pay. ...

Lord Polak (Conservative): ... It is not difficult: Hamas started this and Hamas can bring it to an end. The 7 October massacre and the holding and mistreatment of hostages by Hamas has caused the terrible humanitarian situation in Gaza. Does my noble friend agree that its double standards know no bounds? The sister of Hamas chief Haniyeh and her premature baby are still receiving life-saving treatment in Soroka Medical Center in Be'er Sheva, Israel, while the hostages in his hands are starving, being raped and dying in brutal conditions.

Baroness Uddin (Non-affiliated): ... Generations have been mercilessly wiped out with weapons of our gift, allegedly including phosphorous in Gaza. A free Palestine will emerge. ...

col 1801 In honour of the tens of thousands of innocents slaughtered and maimed in the hands of the IDF's allegedly genocidal regime, witnessed by loud advocates of penholders of universal morality and justice now speaking another tongue, when will the UK Government say "Stop now" and cease their complicity for the incomprehensible cruelty, rape, torture and detention in the killing fields of Palestine, which has indeed set an ugly precedent for our world, and abide by the ruling of the ICJ provisional order?

Lord Roberts of Belgravia (Conservative): My Lords, even if we were to take as accurate Hamas's statistics and the 27,500 figure—there is no reason why we should; we do not do that with Putin or ISIS—if one subtracts the number of Gazans who have been killed by the quarter or so of the Islamic Jihad and Hamas rockets that fall short, one is left with a less than 2:1 ratio of civilians to Hamas terrorists killed, of whom there have been more than 9,000 so far. War is hell, and every individual civilian death is a tragedy, but—I speak

as a military historian—less than 2:1 is an astonishingly low ratio for modern urban warfare where the terrorists routinely use civilians as human shields. It is a testament to the professionalism, ethics and values of the Israel Defense Forces.

Lord Stone of Blackheath (Non-affiliated): ... Both Israel and Palestine have right on their side, yet they cannot see the right on the other side. At heart, their actions come from a place of humanity, but only from one side. So, to try to help them move to a consciousness of shared understanding and love ... I have invited to the House of Lords 40 individuals who lead organisations on the ground in both Palestine and Israel and who are ready to work in union across the divide, supporting each other. They will come here for three days at the beginning of June to discuss how they would use their experience, compassion and friendships to work out which way to go to find a way of living together that benefits us all. ...

Baroness Gohir (Crossbench): ... With no access to menstrual products, Palestinian women and girls are using dirty rags. Palestinian women are having caesareans without anaesthetic and dying during childbirth. If Palestinian women survive bombs, childbirth, disease and hunger, they are witnessing their babies and children dying. Will the Minister confirm if an assessment will be made of whether the assaults on the reproductive rights, health and dignity of Palestinian women have breached international laws? ...

col 1802 **Lord Mitchell (Labour):** ... five weeks ago I was at Kibbutz Kfar Aza on the Israel-Gaza border. Hamas had ransacked the place. It did not take much to imagine the carnage and depravity that took place. I then turned to my left and faced Gaza, no more than a mile away. There were explosions. It also did not take much to imagine the thousands of innocent Palestinians who were dying and whose lives were being wrecked. But it was Hamas that spent billions building subterranean fortresses when it could have built thriving communities. It was Hamas that located military command centres under hospitals and schools; and now it is Hamas that is commandeering the distribution of food and water to the Gazan people.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green): ... What can and should the UK do? First, it should call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire now ... Secondly, it should resume the funding for UNRWA, the largest aid agency, that is so crucial to people's survival. Thirdly, it should suspend all arms sales to Israel, particularly parts for the F35 joint strike fighter. This is particularly crucial: these sales could soon see us taken before the ICJ.

Baroness Noakes (Conservative): My Lords, the people of Gaza have been failed by Hamas and by UNRWA. Hamas killed, raped and mutilated Israelis on 7 October. It killed 1,200 and wounded many more, and it took more than 200 hostages. It knew exactly what it was doing and what the consequences would be for the people of Gaza. UNRWA is rotten to its core and has been a willing accomplice to Hamas. Its schools taught hatred of Israel. UNRWA staff have allowed weapons and rockets to be stored in aid centres. Most shockingly, some of them willingly joined the murderous gangs on 7 October. ...

col 1803 **Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat):** ... The declared objectives of the war in Gaza were to destroy Hamas and secure the release of the hostages, yet after 17 weeks, neither has been achieved. ... In the meantime, Ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich have called for Jewish settlements in Gaza and for the migration of the Palestinian people, while health and aid facilities are being systematically destroyed. What action will the UK Government take to insist on compliance with international law and the rulings of the ICJ ...

Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative): My Lords, the current situation in Gaza is of course horrific, but it could be resolved within hours, if Hamas wanted to, by releasing the hostages. ...

His Majesty's Government have called for an independent state of Palestine. Can my noble friend confirm now or in writing: is it to be a democracy or an autocracy? Will a Palestinian state be required to ban Hamas and other terrorists? Will it have a military army, and will this mean the end of the discredited and corrupt UNRWA? Will it allow regular inspections

to ensure there are no more tunnels? ...

Lord Alderdice (Liberal Democrat): ... When you next look into the eyes of one of your own children or grandchildren, you will see the miracle of a wonderful human being. You do not want them to suffer, be beaten, shot or blown up, have their limbs amputated without anaesthetic, live in misery or die in agony. ... When you next look at a picture of a child—a Jewish child, a Palestinian child, Muslim or Christian or any other child—are you reminded of your own children, or have you lost that sense of our common humanity? ...

col 1804 **Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour):** ... The dire situation in Gaza must stop now. We need a humanitarian truce to allow aid in and the release of the hostages ... Can [the Minister] also update us on increased access to Gaza, particularly land routes through Kerem Shalom and Rafah, and air drops and maritime routes? ... Finally, to pick up my noble friend's point about UNRWA, we need to ensure that that organisation can continue ...

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon): ... As a Muslim, I am reminded of the verse of the Holy Koran which says: "That person who saves the life of a single soul is akin to the person saving all humanity. That person who takes the life of an innocent soul is akin to the person taking the life of all humanity". For those who claim to act in religion, as Hamas does, we must look at the fundamentals. Not just the Muslim world but any like-minded thinking person with humanity at their core should reject its activities outright. ...

Many noble Lords ... reminded us of what started this crisis. Four months since Hamas carried out the worst terror attack in Israel's history, Hamas continues to hold more than 130 hostages. ...

col 1805 As we look across the situation in the Middle East, in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, it is clear that ordinary people are suffering. Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis ...

