



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Point of Order

John McDonnell (Labour): ... Large numbers of our constituents have come to lobby Parliament today because the issue of Gaza is so close to their hearts. Only a limited number are being allowed into Westminster Hall, even though there is quite a sizeable amount of space, so many constituents are being forced to stand out in the rain. Would it be possible to see what could be done to accommodate more in Westminster Hall as they come in and filter on the green card system?

Madam Deputy Speaker: ... This is obviously a matter that the House authorities will be dealing with, but I will ensure that his comments are fed back to see if anything further can be done. I am sure that he will appreciate that large numbers of people trying to gain entrance can inevitably cause some delays, and I am sure we are all sorry about that. As I say, I will feed back his comments.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-21/debates/0A512089-B77B-47F8-99E2-084D422F1474/PointsOfOrder#contribution-D4A3C323-B3D4-417D-835B-A025B97DF2BD>

House of Lords Ministerial Statement and Q&A

Anti-Semitism in the UK

[The Minister's statement to the House of Commons](#) was read in the Lords.

col 686 Lord Coaker (Labour): My Lords, I thank the Government for the opportunity to discuss ... what the Government have had to say in response to the appalling levels of anti-Semitism detailed in the recent Community Security Trust reports. I know that we will all wish to thank it for the truly crucial work that it does, not only in monitoring anti-Semitism but in the physical protection that it provides for Jewish schools, synagogues and other community events. I have been to see its work myself, and it will always remain with me. In particular, there was the experience in a north London Jewish school: an alarm was sounded and we, staff and children automatically hid under desks or tables in case of a terrorist attack on the school. It was truly shocking. That was in London—in our country, in 2019, before the obvious increased tension now.

The CST reported over 4,000 individual incidents of hate crime against Jews in 2023, with 66% of those since 7 October. This is a 147% rise. Assault is up by 96%. Threats are up by 196%. Abuse is up by 149%. That is taking place in every part of the UK, as the report makes clear. ...

col 687 The Government rightly proscribed Hizb ut-Tahrir. What assessment have they made of the impact that this has had? Are there any other groups that they have considered proscribing to help deal with this extremism? ...

The Government announced a very welcome increase of £7 million of funding ... for helping to tackle anti-Semitism in education. What progress is being made in distributing this extra £7 million? ...

The Government's Statement also draws attention, quite rightly, to the shocking and totally unacceptable increase in abuse and hatred of Muslims, as highlighted by Tell MAMA and others. Funding has been made available for security at Muslim schools and mosques. Can the Minister tell us how much and how it is being distributed?

There are also questions for the Government about when we will see the new law to deal with hateful extremism. It is eight years since the counter-extremism strategy was updated ... Will the Government look again at their decision to downgrade the reporting of non-crime hate incidents, which particularly affects the recording of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia? How is it that anti-Semitism can seemingly flourish online and remain there? ...

We all agree that abuse, discrimination and hatred have no place in our society. ... I do not want to wake up, as I did yesterday, to read that a statue of Amy Winehouse has been defaced, with the Star of David covered by a pro-Palestinian sticker. ... I do not want to read, as I did today, of a Jewish couple receiving a birth certificate with "Israel" scrubbed out. ...

col 688 Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (Liberal Democrat): ... I welcome the comments on and compliments to the Community Security Trust ... It does an incredible job, not only on the statistics on which we base a lot of our information but in the security it presents to the Jewish community in the UK. I do not know whether anyone has had a chance to go to the CST's headquarters in Hendon. It has an array of television monitors that are the envy of Scotland Yard. There are rows and rows of them. How do they cope with recording things at each individual site? They are monitored and are activated by movement, so although you might have 100 monitors they may be covering 1,000 sites, because they do not come on until there is physical activity in that area. It is state of the art and quite amazing.

We all decry anti-Semitism ... It is rampant in the UK, and if it is rampant in the UK it will be rampant in organisations, including political parties. ...

It was a horrific time, on 7 October, when there was a massacre on the borders of Gaza, in Israel. People were killed, murdered and slaughtered. A couple of hundred people were taken hostage, some of them from a music festival. The other day, I met here in this House a woman in her early 20s who was at that music festival—a gig that many of us, our children or our grandchildren might have gone to if it had been in the UK. She survived because she was underneath all the dead bodies. What trauma that is. That is a harsh example of anti-Semitism.

... Israel had not yet responded on 7 October but there were 31 incidents of anti-Semitism in the UK that day. This continued until it peaked on 11 October, with 80 incidents in the UK. The week following 7 October saw 416 anti-Semitic incidents. The speed and number of these incidents on or after 7 October appear to show that this increase in anti-Jewish hate—that is what it is—was a celebration of Hamas’s attack. ... The subsequent response has added fuel to the flames.

I have seen this anti-Semitism in my own locality. There is a kosher supermarket which I patronise. ... a man with a knife attacked the shop owners in Golders Green. ... in a theatre in London, where the stand-up comedian decided, as part of his act, to wave a Ukrainian and a Palestinian flag, and invited the members of the audience to stand up and clap those flags. One guy in the audience was an Israeli, there enjoying the show, and he did not stand up—he did not make a fuss but he did not stand up. The comedian picked him out and he and the audience forced the guy out. The anti-Semitism forced him out of the theatre. ...

col 689 I understand what is sometimes behind many of the people on the marches which take place—a horror at the Palestinians’ suffering in Gaza. I sympathise with and understand that. But I must say that, as an Orthodox Jew in the UK, I am reminded somewhat of the Duke of Wellington’s comment “I don’t know what effect they will have on the enemy but by God they frighten me”. ... At the moment, there are Jewish parents who are not sending their children to their Jewish schools because they are frightened. If they are sending them, they are telling them not to wear the school blazers or their yarmulkes—their head covering—because it will identify them. This is the UK, this is the country we live in, and this is not how it should be. ...

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom): ... Anti-Semitism is deplorable, and it is worse now than I have ever known it.

I turn to the late, great Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, formerly of your Lordships’ House, for some words to sum up my feelings on this. ...

“Jews cannot fight antisemitism alone. The victim cannot cure the crime. The hated cannot cure the hate. It would be the greatest mistake for Jews to believe that they can fight it alone. The only people who can successfully combat antisemitism are those active in the cultures that harbour it. Antisemitism begins with Jews, but it never ends with them. A world without room for Jews is one that has no room for difference, and a world that lacks space for difference lacks space for humanity itself”.

I think that is very powerful. ...

col 690 I also join the noble Lord, Lord Palmer, in noting that the rise in some of these incidents spiked after 7 October, but before there had been any military response by Israel, which really illustrates the pernicious nature of what we are talking about. ...

The terrorist atrocities carried out against the people of Israel are of course horrifying, and anti-Semitism in British society will not be tolerated. This extends to our schools, colleges and universities. So the department is working with all relevant authorities to keep Jewish pupils, students and educational staff safe. We are providing an additional £3 million for the Community Security Trust to provide additional security at Jewish schools, synagogues and other Jewish community buildings. The Government’s Educate Against Hate website provides support for pupils to challenge racist and discriminatory beliefs, and we are due to imminently send letters to schools outlining advice on managing sensitive discussions around anti-Semitism.

The funding for the Community Security Trust will be maintained next year, with a total of £36 million available for the protection of UK Jewish communities between 2023-24 and 2024-25. ...

... the Community Security Trust ... pointed out, in a very powerful comment, that in most schools the alarms are for people to get out. In Jewish schools, they are for people to stay in and hide under a table. ...