Israel is a state, and it has obligations in this respect, and we make that point consistently. ...

Several noble Lords ... rightly raised the issue of UNRWA. Let me be very clear: it was not from Israel—the first call I received ... was from the head of UNRWA himself, telling me that the organisation had received the report and taken actions. ... of course, we want to ensure any resumption of funding is based on the satisfaction that such individuals cannot be employed by UNRWA again. It damages not just the organisation but the UN as a whole ...

An estimated 1.7 million people are now internally displaced; more than 1 million people—over half of Gaza's population—are packed into the southern region of Rafah, which previously had a population of just 280,000. Meanwhile, the World Food Programme has stated that nine out of 10 people in Gaza may be living on less than one meal a day, and only 14 of 36 hospitals are partially functioning, without enough medicines or specialised staff, with many working to 300% of their capacity. The UN reports that since 11 October, the Gaza Strip has been under an electricity blackout after the Israeli authorities cut off the supply, and fuel reserves for Gaza's sole power plant were depleted. Let me assure all noble Lords that of course we raise these issues directly with Israel and ask them to turn back on the water supplies and the electricity so that vital hospitals and humanitarian efforts can be supported. ...

col 1806 The communications and industrial fuel shutdown continues to hinder the aid community's efforts ... to assess the full extent of needs in Gaza. ...

There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support ... we are focusing on practical solutions to save lives. ...

The Foreign Secretary discussed directly with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 24 January the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation there. ... he reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza ...

col 1807 The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Bristol reflected on the terrible suffering. I agree, and that is why we have asked the Israelis again to protect civilian lives. Many Israelis understand, and their Government understand in certain respects, the importance of the international requirement—not just to comply with international humanitarian law—which means that aid and humanitarian support get into Gaza. ...

We have called for an immediate pause now to get more aid in and hostages out. We want to turn this pause into a specific, sustainable and permanent ceasefire. That means no return to fighting. ...

To conclude ... there must be the release of all hostages held in Gaza. Equally, that means removing Hamas's capacity to launch rockets against Israel, as it has done before; it means Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza, and the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international, comprehensive support package. We also need a political horizon, which is incredibly important and which my noble friend the Foreign Secretary has homed in on, that provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

We need genuine momentum towards permanent peace. That is why we are pressing for a contact group; my noble friend the Foreign Secretary will do so at the Munich conference. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-08/debates/C5588F3F-2786-4CD3-9D34-BC2E58878A05/GazaHumanitarianSituation>

The Spectator article referred to above by Lord Frost can be read at
<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/javier-milei-is-no-populist/>

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Foreign Relations

Chris Law (SNP) [11804] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will publish details of the discussions between the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and his Israeli counterpart during his most recent visit to that country.

Andrew Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Katz in Jerusalem, during his most recent visit to Israel.

The Foreign Secretary discussed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation there with Prime Minister Netanyahu. He reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza, for Nitzana and Kerom Shalom to be open for longer, and for Israel to support the UN to deliver aid effectively across the whole of Gaza.

We also want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying home.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-29/11804>

International Law

Neale Hanvey (Alba) [12867] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has a tracker database of alleged violations of international law.

Leo Docherty: We are monitoring closely the situation in Israel and the Occupied-Palestinian Territories. We regularly review advice about Israel's commitment and capability to comply with International Humanitarian Law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-02/12867>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Israel

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [11632] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the International Court of Justice's decision on the request for provisional measures 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), what diplomatic steps he plans to take to encourage political dialogue on the crisis in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.

Israel: Palestinians

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [12407] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he made representations in support of a two-state solution during his last meeting with the Prime Minister of Israel.

Leo Docherty: We want to see an end to the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible and are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

These are the vital steps:

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

The Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have reiterated these messages in their contacts with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior Israeli political leaders, including during the Foreign Secretary's visit to Israel on 24 January. We are clear we support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people, and we need to generate momentum now towards a permanent peace. That is why we are pressing for a Contact Group, bringing together the key players, to be set up at once.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12407>

The International Court of Justice decision (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

Richard Burgon (Labour) [12097] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has received legal advice on the implications for his Department's policies of the International Court of Justice's decision on the request for provisional measures 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).

Andrew Mitchell: We regularly review advice about Israel's capability and commitment to International Humanitarian Law and we act in accordance with that advice. We respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice (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 IHL, 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 now 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/2024-01-30/12097>

The International Court of Justice decision (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: Genocide Convention

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [12404] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the International Court of Justice's decision on the request for provisional measures 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 International Court of Justice (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 Humanitarian 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/2024-01-31/12404>

The International Court of Justice decision (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: British Nationals Abroad

Drew Hendry (SNP) [13051] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will hold discussions with his Israeli counterpart on taking steps to help ensure the safety of the family members of British citizens in the event that combat operations take place in Rafah.

Andrew Mitchell: We continue to urge Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. The Foreign Secretary reiterated this during his visit to Israel on 24 January.

We have helped to facilitate over 300 British Nationals to leave Gaza so far. We are working with the Israelis and Egyptian authorities to ensure any remaining British nationals still in Gaza that want to leave are cleared to cross as soon as possible and encourage timely processing of UK consular cases.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-05/13051>

Gaza: British Nationals Abroad

Drew Hendry (SNP) [13079] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what support his Department provides to UK citizens with family members in Gaza; and what assessment he has made of the adequacy of that support.

Andrew Mitchell: Government support to individuals affected by a crisis abroad is set out on gov.uk:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-deal-with-a-crisis-overseas>

This includes the support provided in certain circumstances to immediate family

members of British nationals.

We are engaging with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities on a regular basis to discuss the border crossing and encourage timely processing of UK consular cases. We have helped to facilitate over 300 British nationals to leave Gaza so far. A small number remain.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-05/13079>

Gaza: British Nationals Abroad

Drew Hendry (SNP) [13080] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an estimate of how many UK citizens have family members in Rafah.

Andrew Mitchell: We are working with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities to discuss the border crossing and encourage timely processing of UK consular cases. We are not in a position to provide a running commentary on the number of wider UK family members in Rafah.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-05/13080>

Israel: Arms Trade

Richard Burgon (Labour) [12621] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to paragraph 40 of the summary grounds of the Secretary of State in the case of *The King (on the application of Al-Haq) v. Secretary of State for Business and Trade*, AC-2023-LON-003634, if he will publish the out-of-cycle international humanitarian law assessment produced by his Department's Middle East and North Africa directorate on 8 December 2023.