The Government have made an additional £4.9 million of funding available for protective security at mosques and Muslim faith schools, which brings the total funding to £29.4 million for both 2023-24 and 2024-25. We obviously have to listen to the concerns with the same attentiveness. ...

col/ 691 ... Tell MAMA ... has been supported by DLUHC to the tune of £6 million, I think, since its inception. ...

That the police are fully aware of their powers has been repeatedly demonstrated, most recently with respect to a convoy planned from the north of England to north London, many parts of which have Jewish communities. The police stopped that convoy because they were concerned it would inflame tensions and engage in intimidatory behaviour. Under Sections 12 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 the police have powers to impose conditions on protests to prevent specific consequences, including serious public disorder, serious disruption to the life of the community or intimidation. The police can impose any condition they deem necessary to prevent these harms occurring and have made repeated use of these powers—for example, to prohibit protests outside the Israeli embassy and to ensure that vulnerable communities are protected.

The recent protests have seen a small minority dedicated to causing damage and intimidating the law-abiding majority. We respect the right to protest, which we regard as paramount in our country, but dangerous behaviour must not be tolerated. ...

However, we need to be very careful when we are criticising the police for actions they may or may not have taken at individual marches. It is difficult to judge what it is like when you are in a protest and trying to police it. We should trust the police. ...

The noble Lord, Lord Coaker, asked about the hate crime strategy and action plan. We are not intending to publish a new plan at this time, but we remain committed to continuing to protect all communities from crime, and we have a number of programmes in place to do so. ...

col/ 692 As regards non-crime hate incidents, the Government introduced a new code of practice to make the processes surrounding the recording and retention of personal data subject to stronger safeguards. The code better protects the right to freedom of expression, while respecting the operational importance of NCHI recording for the police in protecting vulnerable people and communities from harm. However, the code makes it clear that instances that include personal data can and should be recorded if the event presents a real risk of significant harm and if there is a real risk that future criminal offences may be committed. We would like to make it absolutely clear that the code relates only to non-crime hate incidents; it does not amend the hate crime framework in any way, shape or form.

The noble Lord, Lord Coaker, asked about the birth certificate incident that was widely reported. I happened to be with the Home Secretary when we were made aware of that, and he immediately asked officials to investigate the matter. Appropriate action will be taken, but at the moment investigations are ongoing.

On online hate crime, again the Government are clear that online offending is as serious as offline offending. We have very robust legislation in place to deal with threatening and abusive behaviour or behaviour which is intended or likely to stir up hatred. This applies whether it takes place online or offline. ...

The Government have worked with the police to fund True Vision, which is an online hate crime reporting portal, designed so that victims of hate crime do not have to visit a police station to report. ...

col/ 693 **Lord Mann (Non-affiliated):** ... In my view, there is a sinister change in what is

going on with anti-Semitism beyond the noise, which is bad enough: it is the very specific, organised and co-ordinated targeting of individual Jewish people, at work and in their accommodation, in ways that we have never seen before. I do not mean awful random violent acts of anti-Semitism, which of course are dangerous and threatening for all of us and something that we need to deal with, but the co-ordinated targeting of people, isolating them and organising pile-ons to force them out of workplaces—in some cases off student courses and in other cases out of accommodation, but particularly from the workplace. That co-ordination is something that we have not seen in this country. ...

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: ... I completely agree. The targeted stuff that he refers to is a particularly pernicious form of anti-Semitism, and I too have seen evidence of it. The police are aware of it, and I hope they will crack down on the perpetrators. ...

Baroness Lawlor (Conservative): ... The noble Lord, Lord Coaker, referred to the reported figures of anti-Semitic incidents being up by 147% last year on the previous year. ... By Monday 9 October other crimes were on the increase. A piece of graffiti was sprayed on a bridge in Golders Green, saying “Free Palestine”. I ask the Minister: what steps have been taken to find the perpetrators of each of the incidents that have been reported and recorded? No perpetrator should go without the sanction of the law. ...

In today’s protest outside Parliament, crowds were chanting “Free Palestine” and waving Palestine flags. They were right up to the metal barriers of this Parliament. Does the Minister not consider that if the police do not have the powers under the Public Order Act 1986 to impose conditions, perhaps that Act might be considered so that such conditions could involve moving those crowds across the road, so that they are not intimidating people trying to get into Parliament? ...

col 694 Do the Government not think it a stain on the honour not only of the country but of the way we are conducting our policing for such marches and intimidation to take place? There is a very fine line dividing the words “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” from the slogans we see on the railings at our entries to Parliament of “Free Palestine” and the flag waving. ...

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: ... Crowd policing is a very difficult thing to do, for obvious reasons. In some cases, I would absolutely defend the police’s right to carefully gather evidence and consult the experts whom they have available to them before potentially inflaming tensions ...

... we are confident that the police have the right powers. ...

Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated): ... We almost cannot describe how serious the mood is at the moment. This is a serious time, historically, in terms of anti-Semitism, and this is not just some rhetorical flourish. I want to have that on record.

col 695 I am not frightened by the phrase “Free Palestine”, and I do not want to give the Minister any more excuses to clamp down on demonstrations or free speech ... However, it is grim, or maybe fitting, that this Statement on the frightening rise of anti-Semitism is against the backdrop of the debate today on a Gaza ceasefire in the other place—albeit performative, because I note that not one life will be saved and there will not be a ceasefire as a consequence of this. That debate descended into a nasty mood of sectarianism. Worse, tonight we are hearing dark allegations that physical threats were made to elected Members, poisoning the democratic procedures of this Parliament. ...

A much smaller incident that I would like the Minister to comment on is one that cheered me up. It might sound minor, but, after the unpleasant incident earlier this week of the Star of David necklace on the statue of Amy Winehouse being covered up ... it was so shocking, even though it seemed so small—I was pleased to see that a non-Jewish member of the public had gone out of their way to skive off work and scrape off the sticker from the statue. I know that because it was reported by the group Our Fight, a new grass-roots campaign of non-Jews challenging British anti-Semitism, which was set up after 7 October.

Would the Minister agree on the importance of such solidarity, which cuts across identity

politics and all sorts of party tribalism? ...

So much of the anti-Semitism we are seeing today, and much of the reaction to the war in Gaza, is, I am sad to say, around religious and racial identity and some of the most divisive, regressive sides of society. We should call for a universal condemnation of the racism of anti-Semitism.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: ... I think this goes back to what I said when I quoted Rabbi Sacks. He pointed out that anti-Semitism may begin with the Jews but it does not end there, so it is for all of us to combat it.

Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative): ... I was talking to a beauty journalist yesterday and she was telling me of the tweets going around about beauty products, telling people not to buy from certain businesses as they are owned by a Jewish person and not to buy from certain businesses as they are owned by a person who supports Israel. It is biting, and it is not just beauty products but clothing products and any Jewish business. This is truly shocking. This last happened 70 years ago. It is spiralling out of control. Jewish businesses are being targeted because they are owned by Jewish people, and people are responding to it. I do not know what the Government can do about that.

col 696 As I mentioned earlier in this Chamber, I am president of Westminster Synagogue. On Saturday, the police told us that they would protect us. They sent 20 police officers and four vans, because the demonstration walked past our synagogue, and they felt that was necessary. That demonstration included people chanting anti-Semitic slogans and the expression "From the river to the sea", which means genocide of the Jewish people in the State of Israel. Of course, the police did not do anything to stop those chants and protests. They did, however, take one person away. That person was standing behind a railing with a banner saying, " Hamas are terrorists". He was manhandled by the police, his arms were locked and he was walked away. My noble friend the Minister says that the police are restricted in what they can do; they seem to be selective in deciding what to do. ...