Andrew Mitchell: We regularly review advice about Israel's capability and commitment to International Humanitarian Law and act in accordance with that advice. It would not be appropriate to comment on documents related to ongoing legal proceedings. We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to be respected in the conflict and for civilians to be protected.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12621>

The summary grounds referred to above are not available online

Arms Trade: Israel

Philippa Whitford (SNP) [12824] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will make an assessment of the implications for her policy on arms exports to Israel of the International Court of Justice's order relating to the case of the *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v Israel)*, published on 26 January 2024.

Greg Hands: Decisions on export licensing are based on the UK's Strategic Export Licensing Criteria.

The Government's export licences are kept under careful and continual review, and can amend, suspend or revoke extant licences, or refuse new licence applications, where they are inconsistent with these criteria.

The Government respects the role and independence of the International Court of Justice. However, the Government have stated that we have considerable concerns about this case.

Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas, provided this is proportionate and within the bounds of International Humanitarian Law, as we've said from the outset. The Government view is that Israel's actions in Gaza cannot be described as a genocide, which is why South Africa's decision to bring the case was wrong and provocative.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-02/12824>

The International Court of Justice 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>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-12-08/hcws449>

Israel: Armed Forces

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [12736] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Israeli armed forces personnel are in the UK.

James Heapey: Israel is represented by Armed Forces personnel in its Embassy in the UK, and as participants in UK defence-led training courses.

There are currently six Israeli Armed Forces officers posted in the UK.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12736>

Gaza: Israel

Richard Burgon (Labour) [12623] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to Q639 of the oral evidence given by the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 9 January 2024, HC 325, and to paragraph 50 of the summary grounds of the Secretary of State in the case of *The King (on the application of Al-Haq) v. Secretary of State for Business and Trade*, AC-2023-LON-003634, for what reason the Secretary of State said to the Committee that his role was not to make a legal adjudication on whether Israel had breached international humanitarian law.

Andrew Mitchell: We regularly review advice about Israel's capability and commitment to International Humanitarian Law and act in accordance with that advice, including in relation to arms exports. The Foreign Secretary's role is to advise the Secretary of State at the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) on certain Criteria in the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, including whether there is a clear risk that controlled goods exported under a licence might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of IHL, and it is for the Secretary of State at DBT to act in light of that advice.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12623>

The oral evidence referred to above can be read at
<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14047/html/>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-12-08/hcws449>

The summary grounds referred to above are not available online

Hamas: Hostage Taking

Nicola Richards (Conservative) [11665] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help secure the release of Israeli hostages.

Andrew Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary met the Sharabi and Popplewell families on 16 January to hear about their relatives' horrendous ordeals at the hands of Hamas. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary also met with hostage families on 21 January.

We will continue to do all we can to secure the release of all hostages. We need a humanitarian pause now to allow for the release of hostages. We will continue to do all we can.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/11665>

Gaza: Health Professions

Stephen Timms (Labour) [12889] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he plans to support the nomination of health care workers in Gaza for the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize.

Leo Docherty: We recognise the vital work being carried out by healthcare workers in the current conflict. We are supporting NGOs and UN partners to deliver medical aid and care in the Gaza Strip, to meet the immediate needs of the population there. 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/2024-02-05/12889>

UNRWA: Finance

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [12405] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what correspondence he has received from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees following the temporary pause in funding, announced on 27 January 2024.

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 and are pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations.

As I [Minister Mitchell *[sic]*] said in the House on 29 January, I have spoken with the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Phillippe Lazzarini about steps being taken by the organisation to review these very serious allegations.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12405>

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 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) [12055] 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 had scheduled payments to be made to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) before the announcement of a temporary pause in funding on 27 January 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: Payments have been as per our Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). We are not aware of other UK Government Departments having any scheduled payments for UNRWA.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12055>

The Statement referred to above can be read at

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

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>

UNRWA: Finance

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [13138] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what the evidential basis was for his decision to suspend funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Leo Docherty: We are appalled by allegations that United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel. The UK is pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations. The United States, Germany, Australia, Canada, Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands have all temporarily paused funding.

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 OCHA, UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-05/13138>

The following three questions all received the same answer

UNRWA: Finance

Philippa Whitford (SNP) [12833] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the pause of future funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on the provision of emergency shelter for internally displaced civilians in Gaza.

Philippa Whitford (SNP) [12834] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the pause of future funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on the emergency treatment and rehabilitation of wounded civilians in Gaza.

Philippa Whitford (SNP) [12835] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of suspending funding for UNRWA on access to (a) food, (b) clean drinking water and (c) healthcare and medical supplies for children 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's pause in any future funding of UNRWA will remain in place until we review the allegations, and we are looking to our partners in the UN to carry out a robust and comprehensive investigation. 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, and our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands, and we are getting on with aid delivery through funding multiple implementing partners including other UN agencies and international and UK NGOs. This support is helping people in Gaza get food, water, shelter and medicines. 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 are currently supporting NGOs 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/2024-02-02/12833>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-02/12834>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-02/12835>

UNRWA: Finance

Alan Brown (SNP) [12449] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the the potential impact of pauses of future funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on stability in the West Bank.

Andrew Mitchell: 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 those who desperately need it. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands.

Regarding the situation in the West Bank, as we have stated we support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people, and the Palestinian Authority has an important long-term role to play. We must work with our allies to provide serious, practical and enduring support needed to bolster the Palestinian Authority. We already provide technical and practical support and are ready to do more. The Palestinian Authority must also take much needed steps to reform, including setting out a pathway to demonstrate progress. Just as the Palestinian Authority must act, so must Israel. This means releasing frozen funds, halting settlement expansion and holding to account those responsible for extremist settler violence.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12449>

The following three questions all received the same answer

UNRWA: Finance

Alan Brown (SNP) [12448] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that pauses in the funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) do not exacerbate the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Alan Brown (SNP) [12451] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of a reduction in future funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on the effectiveness of international NGOs operating in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Alan Brown (SNP) [12452] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the impact of a pause in future funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on the humanitarian situation 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.

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, and we are helping people in Gaza get food, water, shelter and medicines. 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/2024-01-31/12448>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12451>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12452>

UNRWA: Finance

Alan Brown (SNP) [12450] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the consistency of (a) the decision to pause future funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and (b) paragraph 80 of the International Court of Justice's Order relating to the case of the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v Israel), published on 26 January 2024.

Leo Docherty: We are 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, and our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands, and we are getting on with aid delivery through funding multiple implementing partners including other UN agencies and international and UK NGOs. This support is helping people in Gaza get food, water, shelter and medicines.

We are also clear that an immediate pause is necessary to get aid in and hostages out, and then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12450>

The International Court of Justice 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>

UNRWA: Finance

Afzal Khan (Labour) [12447] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what (a) information and (b) sources informed the decision not to renew funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the next financial year; and what assessment he has made of the potential implications of that decision on future UK funding for humanitarian relief efforts for Palestinians.

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. We are pausing any future funding of UNRWA while we review these concerning allegations. The pause will remain in place until we are able to review the allegations. Any future funding decisions will be taken after this time.

We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who

desperately need it. This support is helping people in Gaza get food, water, shelter and medicines. 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/2024-01-31/12447>

Palestinians: Refugees

Afzal Khan (Labour) [12444] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has made an assessment of potential alternatives for the provision of support to Palestinian refugees, in the context of the pause in funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), announced on 27 January 2024.

Leo Docherty: We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, and we are getting on with aid delivery through funding multiple implementing partners including other UN agencies and international and UK NGOs. This support is helping people in Gaza get food, water, shelter and medicines.

Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza also 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. We have and will continue to support the Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) which has a long standing and trusted role as auxiliary to the Egyptian authorities in the humanitarian field.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12444>

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>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Caroline Lucas (Green) [11763] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 12 January 2024 to Question 7540 on Gaza: Humanitarian Aid and the Answer of 26 January 2024 to Question 9495 on Gaza: Humanitarian Aid, how many truckloads of UK aid are in Gaza; what recent progress his Department has made on helping to tackle constraints on the number of trucks entering Gaza each day; and what recent estimate he has made of the average daily number of truckloads of humanitarian supplies entering Gaza in the last month.

Andrew Mitchell: 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. 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 in December and 315 tonnes in the second delivery. The UK also played a leading role in securing the passage of Security Council resolution 2720, which set out the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-29/11763>

The answers referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7540>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/9495>

UNSCR 2720, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

Hamas: Children

Nicola Richards (Conservative) [11663] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what information his Department holds on the alleged use of child soldiers by Hamas.

Andrew Mitchell: We condemn the recruiting and use of children in armed conflict and want to see an end to this abhorrent practice.

The UK is an active member of the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), which leads the international response to violations committed against children in conflict. The Working Group issues calls and concrete requests to those governments and armed groups listed in the Secretary-General's annual report, including in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law to be respected and civilians to be protected.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/11663>

Egypt: Palestinians

Drew Hendry (SNP) [13078] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will hold discussions with his Egyptian counterpart on opening the Rafah border crossing into Egypt to Palestinian refugees.

Leo Docherty: We continue to discuss with our Egyptian counterparts a wide range of issues relating to the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Our priority is addressing the crisis in Gaza itself - we recognise that there is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support and so our focus must be on practical solutions that save lives.

As we have said, Israel must take steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza including allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses, opening more routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity. The 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-05/13078>

House of Lords Written Answers

Arms Trade: Israel

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Labour) [HL1941] To ask His Majesty's Government what legal advice has been received and briefed on in relation to the risk of UK-manufactured arms and components being used in violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Lord Offord of Garvel: The Export Control Joint Unit (ECJU) is comprised of subject matter experts and officials in the Department for Business and Trade, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the Ministry of Defence. The Secretary of State for Business and Trade receives legal advice as appropriate, on all matters related to export licensing, as part of advice from officials. Any legal advice received is subject to legal professional privilege and as such we do not comment on legal advice that may or may not have been sought or received.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-25/hl1941>

Arms Trade: Israel

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Labour) [HL1942] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment has been carried out by the Export Control Joint Unit into the risk of UK arms exported to Israel being used in violation of international humanitarian law; what concerns were raised during this assessment; what were their findings; and what plans they have to conduct a review of arms export licences to Israel.

Lord Offord of Garvel: All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against our Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, including with regard to international humanitarian law.

We are monitoring the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories very closely.

We can and do respond quickly and flexibly to changing international circumstances. All licences are kept under careful and continual review and we are able to amend, suspend, refuse or revoke licences as circumstances require.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-25/hl1942>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL1930] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the humanitarian situation in Gaza; and what action they are taking with international partners to prevent crisis levels of hunger and famine amongst the civilian population of Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: There is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza and a desperate need for increased humanitarian support - 9 out of 10 Palestinians in Gaza are living on less than one meal a day. Our focus must be on practical solutions that save lives.

The Prime Minister discussed the crisis in Israel and Gaza with President Biden on 22 January. The UK and US are focused on alleviating the terrible suffering in Gaza and together we are working to establish a new aid route through the port of Ashdod. The Foreign Secretary has 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.

We trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we will continue to support 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. Israel must concrete take steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid across Gaza including allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses, opening more routes into Gaza and immediately restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-25/hl1930>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Uranium

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (Green) [HL1921] To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the article in the Nature Scientific Reports journal Radiological hazard assessments of radionuclides in building materials, soils and sands from the Gaza Strip and the north of Sinai Peninsula, published on 1 December 2021, what assessment they have made of the discovery of enriched uranium in Gaza.

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (Green) [HL1922] To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the article in the Nature Scientific Reports journal Radiological hazard assessments of radionuclides in building materials, soils and sands from the Gaza Strip and the north of Sinai Peninsula, published on 1 December 2021, what assessment they have made of the likely cause of the 24 samples from Gaza containing enriched uranium.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Nature Scientific Reports article does not provide sufficient information to make a qualified determination as to the potential source of the enriched uranium traces it reports were found. The dose rates and level of radiological hazard of the samples referred to in the article are stated as being within recommended global limits. The UK has not tested the samples referenced in the article.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-25/hl1921>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-25/hl1922>

The article referred to above can be read at

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-02559-7>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru) [381] **UK funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East** – This House notes the UK's decision to pause funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); further notes that UNRWA's services are primarily funded through contributions from UN member states, constituting around 93% of the agency's funds; is concerned that UNRWA has warned that the decision by the UK and other countries to suspend funding will leave it unable to fund its aid operations in a matter of weeks; notes that UNRWA supports 5.9 million Palestinian refugees in Gaza and other countries including Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and employs 30,000 staff, 13,000 of whom work in Gaza; further notes the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza where over 2 million people are at imminent risk of famine and 152 UNRWA staff have been killed; notes UNRWA's swift action to terminate the contracts of 12 employees following allegations of their involvement in the 7 October attack and launch an investigation by the UN Office of Internal Oversight, in addition to the appointment of an independent review group by the UN Secretary-General to assess how UNRWA ensures neutrality and responds to allegations of serious wrongdoing; further notes that other countries including Ireland, Norway, Belgium, Denmark and Spain continue to fund UNRWA in light of the agency's swift disciplinary and investigative response; and calls on the UK Government to immediately re-instate funding for UNRWA given the disastrous humanitarian consequences that the pause in funding will have for people in Gaza and the wider region.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61873>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