I add that it was extremely disheartening to see the disgraced academic David Miller allowed to tweet out his vile abuse of Jewish charities, and it was very disappointing that the University of Bristol failed in its case. One can only think that it did not try particularly hard. ...

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: ... it is very difficult to second-guess the police after the fact. ... The decision obviously has to be context specific. But the police are accountable for their actions ... we are all right to question the police, after the fact, about why they did what they did, how they did it and all the rest of the operational matters that they have to remain responsible for. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-21/debates/67AE80B8-12CB-4EC5-B59D-5D9D6B729FC7/Anti-SemitismInTheUK>

The CST report referred to above can be read at

https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic_Incidents_Report_2023.pdf

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

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

The Non-Crime Hate Incidents: Code of Practice, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice-on-the-recording-and-retention-of-personal-data-accessible>

The True Vision hate crime reporting portal referred to above can be read at

https://www.report-it.org.uk/your_police_force

House of Lords Oral Answers

Hate Crimes

Baroness Hussein-Ece (Liberal Democrat): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of any increase in the number incidents of race and faith-based hate crimes, and whether they intend to introduce a new hate crime action plan.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Baroness Penn): My Lords, hate crimes recorded by the police decreased by 5% last year. This reflects the crime survey statistics, which show a decline in hate crime reported over the last 15 years. Since 7 October, British Jews and Muslims have reported incidents in increased numbers. This is unacceptable, and we continue to work closely with communities. We are not intending to publish a hate crime strategy. We remain committed to cutting crime and protecting all communities.

Baroness Hussein-Ece: My Lords, I thank the Minister for that response, but, as she said, hate crime has spiked very recently, and we know that hate crimes are chronically underreported in the UK and that many victims feel disempowered by existing reporting services. In the Government's last hate crime action plan of 2016, they pledged to increase the reporting of hate crimes and encourage more people from under-reported groups to come forward. What is happening about that? Can the Minister tell the House whether this work has been reviewed in the last eight years and whether reporting and prosecutions have indeed improved? Will the Government introduce a comprehensive strategy to ensure vulnerable groups feel protected and supported in law?

Baroness Penn: My Lords, we have seen an increase in reporting and recording of hate crime over the last decade or so. There has been a small decrease in the last year, but, overall, that is partly reflective of the fact that we have put additional efforts into encouraging people to come forward. That includes through supporting charities such as the Community Security Trust but also Tell MAMA, which we fund, which is an organisation that focuses on anti-Muslim hatred and provides a different route by which people can report crimes and incidents and then get the appropriate support.

Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative): ... I am president of Westminster Synagogue. This Saturday, we had 20 policemen and four vans to protect us as a demonstration went past Knightsbridge. Does my noble friend agree that these demonstrations, with anti-Semitic slogans and rhetoric calling for genocide against the State of Israel, need to be controlled and curtailed so that British Jews can once again feel safe and secure in the streets of London?

Baroness Penn: My Lords, I think my noble friend's experience bears out the statistics that we saw announced by the Community Security Trust last week, showing the highest number of reported anti-Semitic incidents on record in 2023, with the majority of these being reported from 7 October. There is no place on British streets for demonstrations, convoys or flag-waving that glorify terrorism or harass the Jewish community, and we will work closely with the police, who we urge to step up patrols and use all available powers to enforce the law.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench): My Lords, the current practice of giving government funding to more vocal communities to collect figures to show that they are more hated than others is a waste of that funding. Does the Minister agree that a better approach would be to tackle the underlying ignorance on which prejudice thrives by stressing, in the teaching of RE in schools and elsewhere, the large number of important ethical commonalities between different faiths to show that the superficial differences are very insignificant?

Baroness Penn: My Lords, the Government committed to break down the recording of hate crime first by religion and then more recently by race. That

provides us with an important insight into the experiences of different communities, which can be quite different across the country. Where I agree with the noble Lord is that part of the solution to some of these issues is focusing on where we have more in common than what divides us. We should emphasise that, particularly in our schools.

The Lord Bishop of Chichester: My Lords, this is an extremely difficult time, in which we hear profoundly disturbing reports of the rise in race and faith-based hate crimes. Tomorrow, the board of the UK's Inter Faith Network will meet to confirm its closure following the withdrawal of funding by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This comes at a time when we urgently need to promote interfaith dialogue and the expansion of religious literacy in schools, as has been mentioned, and elsewhere. What assessment have His Majesty's Government made of the impact of the closure of the Inter Faith Network, and what will replace it?

Baroness Penn: My Lords, the Government fund a number of organisations to work in the space. On the Inter Faith Network specifically, the Secretary of State decided to withdraw the offer of funding for this year due to the appointment of a member of the Muslim Council of Britain to the board of trustees of the IFN. Successive Governments have had a long-standing policy of non-engagement with the MCB.

Therefore, the appointment of an MCB member to the core governance structure of a government-funded organisation informed that decision.

Lord Turnberg (Labour): My Lords, following the previous question, would it not be helpful if the leadership of the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities made a joint statement about how abhorrent racial hatred really is?

Baroness Penn: I know of many efforts across the country, locally and nationally, to bring leaders of different faiths together and make statements of unity. That is something the Government continue to support.

Baroness Deech (Crossbench): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Mann, issued a report on anti-Semitism not long ago which made very useful recommendations, including teaching about anti-Semitism and Jewish history in school. Would that not be a far better approach than focusing entirely on Holocaust education, which places everything in the past, far away, nothing to do with us today?

Baroness Penn: My Lords, one of the most recent announcements from the Government in this area is indeed additional funding through the Department for Education to schools to increase education around this area. That is something the DfE is taking forward.

Lord Kamall (Conservative): My Lords, when the Government look at their hate crime strategy, how much of it do they think they can achieve in a top-down way from central government, and how much can they achieve in working with local community organisations, so that it is a bottom-up approach to tackling hate crimes?

Baroness Penn: My noble friend is absolutely right that working at a local level is key to giving people more confidence in reporting, but it is also really important in thinking about solutions to these issues. One of the things that my department has been doing, in particular since 7 October, is regular engagement with local authorities to understand what is going on in their area, examples of best practice we can help share, and any particular issues that they are aware of that we can provide more support on.

Baroness Taylor of Stevenage (Labour): My Lords, news reports this week of a baby's passport application being returned from the Home Office to its parents with its birthplace, Israel, scribbled out and the application torn, and a statue of Amy Winehouse being defaced with a Palestinian flag sticker placed over her Star of David, are more evidence of the increase in anti-Semitic incidents reported by the CST. The Government's downgrading of recording of non-crime hate incidents limits the police's ability to monitor

and prevent escalation within communities. Can the Minister tell the House whether the Government will support Labour's plan to reinstate full collection details for all hate incidents?

Baroness Penn: My Lords, I have not had the same feedback as the noble Baroness. As I say, it was this Government that brought in the disaggregation of hate crimes by different religions to help provide insight into the experience of different communities. We provide ongoing support and funding to the CST in its work, and we have regular engagement with the police to understand what the picture is in local areas. I will look at the issue the noble Baroness raises, and also understand from the feedback and conversations we have what impact that has. ...

Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated): My Lords, will the Minister acknowledge that there are real problems in terms of legislating against hate as a crime, because it can be used to silence opposition? One of our fellow Peers has recently been accused of, and in fact punished for, bigotry, when bad-faith activists wilfully labelled a tweet against Islamists—that is Hamas—as Islamophobic. Conversely, while I consider that the virulent rhetoric and abuse directed at Zionism is often—usually—thinly disguised anti-Semitism, the same legitimate criticism of Israel is being curtailed. Should we avoid using the law, and instead argue back and condemn loudly?

Baroness Penn: My Lords, we have both systems in place. We fully support lawful freedom of speech; it generates rigorous debate and is incredibly important to our society. But it is not an absolute right, and does not include the right to harass others or incite them to violence or terrorism. It is possible to both have in place laws against hate crime while protecting and respecting freedom of speech. Sometimes the implementation of that is a carefully balanced judgment, and that is something we all need to take care with.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-21/debates/BF2CF250-895F-44F8-BACA-1D824A464C93/HateCrimes>

The Hate Crime Action Plan referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f8db94a8fa8f56ad07d1152/2016_Hate_Crime_Action_Plan.pdf

The CST statistics referred to above can be read at

https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic_Incidents_Report_2023.pdf

Lord Mann's reports referred to above can be read at

<https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Understanding-Jewish-Experience-in-Higher-Education.pdf>

and

<https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/A-Good-Practice-Guide.pdf>

Northern Ireland Assembly Oral Answer

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

Cara Hunter (SDLP) [AQO 33/22-27] To ask the Minister for Communities for his assessment of the impact the provisions in the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill will have on local government.

Minister for Communities (Gordon Lyons): The purpose of the Bill, which will extend to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, is to prevent public bodies, when making decisions about procurement and investment, from considering a country or territory of origin or other territorial considerations in a way that indicates political or moral disapproval of a foreign state.

District councils in Northern Ireland are already prevented from considering country or territory of origin in their procurement contracts under Article 19 of the Local

Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 1992.

The ban imposed by the Bill differs from that in the 1992 Order in that it covers investment as well as procurement.

I have asked my officials to keep me informed of any changes to the Bill, as it progresses through its parliamentary stages, which may have an impact on councils here.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=389582>

The Order referred to above can be read at

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1992/810/contents>

Tell Mama

Greatest Rise in Reported Anti-Muslim Hate Cases to Tell MAMA since Oct 7th

... Tell MAMA recorded over 2,000 anti-Muslim cases in the four months that followed Hamas's deadly terror attacks on October 7. This is the largest recorded number of cases in four months, since Tell MAMA was founded in 2011.

... Tell MAMA can confirm that in total, of the 2,010 cases post October 7th 2023, 901 occurred offline with 1,109 online cases. In comparison with the same timescale a year earlier, this demonstrates a 335% increase in anti-Muslim hate cases. ...

Tell MAMA received 576 cases in London, 71 in the northwest, 27 in South Yorkshire, 39 in West Yorkshire, 33 in the East Midlands and 41 in the West Midlands. In other areas, like the Southeast, we recorded 26 and in the Southwest of England, we recorded 27 cases. The final geographic areas concern Scotland (21), Wales (9), and the Northeast (31).

... Tell MAMA received 535 cases of abusive behaviour, 77 threats, 83 assaults, 79 acts of vandalism, 69 cases of discrimination, 39 acts of hate speech and 19 examples of anti-Muslim literature. And in over 65% of these cases, women were the target of such attacks. This once again demonstrates that British Muslim women have borne the majority of the brunt of anti-Muslim hate during this time. ...

Statement by the Director of Tell MAMA – Iman Atta OBE: “We are deeply concerned about the impacts that the Israel and Gaza war are having on hate crimes and on social cohesion in the U.K. Hate crimes against British Muslims have substantially risen and our data clearly demonstrates this. This rise in anti-Muslim hate is unacceptable and we hope that political leaders speak out to send a clear message that anti-Muslim hate, like antisemitism, is unacceptable in our country. There really is no space for hate and more than ever, it is essential that we sustain, nurture and protect the bonds that we have between communities, so that we all feel valued and safe in our communities and in our country”. ...

Examples of street-level abuse and harassment ... include a case of a Muslim woman in Islamic clothing who described the assault she faced when on a bus in East London. During the assault one of the perpetrators made inflammatory statements to her including, “you Muslims are troublemakers”. ...

In another London-based case, a woman described how someone vandalized their car with a Nazi swastika. ...

Tell MAMA is also liaising with Durham Police over a written death threat to worshippers at a mosque in Darlington on the 29th of December. ...

Another case included the targeting of a Muslim family home after someone daubed “Hamas” on their front door. ...

In the online world, comparisons continue to show a sharp rise in reported cases. For example, in January 2023 Tell MAMA received 18 online anti-Muslim hate cases. In January 2024, we received 70 cases.

... we continued to record cases on public transport. One case of note is the targeting of

individuals expressing visible support for Palestine (be it wearing a badge or carrying a Palestinian flag) who faced abuse, including anti-Muslim slurs like being a “terrorist”. Statements by far right sympathisers post October 7th have included comments around demonstrations for a Gaza ceasefire that have included, “f*** off” to a Muslim country and do so”.

We also note that X, (formerly known as Twitter), suspended an account that asked users “Who’d win in the upcoming civil war in Britain?” providing two options: “British” or “Muslim”; the post attracted various replies from individuals who expressed overt anti-Muslim sentiments, boasted Crusader imagery in their bios and who made racialised and extremist comments about Muslim communities. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://tellmamauk.org/greatest-rise-in-reported-anti-muslim-hate-cases-to-tell-mama-since-oct-7th/>

TOP

Holocaust

Scottish Parliament Oral Answer

Henry Wuga

Jackson Carlaw (Conservative): Will the First Minister join me in offering congratulations to my constituent Henry Wuga? Henry escaped the Nazi Holocaust, travelling from Nuremberg to Glasgow in 1939 at the age of 15. Here, he met his wife, Ingrid, who was also a survivor as a consequence of the Kindertransport and events that were celebrated in the film “One Life”, starring Sir Anthony Hopkins.

Tomorrow, Henry turns 100 years of age. He has made a remarkable contribution to this country. I have lodged a motion that is supported by Paul O’Kane, and Kirsten Oswald MP is tabling a similar motion in the House of Commons. Will the First Minister join me and, I hope, the chamber, in offering Henry Wuga many happy returns? [*Applause.*]

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Yes. I wish Henry Wuga a very happy 100th birthday; indeed, I have written to him to pass on my personal congratulations.

Jackson Carlaw is right. Henry Wuga is an absolute inspiration. Just weeks ago, Jackson Carlaw, many other members in the chamber and I commemorated Holocaust memorial day. We heard very powerful testimony from a number of those who were either survivors or families of survivors of the Holocaust and other genocides.

The work that Henry has done over the decades to remind and inform people of the horrors of the Holocaust—which should never ever be forgotten by any of us—is truly an inspiration for each and every person in this country.

I pass on my congratulations and best wishes for Henry’s birthday, and I put on record my, the Scottish Government’s, and the whole country’s appreciation for the incredible work that he has done. In particular, he has reminded us of the horrors of the Holocaust and said that we should never ever forget them, that we should reflect on them and, of course, that wherever we see violence or discrimination—be it here at home or abroad—we should work together to ensure that we see peace right across the world. [*Applause.*]

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15714&i=134081#ScotParIOR>

TOP

Israel

See also the Commons Point of Order, Lords Ministerial Statement and Q&A “Antisemitism in the UK”, oral answers “Hate Crime”, and Tell Mama press release that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Debate

Ceasefire in Gaza

col 723 **Mr Speaker (Lindsay Hoyle):** ... I think it is important on this occasion that the House is able to consider the widest possible range of options. I have therefore decided to select the amendments both in the name of the Prime Minister and in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

Because the operation of Standing Order No. 31 would prevent another amendment from being moved after the Government have moved their amendment, I will, exceptionally, call the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson to move their amendment at the beginning of the debate, once the SNP spokesperson has moved their motion. At the end of the debate, the House will have an opportunity to take a decision on the official Opposition amendment. If that is agreed to, there will be a final Question on the main motion, as amended.

If the official Opposition amendment is not agreed to, I will call the Minister to move the Government amendment formally. ... That will engage the provisions of Standing Order No. 31, so the next vote will be on the original words in the SNP motion. If that is not agreed to, the House will have the opportunity to vote on the Government amendment. Proceeding in this way will allow a vote to take place, potentially, on the proposals from each of the three main parties. ...

col 724 Finally, I should tell the House that in my opinion the operation of Standing Order No. 31, which governs the way amendments to Opposition day motions are dealt with, reflects an outdated approach that restricts the options that can be put to the House. It is my intention to ask the Procedure Committee to consider its operation. ...

Brendan O’Hara (SNP): I beg to move, That this House calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and Israel; notes with shock and distress that the death toll has now risen beyond 28,000, the vast majority of whom were women and children; further notes that there are currently 1.5 million Palestinians sheltering in Rafah, 610,000 of whom are children; also notes that they have nowhere else to go; condemns any military assault on what is now the largest refugee camp in the world; further calls for the immediate release of all hostages taken by Hamas and an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people; and recognises that the only way to stop the slaughter of innocent civilians is to press for a ceasefire now.

Our motion calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, from all combatants. I wish to put on record, once again, our unequivocal condemnation of the Hamas attack of 7 October, and to repeat our call both for the immediate release of all the hostages and for seeing those involved in those atrocities called to account for their actions. ...

col 725 No one would deny that Israel has the right to defend itself—every country has that right. What no country has the right to do, however, is lay siege to a civilian population, carpet-bomb densely inhabited areas, drive people from their homes, erase an entire civilian infrastructure, and impose a collective punishment involving the cutting off of water, electricity, food, and medicine from civilians. And no country, regardless of who it is, can, in the name of self-defence, kill civilians at such a pace, and on such a scale, that in just 16 weeks almost 30,000 are known to have died, with a further 80,000 injured. We cannot allow the core principle of self-defence to be so ruthlessly exploited and manipulated in order to legitimise the slaughter of innocent civilians. ...

If we accept what Israel is doing in Gaza as the new norm—as the new accepted standard of self-defence—we undermine that core principle, which is meant to protect and defend us. ...

Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat): ... Each night, we all watch the torture of the people in Gaza with horror, and we remember every morning the pain being felt by the families whose loved ones are being held hostage. ...

col 726 **Colum Eastwood (SDP):** ... On Monday, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released a statement saying that UN experts had uncovered that Israeli forces in Gaza and the west bank are being accused of egregious human rights abuses, including arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings and sexual violence, including rape. The Israeli Government, of course, have dismissed this without any investigation. Does the hon. Member agree that this Government should be pushing hard for a proper investigation for people to be held to account for these kinds of gross human rights abuses?

Brendan O'Hara: I absolutely agree ... whether it is a perceived ally or a perceived foe, an egregious breach of human rights is an egregious breach of human rights and should be taken as exactly that and investigated without fear or favour.

Ian Blackford (SNP): ... The issue is one of principle for those who are facing famine and death in Gaza. It is important that all of us across this House show the appropriate leadership, come together and speak up against the human rights abuses that are taking place, and woe betide any of us who fail to show that leadership. ...

Brendan O'Hara: ... Voting for an immediate ceasefire today will not by itself bring about an end to the slaughter, but the impact, and the impact on the optics, of this Parliament, hitherto one of Israel's staunchest allies, saying that enough is enough, and calling for an immediate ceasefire, would be enormous. ... [it] would further remove that ever-thinning veil of legitimacy that the UK's continued support gives to Israel's merciless war in Gaza. It would also show the beleaguered and battered people of Palestine that we care and we have not forgotten them. ...

Alexander Stafford (Conservative): ... Does he not agree with me that the only way—the most certain way—of ending this conflict is for Hamas to release the hostages, including a nine-month-old baby who was kidnapped by Hamas? ...

col 727 **Brendan O'Hara:** ... we utterly condemn the Hamas attack and we implore them to release the hostages, but there has to be a pathway to reaching that. ...

It is moments like these that shape the ethical identity of a country. It is the decisions that we take now that will reverberate down the decades, and they will define who we are and what we stand for. That is why we are calling so clearly and unambiguously for an immediate ceasefire. Anything else pre-supposes that there can be a military solution to this conflict. Any other form of words threatens to give credence to the idea that Israel's deploying its massive military capacity in Gaza will somehow be enough to destroy Hamas. ...

Julian Lewis (Conservative): ... I could understand the hon. Gentleman's argument better if he were talking about what the Americans seem to call a temporary ceasefire to see whether more hostages could be released, but he appears to be calling for an unconditional ceasefire ... which would leave all the hostages at the mercy of Hamas. Does that not put Israel in the position where previously it has had to release 1,000 people who had been criminally convicted in order to get one soldier back? Indeed, one of the people Israel released was the person who organised the Hamas atrocities on 7 October.

Brendan O'Hara: ... there has to be a roadway—a path—towards peace, and that has to start with an immediate ceasefire. ...

Joanna Cherry (SNP): ... the rules of international law are very clear ... the use of self-defence must be proportionate, and by any view, 30,000 civilians dead, the majority of whom are women and children, is excessive and not a proportionate use of force.

col 728 **Brendan O’Hara:** ... If we accept Israel’s response as the new norm, the danger that everybody across the world, regardless of their circumstances, will be put in is terrifying. ...

... no one can argue with any credibility for what they used to call, and some people still do call, “humanitarian pauses”—the convoluted idea of organised fixed-term pauses in the killing that would allow emergency aid into Gaza, only for the carnage to resume at a prearranged date and time. That should be seen for what it always was: a smokescreen ... Well, we have seen the way public opinion is blowing, across the world and here in the UK, with millions taking to the streets, and polls showing 75%-plus support for an immediate ceasefire. ... Consequently, the UK’s international reputation has been so diminished that when the process of finding a just, lasting peace in the region begins, the UK will struggle to play a meaningful part in it. ...

An immediate ceasefire has already been endorsed by [a long list of organisations] who have seen Israel completely abandon international humanitarian law by imposing collective punishment on a defenceless civilian population. ... In just 16 weeks, an estimated 18,000 Palestinian children have been left without a single living relative.

col 729 **Afzal Khan (Labour):** The only way we can ensure a permanent end to the cycle of violence is by facilitating the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel. The main blocker to that is Prime Minister Netanyahu ... Does the hon. Member agree that the UK must show strong opposition to Netanyahu’s plans by unilaterally recognising the state of Palestine as a matter of urgency?

Brendan O’Hara: I could not agree more ...

Thirty-year-old Islam Harb lost three of his four children, along with his mother, two of his sisters and both his brothers when a missile hit their home. Islam said: “my family spent days trying to dig the remains of the dead out of the rubble. The body of my brother Khalil was found 200m away from the house due to the power of the strike, in pieces. My children’s small bodies were torn to pieces.”