David Cameron Deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah – over half of Gaza’s population are sheltering in the area. The priority must be an immediate pause in the fighting to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.

https://twitter.com/David_Cameron/status/1756411909740355968

Scottish Government

Humza Yousaf Ireland is right. Israel displaced millions of innocent men, women & children to south Gaza. They have nowhere to go. Israel's threatened action in Rafah is indefensible & will cause devastation beyond comprehension. International community must demand an immediate ceasefire. [plus link to a lengthy statement by Irish Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence Micheál Martin]

<https://twitter.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1756398579235668228>

Northern Ireland Assembly No Day Named Motion

Gerry Carroll (People Before Profit Alliance) [tabled 8/2/2024] **Apartheid Israel** – That this Assembly agrees that apartheid Israel is engaged in a genocide in Gaza; notes that tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed, including over 10,000 children, many more have been seriously injured and traumatised, and that almost 2 million people are displaced and face a catastrophic humanitarian crisis with famine conditions; reiterates its disgust at the level of collective suffering inflicted on the people of Gaza and commends the mass movement that has erupted across Ireland against the violence in recent months; affirms its support for a ceasefire, the boycott divestment and the sanctions campaign, for expulsion of Israeli ambassadors from Britain and Ireland, for Israel to be held accountable by international bodies for war crimes and genocide, and for Palestinian self-determination; further agrees that Israel's murderous campaign of collective punishment is highly dependent on the military, financial and political support of President Biden and the US government in particular; agrees the Biden administration has immorally opposed calls for a humanitarian ceasefire, systematically repeated Israeli war propaganda and that President Biden has personally bypassed Congress to transfer arms to Israel during the genocidal war that will cause widespread death and suffering in Gaza; further agrees to write to the Taoiseach and all political parties on the island of Ireland calling on them not to attend St. Patrick’s Day celebrations in the White House, nor to meet with President Biden or any representative of his administration as part of the St. Patrick’s Day events; and agrees to write to Claire Cronin, US Ambassador to Ireland, British Foreign Secretary, David Cameron and Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, calling for an immediate suspension of all military, financial, and diplomatic support for apartheid Israel and its genocidal war on Palestine.

There is currently no direct link to individual motions, and motions do not have an identifying number. The No Day Named motion list can be read at

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/plenary/nodaynamedlist.aspx>

Trades Union Congress (TUC)

UK government must change course to support peace in Palestine, Israel and the Middle East

On 7 February, the TUC wrote to Lord Cameron, Secretary of State for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) on the escalating violence in Gaza, Israel and the Middle East. We have [long-standing policy](#) in support of Palestinian rights and ending the occupation of Palestinian territory.

This letter follows on from the [TUC's General Council statement](#) unequivocally condemning the shocking attacks on Israeli civilians by Hamas, calling for the immediate, unconditional release of all hostages unharmed, and calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

In our letter to Lord Cameron, we've expressed disappointment that the UK government has so far failed to call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, or support resolutions calling for one at the United Nations. We recognise that a ceasefire must be accompanied by a political process.

Our government has also failed to publicly condemn the siege of Gaza and called for it to end, even though it is causing immense human suffering and international humanitarian law prohibits the use of starvation, including attacking objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and denying or impeding access to humanitarian aid, as a method of warfare.

UNRWA is carrying out lifesaving humanitarian work in Gaza, providing shelter, food and water. We've called on the UK government to resume its funding to UNRWA while an investigation into allegations by the Israeli government that several UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attacks – is carried out. ...

We've also raised our concerns that reportedly more than 27,000 Palestinians, mainly women and children, have been killed in operations launched by Israeli forces since 7 October, and that more than 66,000 have been injured. ...

The TUC has called on the UK government and international community to act to ensure that international law is upheld and applied consistently. We're alarmed that at least 1.7 million civilians, 75 per cent of Gaza's population, have been forcibly displaced according to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and reportedly, that a member of Israel's security cabinet described Gaza Strip residents evacuating south on IDF orders as, "rolling out a Gaza Nakba". We're also deeply concerned that Prime Minister Netanyahu has rejected the creation of a State of Palestine ...

In calling for international law to be upheld, we've welcomed the decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to issue binding provisional measures ...

Our letter stresses our concern that since 7 October, at least 360 Palestinians have reportedly been killed in attacks involving Israeli forces and/or settlers in the West Bank including East Jerusalem. ...

We are urging the UK government to do more to bring about an end to this escalating violence and support a just peace by:

- calling for an immediate and lasting ceasefire ...
- taking action alongside the international community to ensure that international law is upheld and applied consistently ...
- insisting that Israel complies, in full, with the binding provisional measures issued by the ICJ
- taking action to ensure that it is not complicit in any war crimes or crimes against humanity ...
- restoring funding to UNRWA and support the ILO's Emergency Response Programme
- ending arms sales and military collaboration with Israel, and ending the UK's trade in settlement goods

- withdrawing the Economic Activities of Public Bodies Bill
- recognising the State of Palestine and support genuine efforts towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/uk-government-must-change-course-support-peace-palestine-israel-and-middle-east>

International Court of Justice

Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel): Nicaragua requests permission to intervene in the proceedings under Article 62 of the Statute

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240208-pre-01-00-en.pdf>

United Nations

Press Conference by Secretary-General António Guterres at United Nations Headquarters

... And in Gaza, the situation just keeps getting worse. In addition to the death and destruction from military operations — starvation and disease are bearing down on Palestinians in Gaza. Despite some limited steps, our humanitarian operations continue to face denials of access, delays, impediments, and multiple dangers — including live fire. One of our convoys was damaged by Israeli naval artillery earlier this week. Just 10 out of 61 planned aid convoys to the north reached their destination in January.

Let's be clear: Denial of humanitarian access means denial of humanitarian relief for civilians. Food and water are needed for a desperate population. Medicine and fuel are needed for the desperation in hospitals. And other life-saving supplies for a population in a terrible situation. I am particularly worried by reports that the Israeli military intends to focus next on Rafah.

Half of Gaza's population is now crammed into Rafah. They have nowhere to go. They have no homes — and they have no hope. They are living in over-crowded make-shift shelters, in unsanitary conditions without running water, electricity and adequate food supplies. All of this underscores the need for full respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and ensuring their essential needs are met.