His surviving sister, Ahlam, added: “My brother Mohammed...was only recognized by his hair; nothing was left of my brother Khalil except his hand”.

Thirty-year-old Ahmad Nasman, a physiotherapist in Gaza, lost his wife and their three children, aged five, four, and just three months, along with both of his parents and his sister when a missile hit their home. He said it took him four days to retrieve the body of his baby daughter Ayla from the rubble; she was only recognised by the clothes she was wearing. The same blast decapitated his five-year-old daughter, Arwa. ...

That is why it will be times like these for which we are all remembered. We will be remembered for what we did, or for what we chose not to do. ...

col 730 We will also say that we chose to listen. We listened to the International Court of Justice when it determined that there were plausible grounds that Israel is in the process of committing genocide. We listened to the anguished pleas of innocent Palestinians begging for our help to make it stop. We listened to the anger of millions of people from across these islands. And then we used our immensely privileged position as Members of this House to demand an immediate ceasefire. ...

David Lammy (Labour): I beg to move amendment (a), to leave out from “House” to end and add “believes that an Israeli ground offensive in Rafah risks catastrophic humanitarian consequences and therefore must not take place; notes the intolerable loss of Palestinian life, the majority being women and children; condemns the terrorism of Hamas who continue to hold hostages; supports Australia, Canada and New Zealand’s calls for Hamas to release and return all hostages and for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, which means an immediate stop to the fighting and a ceasefire that lasts and is observed by all sides, noting that Israel cannot be expected to cease fighting if Hamas continues with violence and that Israelis have the right to the assurance that the horror of 7 October 2023 cannot happen again; therefore supports diplomatic mediation efforts to achieve a lasting

ceasefire; demands that rapid and unimpeded humanitarian relief is provided in Gaza; further demands an end to settlement expansion and violence; urges Israel to comply with the International Court of Justice's provisional measures; calls for the UN Security Council to meet urgently; and urges all international partners to work together to establish a diplomatic process to deliver the peace of a two-state solution, with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable Palestinian state, including working with international partners to recognise a Palestinian state as a contribution to rather than outcome of that process, because statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and not in the gift of any neighbour."

... It is with pain and sadness that this House gathers today—the pain and sadness of war that has gone on too long. It is now 137 days since the appalling 7 October massacre, and since that day, the killing has gone on. Flattened cities, ransacked kibbutzim, teeming refugee camps, hostages in chains—we have seen it all on our TV and phone screens. A ground offensive in Rafah would be a humanitarian disaster, a moral catastrophe and a strategic mistake. It must not happen. ...

col 731 ... all violence against civilians must now stop. That is why Labour is saying unequivocally that we need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to end the bloodshed and the suffering.

Clive Betts (Labour): We all want to see the fighting stopped. We cannot begin to imagine the horrors of what will happen if Israel goes into Rafah. The problem, as I think we can all imagine, is that Israel might ignore international opinion and do just that. Can we start to think about what action we will take—what sanctions we will propose—against Israel if it does that? ...

David Lammy: ... the UN is meeting to discuss those very issues. I think we in this Chamber can all agree that, were that to happen, particularly over Ramadan, as is being indicated at the moment by the Israeli Government, it would be a catastrophic mistake. Labour supports an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, a stop to fighting by both sides now, the release of hostages, a surge of aid into Gaza, and a two-state solution. ...

col 732 Let me turn to the SNP motion. It expresses our common desire for the fighting and the suffering to stop, but as drafted ... it does not address how the fighting will not restart. It calls for an end to the war, but it does not lay out a path to a sustainable peace. ... For any ceasefire to work, it must, by necessity, be observed by both sides, or it is not a ceasefire. That is why we are clear that Israel cannot be expected to cease fighting if Hamas continue with violence. Israelis have the right to the assurance that the horror of 7 October cannot happen again. ...

Charles Walker (Conservative): ... The problem is that we in this House do not have operational control over the combatants. This war will end when both sides are exhausted, decide that they want it to end, and lay down their arms. ... Brendan O'Hara ... read out a very long charge sheet against Israel, but at the end of the day, Hamas are using their own people—men, women and children—as human shields, and they know what they are doing.

Alan Brown (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman ... cannot demand an immediate ceasefire and also that the ceasefire must be permanent, because we cannot guarantee that. Surely, if the right hon. Gentleman wants it to be a permanent ceasefire, that allows the carnage to continue and Gaza to be wiped from the map.

David Lammy: ... the Labour party is calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. ...

col 733 **Colum Eastwood:** ... people are dying today. We have to call for an immediate ceasefire right now ...

Mhairi Black (SNP): ... I ... want to know why the Labour motion includes a caveat that notes that "Israel cannot be expected to cease fighting if Hamas continues with violence". Hamas is not the people of Palestine, so why is that line in the Labour amendment?

David Lammy: ... it is crystal clear that if we expect Israel to lay down its arms, we must ask Hamas to do the same.

Steve Double (Conservative): ... there was a ceasefire on 6 October, which was broken by Hamas. The previous ceasefire at the end of last year was also broken by Hamas, so why does the right hon. Gentleman have any faith that if a ceasefire were agreed now, Hamas would stick to it?

David Lammy: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, but let us be clear: the last pause came before there had been any release of any hostages. It came at a point when very little humanitarian aid was going into Gaza, and it is because of that pause that we saw some hostages released—Hamas did stop the rocket fire at that point. ...

col 734 Turning to the Government's amendment, again, there are elements that we agree with, but there is a serious omission: its failure to call for a ceasefire that is immediate. ...

col 735 We all know that before this crisis about 500 trucks a day were getting in, and today that figure is less than 95. Starvation is widespread and medical aid is hard to come by. The last hospitals are closing, and—this is personal to me, because one of my children is adopted—there are now 17,000 young people in Gaza who are orphaned. ...

Rehman Chishti (Conservative): I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that there needs to be an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, but that needs to be in accordance with a clear political framework for a two-state solution, because otherwise we may have the same problem six months or a year down the line. ... Let us make it clear what recognition of that state means, and have a clear timeline for when we will recognise that state.

David Lammy: ... All of us know that it is not the military and weapons that will bring an end to the crisis; it is political discussion and dialogue ... Recognition in and of itself does not achieve that two-state solution, but it is our commitment, if we could work with partners. ...

col 736 Labour's amendment reflects the common sense and moral purpose of the British people. They see the endless killing of innocents and find it intolerable. We want it to stop now through an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. ... They see the families of hostages in agony, whose capture is prolonging their agony. They want to see the hostages released not tomorrow and not in 100 days; they want them released now. ... They want Israel to comply with the ICJ's provisional measures—not tomorrow and not in 100 days, but now. The common sense of the British people also understands that no ceasefire can be one-sided. They know it is not enough just for Hamas or just for Israel to stop firing rockets; they want both sides to stop, and not tomorrow or in another 100 days, but now. ...

They understand that a ceasefire is not the final destination, but a step on the road to a lasting peace; one that requires hard negotiation and a road map for a political process. There is no way out of the crisis without the hope that both Palestinians and Israelis have a path to security, justice and opportunity in lands they can call their own. ...

... my discussions with the United States and with European and Arab leaders in Munich have made clear the widespread acknowledgment of the need to urgently seek that just and lasting solution: a sovereign and viable Palestinian state, and a safe and secure Israel, with strong and trusting relations with the countries in the region. That is the prize. ... The UK cannot advance this agenda on its own, but it cannot sit this one out. ... That is why our amendment ... makes it clear that we will work with international partners to recognise a Palestinian state as a contribution to, rather than an outcome of, a two-state solution.

col 738 **The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Andrew Mitchell):** ... Our amendment states that the House, supports Israel's right to self-defence, in compliance with international humanitarian law, against the terror attacks perpetrated by Hamas; condemns the slaughter, abuse and gender-based violence perpetrated on 7 October 2023; further condemns the use of civilian areas by Hamas and others for terrorist operations; urges negotiations to agree an immediate humanitarian pause as the best way to stop the fighting and to get aid in and hostages out;

supports moves towards a permanent sustainable ceasefire; acknowledges that achieving this will require all hostages to be released, the formation of a new Palestinian Government, Hamas to be unable to launch further attacks and to be no longer in charge in Gaza, and a credible pathway to a two-state solution which delivers peace, security and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians; expresses concern at the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and at the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah; reaffirms the urgent need to significantly scale up the flow of aid into Gaza, where too many innocent civilians have died; and calls on all parties to take immediate steps to stop the fighting and ensure unhindered humanitarian access.”

... We all want an end to the fighting as soon as possible, but we must also recognise and understand that a ceasefire will not last if hostages are still being held, and if Hamas still rain down rockets on Israel and maintain control of Gaza with capabilities to carry out further terrorist atrocities. The immediate priority must be negotiating a humanitarian pause, because that will create a window to get more hostages out safely, to get considerably more aid in quickly, and to get further negotiations on a sustainable ceasefire going immediately. ...

We want the pause to become a complete ceasefire without ... a return to fighting. ... As the Prime Minister said to Prime Minister Netanyahu last week, we continue to support Israel's right to defend its people against Hamas' terror, but we are deeply concerned about the loss of civilian life in Gaza and the worsening humanitarian crisis. ...

col 739 On 7 October, Israel suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas. More than 1,200 Israelis were reported killed, and more than 5,000 Israelis were reported injured. Even now, more than 130 hostages are still thought to be held by Hamas in Gaza. Last week saw the first hostage rescue since late October, with two hostages returned to their family. We continue to call for the immediate release of all hostages, including British nationals and their families. We are using all diplomatic channels to push for that, working with partners across the region. Meanwhile, we have helped more than 300 British nationals to leave Gaza. The devastating humanitarian crisis is worsening daily, with hunger and disease spreading. According to latest reports, more than 29,000 people have been killed, 69,000 injured, and 1.7 million people have been displaced. We want Israel to take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

Edward Leigh (Conservative): I wrote to the Foreign Secretary on 2 January and received a reply from one of his junior Ministers in the House of Lords about the plight of the 650 Christians held in the Holy Family church, who are innocent hostages of this appalling situation. I asked the Foreign Secretary if we could give those people asylum as they are clearly in the cross-fire. I received a frankly disingenuous reply saying that the Government would “seek respite” for those people. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... I will ensure that he gets an update on that issue from ... Anne-Marie Trevelyan ... when she winds up the debate.

col 740 As I have said, we are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah, where over half of Gaza's population are sheltering, including more than 600,000 children. Those are people who have fled repeatedly since the conflict began, and as the Foreign Secretary has said, it is impossible to see how a war can be fought among them. There is nowhere for them to go. ... Hamas, of course, displays the utmost cynicism in lurking among civilians, sacrificing innocent lives in the name of their fanaticism, and we condemn that utterly. But we must also recognise the result of that cynicism: Israeli soldiers will only be able to reach hostages or the Hamas leadership at an incredible cost to innocent lives. We share Israel's desire to end the threat from Hamas, and ensure that it no longer exerts control over Gaza, but the UK and our partners say that Israel must reflect on whether such a military operation is wise or is counterproductive to its long-term interests and the achievement of the goals that the international community has set out,

before it takes any further action.

Britain and our partners are doing all we can to help those suffering. We have trebled our assistance, and we are pressing to get it into Gaza by all available routes ...

Let me also reiterate that Israel must obey international humanitarian law in the way it prosecutes the war and in ensuring that food, water and shelter are available to Gazans. It must also take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities. ...

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): People poured cold water on the South African submission to the International Court of Justice before it was placed. Could the Minister now give a response from the Government to the interim decisions made by the International Court of Justice—the world court—which effectively called for an immediate unilateral halt to the hostilities by Israel against the people of Gaza? ...

col 741 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... the Government respect the International Court of Justice. We made it clear that we thought it was a mistake for South Africa to launch that case when it did, and the view of the British Government has not changed ...

The most effective way now to alleviate the suffering is an immediate pause in fighting to get aid in and hostages out. That is the best route to make progress towards a future for Gaza freed from rule by Hamas. ...

Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat): ... I am afraid that I cannot support [the Government] motion in not calling for an immediate ceasefire, because it does not capture the urgency. I welcome the Government's sanctioning of the four extremist violent settlers, because there is a link between what is happening in the west bank in the settlements, the political views of the ultra-right-wing in Netanyahu's Government, especially Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, and the protestations of Netanyahu that he does not want a Palestinian state on '67 borders. ...

Rehman Chishti: Looking at the specific wording of the Government amendment, it mentions "a credible pathway to a two-state solution which delivers peace". ...

For a two-state solution to be achieved, the Government need to set out what they consider a Palestinian state to look like. Is it based on '67 borders and a motion that we, the United Kingdom, drafted and asked others to support? ...

col 742 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... We have set out the vital steps for achieving the pause we wish to see. All hostages must be released and a new Palestinian Government for the west bank and Gaza formed, accompanied by an international support package. Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel must be removed, and they must no longer be in charge in Gaza. Finally, there must be a political horizon ... that provides a credible and irreversible pathway to a two-state solution. The resolution put forward in the Security Council yesterday did not achieve those outcomes. Simply calling for a ceasefire, as that resolution did, will not make it happen. Indeed, as it could endanger the hostage negotiations, it could make a ceasefire less likely.

The way to stop the fighting and then to potentially stop it from restarting is to begin with a pause to get hostages out and aid in. ...

We have also taken further steps to hold those to account who undermined the steps to peace in the west bank. Last week, the British Government announced new sanctions against four extremist Israeli settlers who have violently attacked Palestinians in the west bank.

Our long-standing position is that we will recognise a Palestinian state at a time that is most conducive to the peace process, and I submit to the House that that must be the right answer. We must give the people of the west bank and Gaza the political perspective of a credible route to a Palestinian state and a new future, and it needs to be irreversible. Likewise, we must give the people of Israel certainty of security. ...

Jim McMahon (Labour Co-op): ... People are rightly angry. Part of the anger is born from a real sense of frustration that this Parliament and this Government do not give the same

value to the life of a Palestinian child as they do to the life of an Israeli child. Whether we accept that or not, it is a strongly held belief. We know that 600,000 children are at risk if the Rafah ground offensive begins. No ifs and no buts—will the Minister say from the Dispatch Box that the Government do not support that action?

col 743 Robert Jenrick (Conservative): My right hon. Friend said that the Foreign Secretary has asked Israel to think again about any further military offensive or incursion into Rafah. I think we would all urge Israel to think carefully about how that would be conducted. However, does he agree that our support for Israel on 7 October, when we said it should be able to eradicate Hamas, was clear, and that there is a danger that our emerging position—certainly that of other parties—would leave Hamas’s terrorist organisation partially intact? That is an intolerable situation for Israel: it would send a clear message that using human shields works and that we will not allow Israel to fully defend itself. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... I think that I have answered it, because I have made clear the Government’s position in respect of Hamas and Hamas’s future. ...