We are clear in condemning the horrific attacks of Hamas. We are also clear in condemning the violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza. We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. We need also the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. And we need real, visible, concrete steps towards a two-State solution — based on UN resolutions, international law and previous agreements. Repeated bloody hostilities, and decades of tensions and occupation, have failed to provide a State for the Palestinians, or security for Israelis. ...

Question: ... the Israeli Prime Minister rejected the Hamas proposed the ceasefire terms and said that the total victory in Gaza is possible within months. So it looks that Israel does not have the willingness to consider or accept any negotiated deal. Is there any hope to reverse this course? Is there a plan B? And the UN is playing any role in trying to reach a deal for a ceasefire? ...

Secretary-General: I had a chance to be once again, at the end of last week, with the Prime Minister of Qatar that was kind enough to visit me after his visit to Washington, and he was hopeful that the negotiations will be able to go on and that those negotiations might lead to a breakthrough in relation both to different periods of cessation of hostilities and to the liberation of hostages. For me, the question of the liberation of hostages is absolutely

essential from the human point of view. I had the possibility to receive several hostages, two hostages in Davos, families of hostages and people knowing them and I know what the suffering is, related to that. So when we have a negotiation, in which the release of hostages is in one hand, and in which different aspects of pauses, ceasefires or restoring calm, several different kinds of language were used — when there is a negotiation of this nature, I think it's in the interest of everybody and it's in the particular interest of the Government in Israel to make sure that these negotiations are successful. ...

Question: ... we have not heard you, in your own words, reflect on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) case brought by South Africa against Israel and the subsequent provisional orders that were handed down. What do you make of the case? What do you make of the court's provisional decisions, and the lack of compliance we are all bearing witness to in Gaza today? And in that regard, what is your message to Palestinian trapped in Gaza who have all but lost hope?

Secretary-General: First of all, we fully support the International Court of Justice. We think the International Court of Justice is the right entity to pronounce itself on these issues. We fully support the decisions of the International Court of Justice, and we clearly express that all those decisions must be implemented. And so, it is absolutely essential that all the decisions are implemented. And obviously, I have full confidence in the International Court of Justice to be able to act if those decisions are not properly implemented. ...

Question: Your message to people of Gaza?

Secretary-General: My message to the people of Gaza is a message of total solidarity and total commitment — solidarity with the horrible suffering; commitment to do everything, to mobilize the UN system, to provide the possible assistance we can provide and at the same time to go on with a very active global advocacy for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to take place.

Question: ... you mentioned that one of the UN's convoys was hit by Israeli artillery earlier this week. I believe, only 10 out of 61 planned aid convoys to the North reached their destination in January. Denial of humanitarian access means denial of humanitarian relief. You said earlier today, Philippe Lazzarini noted that UNRWA hasn't been able to deliver food north of Wadi Gaza since before 23 January. All of this to say or to ask, is Israel in contravention of UN Security Council Resolution 2712,2720 and the ICJ ruling?

Secretary-General: I've said clearly that we are witnessing violations of international humanitarian law and those violations must stop. ...
By the way, not only by Israel.

Question: ... Do you believe that, given the fact that the US has a very strong relationship with the Israeli Government, that they are using the leverage they should do? Or the fact that they are giving or planning to give about 17 billion dollars for weapons makes them actually a party to the conflict and not separate, not an independent, what's your position on that? And what's your message to the American administration? ...

Secretary-General: Everybody knows that the United [States] is an ally of Israel. That has been said time and time again by all leaders in the United States and in Israel. So that is clear. It's a country that is an ally. But it is also true, and I can testify to it myself, that there has been a lot of pressure by the United States in relation to Israel in different areas of humanitarian aid. I remember several phone calls, President [Joseph] Biden to Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu to solve problems that we have on the ground and couldn't solve by ourselves. And I can also testify that there has been a clear pressure of the United States in order for full respect of international humanitarian law. But that doesn't change the fact that, indeed, United States is an ally of Israel.

Question: ... Do you believe that they are doing everything in their power to use that leverage? Also given the fact that they cut money to UNRWA in the times where they are financing weapons?

Secretary-General: What I sincerely do not know, what is exactly is in their power. ...

Question: ... I wanted to ask if you also have a message to the Israeli people, considering all the criticism that you're facing from the public in Israel. What is your message to the Israeli people ... considering how much criticism you're facing in the country?

Secretary-General: Well, I am a politician that has a long history of relations with Israel. I was elected Vice President of the Socialist International the same day, in the same Congress, that Yitzhak Rabin was elected and I remember that one of my first visits is when I was elected leader of the Socialist Party in Portugal was to visit [Yitzhak] Rabin and [Shimon] Peres — at that time, were Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel. ... I've always been very closely committed to support, although that in Israel, were defending the Israel interests, but also committed to peace in relation to the Middle East. On the other hand, as Prime Minister of Portugal, I approved and made the parliament approve the decree that revoked the edict of expulsion that the Portuguese did in the early 16th century, in the most criminal and stupid act of the history of my country — when the Jewish community was expelled. We revoked that edict, and I went myself to the Portuguese Synagogue of Amsterdam — by the way, an absolutely fantastic temple — unfortunately, almost deserted because of the Holocaust — to deposit that law. And today, as you are probably aware, tens of thousands of descendants of that community are gaining Portuguese nationality. And there are even citizens of Israel that are moving from Israel to Portugal. On the other hand, I was always a very strong supporter of all efforts in order to create the conditions for full security of the people of Israel under the state of Israel; and at the same time, for the creation of a Palestinian state, allowing for the two countries to live side by side in peace. When Hamas attacked, with that absolutely intolerable terror attacks, I was very strong condemning it. I was also very strong in asking since the beginning and repeatedly for the immediate and the unconditional release of hostages. And when there were indications that Hamas has infiltrated UNRWA, I acted immediately in order to guarantee that we do whatever is necessary for UNRWA to be able to avoid any kind of infiltration by Hamas. But it is also true that I believe we need a two-state solution and I disagree with the policies of the Government of Israel, with the settlements and with a number of other initiatives that have undermined the two-state solution. And I've also expressed my opinion that the way the military operations are being conducted in Gaza has been with an absolutely unacceptable excess of people being killed and of destruction. So my message to the people of Israel is that I will always be a strong supporter of the right of Israel to live in peace and security. I've always been a committed fighter against antisemitism, but I'm also totally committed to work for the Palestinians to be able to have their own state and to have their self-determination recognized and to the end of occupation. ...

Question: ... the allegations against the dozen UNRWA members were undoubtedly very shocking. But to this point, they are still allegations, and it seems you didn't even receive evidence in writing yet. Still, you fired these workers already, without a thorough investigation first. It seems that you or that the UN didn't follow due process here. Why is that?

Secretary-General: First of all, we received allegations in relation to 12 names and those allegations were credible. Now, if the allegations are credible, you are dealing with a high risk. And when you are dealing with a high risk, and you have rules and regulations that allow you to do so, you, I believe, should do what I did — which was to terminate immediately the contracts based on the so-called best interests of the organization, which is what the rules and regulations allow me to do. At the same time, the investigation team was immediately on the ground. And if I have made any mistake, it can be corrected in the future. But we couldn't run the risk not to act immediately as the accusations were related to criminal activities that are really dangerous. And I must say, I'm a little bit surprised, when I now read in the press, that apparently, the military were not willing [for] the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel to convey that information to us; and even worse, I

read in the press that in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they didn't expect me to act. I mean, I can't imagine that this was a trap. One thing that you can be absolutely sure — any allegation that is presented to us by the Government of Israel in relation to any other infiltration of Hamas in the UN, at whatever level, we will act immediately upon it. ...

Question: ... there are more and more doubts on the effectiveness of the UN, especially on maintaining stability and security of the world. What can you say to them? ...

Secretary-General: ... there were accusations in relation to the infiltration of Hamas in relation to UNRWA and to acts like what was mentioned. But let's not forget that we have more than 30,000 workers of UNRWA providing humanitarian aid, but also schooling, health, other forms of community support in Syria, in Lebanon, in Jordan, in West Bank and in Gaza. And that in Gaza, we have from the operational point of view of the emergency, beyond the workers that were in schools and, you know, we have 3,000 people that are the backbone of humanitarian assistance in Gaza. So independently of everything that has happened and acting in relation to that, with clear determination, I think it's important to say that the humanitarian work that the UN does in the world is unique, irreplaceable and a source of pride for all of us, and it should not be confused with the difficulty of decisions Of the Security Council. ...

Question: ... My question involves the suspension of aid by the various donors for UNRWA and my question is this: Were you surprised at all at the quickness of these 16 donors, including the major donors, their withdrawal? And since the report is not going to be due, I gather, until late April, which is two and a half months from now, have they indicated any sort of step or any goals that have to be reached where perhaps they would restore some aid sooner than waiting for the end of April?

Secretary-General: I was surprised. But I think my duty now is to do everything possible to re-establish the situation and to re-establish the situation, of course, my appeal would be for everybody to establish it immediately, but I know all things are. I've been in politics a long period of my life, and I know how politics play in governments, in parliament, in public opinions everywhere, and I understand the concerns that exist. And so what we are doing is to do the right thing in order to give the guarantees that these countries would like to have, that we are doing everything possible to make sure that UNRWA is an organization that not only is effective, necessary, but it is also able to defend itself against infiltrations that can put into question its neutrality. And we are doing everything in that direction. And in my context, I'm hopeful that countries will recognize that effort and that progressively, this problem will be solved. ...

Question: ... You have said also in recent days that the Israel military operation is a collective punishment with Palestinians in Gaza. Because you acknowledge the brutal attack by Hamas, you've condemned it just now, I have to ask you as a former head of state: What is the expectation? What can be done when a terrorist organization invades and murders another state? And on that note, isn't it time for the UN, as other countries, the US, European countries recognize Hamas as a terror organization?

Secretary-General: Well, the recognition of terrorist organizations is done by the Security Council in the United Nations. So I said very clearly that what we had was terror attacks; so I think it's an absolutely clear, my position about those attacks. But now, let's go to your question. And your question is, for me, very simple. Those attacks were horrible, but as different Israeli leaders have been telling repeatedly, they are not fighting the Palestinian people; they are fighting Hamas. If that is the case, I cannot understand how this is conducted in such a way that has led in Gaza to reportedly around 28,000 people killed, to 75 percent of the population displaced, and to a level of destruction of entire neighbourhoods at the level that it has happened. I think that there is something wrong in the way the military operations have been conducted.

Question: But you know how Hamas is inside the civilian population. We see it in schools. We see it in hospitals. It's easier said than done.

Secretary-General: I have condemned the use of human shields. I even said that they are a violation of international humanitarian law, but the same international humanitarian law is clear that even when there are human shields, there is an obligation to protect civilians. So, in that regard, I think we are abiding by principles without double standards. And I think it's very important to be credible not to have double standards. ...

Question: ... Some people expect you to say certain words, to act in a certain way. A lot is being said about it and analyzed. According to you, how do you see your role in this? And the fact that all your calls, all your pleas for ceasefire, for food to enter Gaza, for medicine, for everything you've been saying have fallen on deaf ears, and there's no movement on the ground? In the light of all of that, does that push you maybe to re-examine, reflect on the role of the Secretary-General in a crisis like this and in the world we're living in today? And if so, what is your vision about that? And what are the forces that are stopping you from doing your job? Thank you.

Secretary-General: And that is my worst frustration. To see suffering at such a large scale and to know that I have not the power to stop it. But it is a reality. I have not the power to stop it. I can raise my voice and I do it. I can sometimes convince, but people need to be willing to be convinced. But indeed, the biggest frustration I have is not to have the power to handle these conflicts we have been discussing or at least to create the conditions for people to respect international law and International Humanitarian Law. ...

Question: ... You've also mentioned the gravity of the threat regarding Rafah, where an important part of Gaza's population is now crammed and they have nowhere to go. Do you consider Israel's onslaught to Rafah, where people have been pushed with promises of safety, a war crime? ...

Secretary-General: It is for those classifications, I leave for those that are supposed to classify — and namely for the International Court of Justice and the ICC. What I say is that, looking into the situation in Rafah, where you have now more than half of the population of Gaza that were pushed there — they didn't go because they wanted. They were pushed there. Looking at that situation, I consider that it is time to have humanitarian ceasefire before a gigantic tragedy develops in Gaza, if we have the same kind of intensity of military operations in Gaza that we have seen in Khan Younis and in other parts of Gaza territory. I mean, the same in Rafah, then. ...

Question: ... yesterday, the Israeli Prime Minister ordered the army to prepare the operation in Rafah, so they seemed determined to have the same kind of operation in Rafah that they had in Gaza City and in Khan Younis. So is there any kind of contingency plan for these more than one million people there to go somewhere else? Would you push for the opening on the border to Egypt, to save them for any kind of ground operation there?

Secretary-General: I think that we should push to avoid the tragedy, instead of pushing for things to facilitate the tragedy. ...

Secretary-General: It's about how to if we can replace UNRWA in the work that is done, namely in Gaza. First of all, UNRWA does not only work in Gaza, UNRWA works in Jordan, in Lebanon, in Syria, in the West Bank, where the school system for the Palestinians is guaranteed by UNRWA, where the health system is guaranteed by UNRWA, where vital conditions are guaranteed by UNRWA. I don't see any other organization that would be able to do all these, in all these countries, all of a sudden. But in particular, in Gaza, the backbone of the humanitarian distribution in Gaza by the United Nations are the 3,000 Gazan UNRWA staff members that are dedicated to the emergency response. Obviously, there are other staff members that were teaching or doing other functions that today are not operational, but there are 3,000 Gaza staff members that are the backbone of the humanitarian distribution inside Gaza. No other organization has a meaningful presence inside Gaza and nothing compared with this situation. So there is no other organization that would be able now to replace Gaza, occupying that space. On

the other hand, and that is that is important also for donor countries, the costs with the UNRWA are much lower than the costs with the other agencies for historical reasons. The salary is paid by UNRWA are one third of the salaries paid by UNICEF or WFP or others UN organizations, so any attempt of replacement — that is not possible; if it would be possible, it would mean a huge multiplication of the resources needed for the humanitarian action. ...

Question: ... the Gaza war has been spreading throughout Middle East, especially if you see Iran and Iran-backed groups' attacks in Syria, in Iraq, in Pakistan, Red Sea. And my question is, how do you plan to help prevent this spread? And also, do you have a message for Iran? ...

Secretary-General: I think it's very important that Iran plays a constructive role, doing everything Iran can to avoid the multiplication of these incidents. And I think it is also very important that we do what is being done by the UN and by others, in particular in relation to Lebanon to create the conditions for a negotiation aiming at the de-escalation and the stabilization of the border. Negotiations are possible. I think this is achievable, and I hope that we avoid the worst. Libya and Syria and Iraq are areas where we have less capacity to be active. On the other hand, we hope that there is also a clear de-escalation in relation to the Red Sea and we believe it's absolutely essential to re-establish the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22130.doc.htm>

Statement by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the situation in the Middle East and on the Order of the International Court of Justice of 26 January 2024, indicating provisional measures in the case concerning the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, reiterates that she remains horrified at the situation in the Middle East and at the unbearable loss of life in the region, with allegations of violations of international law.

Special Adviser Wairimu Nderitu reiterates ... [her call] for a humanitarian ceasefire, full compliance with international law and prioritization of protection of civilians and for the intensification of diplomatic efforts to put an end to this crisis. She emphasizes that "civilians should never pay the price of a conflict for which they bear no responsibility. Their most basic rights must be protected and preserved, and their humanitarian needs must be met". ...

The Special Adviser also calls all relevant actors to strengthen their resolve to find solutions to end this conflict. This requires first and foremost ensuring the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructures in accordance with international law. And includes the safe return of all hostages still held by Hamas in Gaza as well investigating acts of sexual violence reportedly committed in the context of the attacks of 7 October 2023 and their aftermath.

The Special Adviser also echoes the Secretary-General's concern over the spillover effects seen in the West Bank and across the region and urges the immediate de-escalation of tensions. "Inflammatory remarks, dehumanizing rhetoric and hate speech can only contribute to ignite further violence and reduce the space for ending the conflict. Political leaders have a special responsibility to refrain from using such hateful narratives and implement all possible measures to defuse ongoing tensions."

To read the full press release see

https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/USG_Special_Adviser_Nderitu_Middle_East_Order_ICJ_9022024.pdf

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Israel's alleged undercover killings in occupied West Bank hospital may amount to extrajudicial killings and war crimes: UN experts

Israel's apparent extrajudicial killings of three Palestinian men at the Ibn Sina hospital in the city of Jenin in the occupied West Bank may amount to grave violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, UN experts warned ...

On 29 January, around 10 armed members of the Israeli Security Agency (Shin Bet) and Israel Police reportedly entered the hospital disguised as doctors, nurses, and female civilians. They were captured on CCTV bringing a wheelchair and a doll in a baby carrier into the hospital. After entering a rehabilitation ward, Israeli forces shot dead Basel Ayman Al-Ghazawi, a patient being treated for serious injuries from an Israeli airstrike three months ago, his brother, Muhammad Ayman Al-Ghazawi, and another visitor, Muhammed Walid Jalamna.

Israel claims all three men were involved in "terrorism" by Palestinian armed groups.

"Regardless, Israel is always required to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law," the experts said.

"In occupied territory under Israeli control, outside active hostilities, at most Israeli forces may have been entitled to arrest or detain them. They could only use force if strictly necessary to prevent an imminent threat to life or serious injury. Instead, Israel chose to murder them, in flagrant violation of their right to life," they said.

In addition, under international humanitarian law, "killing a defenceless injured patient who is being treated in a hospital amounts to a war crime," the experts said, referring to Basel Ayman Al-Ghazawi.

"By disguising themselves as seemingly harmless, protected medical personnel and civilians, the Israeli forces also *prima facie* committed the war crime of perfidy, which is prohibited in all circumstances," the experts said.

"We call on Israel to conduct an effective investigation, in line with international law, with a view to prosecuting and punishing those responsible for committing, ordering, and assisting in these alleged crimes, while putting in place procedures to prevent future arbitrary killings and provide reparations to the victims," the experts said.

They emphasised the international community's long-standing concern at Israel's culture of impunity in relation to alleged international law violations by its personnel. In the absence of a prompt investigation into the killings, the experts would urge an investigation by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

"We urge all parties to fulfil their international legal obligations to ensure respect for international law, including human rights and humanitarian law in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, and to cooperate with current investigations by the International Criminal Court," the experts said.

The killings occurred amidst an alarming increase in Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in apparent violation of their right to life in the West Bank since the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel by Palestinian armed groups. This includes other interferences with medical establishments and personnel protected under international humanitarian law. UN experts have also previously noted Israel's misuse of excessive counter-terrorism laws in the West Bank, including in relation to detention and prosecution.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israels-alleged-undercover-killings-occupied-west-bank-hospital-may-amount>

Widespread destruction by Israeli Defence Forces of civilian infrastructure in Gaza: UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk

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/widespread-destruction-israeli-defence-forces-civilian-infrastructure-gaza>

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

TOP

Other Relevant Information

Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)

Jews in the UK today

<https://www.jpr.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Jews%20in%20the%20UK%20today%20-%20Feb%202024%20-%20Jewish%20identity%20report.pdf>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

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

Criminal Justice Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3511>

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

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

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

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

Genocide Determination Bill

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

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

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

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

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

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

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

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

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

Scottish Parliament

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

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

[TOP](#)

Consultations

** new or updated today

** *closes tomorrow*

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>

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