Flick Drummond (Conservative): Has my right hon. Friend had any discussions with the Israeli Government about how, if the hostages were released by Hamas, Israel would withdraw and the peace process could start moving forward?

Andrew Mitchell: I am sure the House will understand that I cannot comment in any detail at all about the ongoing hostage negotiations ...

Mhairi Black: I want begin with something that Frankie Boyle said. He pointed out that it makes no sense to say that the situation in Gaza is too complex for a ceasefire, because ceasefire is one of the oldest and simplest terms to understand. It means stop firing. In fact, it is so simple that it is designed to be heard and understood in the middle of a literal battle. So there is no middle ground when it comes to a ceasefire: you either follow the order or you don’t. You either stop firing or you don’t.

During the 2014 crisis, there were an estimated 2,251 Palestinian deaths. The then Prime Minister rightly called for an “immediate and unconditional” ceasefire.

col 744 If we fast-forward 10 years to the current conflict, we have a death toll of nearly 30,000, and that is not including the bodies yet to be recovered from underneath the rubble, and yet the very same man—he is now Foreign Secretary—is failing to support a ceasefire. ...

We know that people are starving. People are being reduced to eating grass and animal feed. In January—last month—over half of all aid deliveries were denied access and could not get through to those who needed it. Less than half of the hospitals in Gaza are even partially functioning, and the few that are will quickly run out of supplies unless Israel allows aid through.

Since 2008, Israel has refused entry to any UN agency individuals, which to me is a giant red flag in and of itself. Despite these attempts to shield themselves and hide from any accountability, we know that war crimes are being committed in Gaza. Churches sheltering hundreds of innocent Palestinians have been bombed to the ground. There have been strikes against people in refugee camps and hospitals. Earlier this week, there were reports that Israeli forces ordered the evacuation of a hospital, only to start sniper fire on those who attempted to leave ...

Israel’s own Minister of Defence said there would be “a complete siege on Gaza... No electricity no food, no water, no gas”.

As the occupying power, Israel has an obligation under international law to ensure that the basic needs of Gaza’s civilian population are met. It is not doing that. ...

Israel still refuses to reinstate the water supply it so cruelly shut off months ago. It is stopping medicine getting in. It is stopping food entering Gaza and, despite the growing likelihood of famine that it will have created, it is still not budging.

Let us be absolutely clear that the actions of Hamas were horrific and unjustifiable, but ...

the people of Palestine are not Hamas. ...

In many respects, the ending of the violence in Gaza rests in the hands of the countries supplying the money and the weapons to Israel. The arms trade treaty bans the sale of weapons when there is a concern that they may be used to breach international law. Given that the International Court of Justice has found that there is a plausible risk that Israel is committing genocide, it is upon the UK to revoke all arms licences and military equipment to Israel; otherwise, we break the treaties that we have signed up to. ...

col 745 One death every four minutes. In the time of this debate, as we all talk among ourselves, 100 more people who were alive this morning will be dead. ...

Liam Fox (Conservative): Whatever anyone's views are about the history or the politics of the middle east, no one can be in any doubt that since 7 October we have all witnessed a humanitarian tragedy. The attacks of the terrorist group Hamas, including the murder of young people attending a music festival and the taking of hostages, were bound to set in train a series of violence, which Hamas must have fully understood, including a full response by the Israeli Government. ...

We have constantly to make clear to both sides that the concept of peace is not just the absence of war or conflict but freedom from the fear of conflict, oppression or terror. Peace requires mutual respect, freedom from persecution and living without fear of destitution. It comes with self-determination and liberation from arbitrary justice. It needs hope, dignity and enforceable rights. Only when all the people of the region have access to all that could we talk about having achieved a peaceful solution to the conflict. ...

col 746 There needs to be a guaranteed security for Israel, to protect it from the sort of attacks that it has seen. It is clear that the Israeli construct of security has failed—otherwise, the Hamas incursions would not have taken place. It is also clear that there has to be a proper guarantee of security for any emerging Palestinian state. ...

We can move forward with the ideas of hope and prosperity, bridge building and rapprochement that the Abraham accords have brought. The Governments of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco have been far sighted in maintaining that process during the current conflict. If we do not take that path, we run the risk of going back to 1971 and a generation of radicalised young Arabs who will make a political solution impossible. ...

col 747 **Layla Moran:** ... Last week I went to Israel and Palestine with Yachad, and I will start with a story. On the first day, we went down to the southern border with Gaza, to a place called Nativ Ha'asara, a place I have visited before. We met an incredible woman called Roni, who had lost family members—16 from that kibbutzim had perished. As I went there, I looked across at northern Gaza. I saw the plumes of smoke. I heard the drones and the “pop pop pop” of the gunfire, and I broke down. As I walked back through the village, Roni, an Israeli peace activist, took me to one side, gave me a hug and said, “I'm so sorry”, which I said back. We both cried and held each other.

It is important to remember that although those voices of peace in Israel have been silent for some time, many of the people killed on that day were allies of the Palestinian people who had been calling for decades against the occupation, calling out Netanyahu's Government, and condemning Ben-Gvir and Smotrich. It is for that reason that I welcome the sanctions on those extremist settlers, because there is a direct link between the right wing elements of Netanyahu's Government and those extremist settlers. The amendment that the Lib Dems tabled to the motion stated that we should not finish there. We need to continue those sanctions on those people and their connected entities.

I looked across, thinking of my family still in that church in northern Gaza with no food, no water and no way of getting down to the south, even if they could cross at Rafah with the 1.5 million people there. Without an immediate ceasefire, they and other families who are trapped cannot achieve anything. That is even without thinking about whether they would be allowed to come back if they left, or whether there would be a political solution. ... Without a two-state solution on '67 borders, we are condemning both Israelis and

Palestinians to reliving this nightmare over and over and over again. ...

col 748 Tobias Ellwood (Conservative): ... From the start, I supported Israel's right to defend itself after those terrible 7 October attacks, but I was the only voice here in Parliament, when we reconvened, to warn Prime Minister Netanyahu, before he sent in the tanks, not to invade until there was a clear governance and security plan which any military operation could work towards; and that still eludes us today.

Away from Netanyahu's leadership, Israel is an important UK ally, a rare democratic state in a troubled part of the world. It deserves our support, but also our frankness. The scale of the collateral damage is shocking—indeed, that phrase seems inappropriate given the loss of life— but there is nothing simple about urban warfare, and future military strategists at Sandhurst and West Point are likely to use the Israeli military invasion as an example of how not to do it, and of how tactics without strategy fail.

On the other side, we look for voices in the middle east condemning Hamas, but they are not there. Bahrain was the only country to say that it condemned what Hamas had done. Are we expecting the Palestinian Authority to step in? It is having its own problems in its own neck of the woods. ...

There is no mention of any of this in the motion or the amendments. Are we suggesting that we should empower Hamas to stay, as they remain committed to destroying Israel? It is in their covenant to do exactly that. Shouting "Ceasefire, ceasefire" alone and unconditionally, will not, I am afraid, change anything ... A ceasefire is a contract agreed between two sides, and it requires a third party to step forward to ensure that they can control what goes on. It begins with a cessation of hostilities that allows space for other activities to take place, and allows plans to advance. Neither Israel nor Hamas are in that place yet. ...

A ceasefire calls for timeframes, no-fly zones, buffer zones, emergency procedures to quash any breaches, agreed incentives in relation to, for example, hostage release and humanitarian support, and, of course, international monitoring teams in which the UK could play a part. I do not hear any of that being discussed today; I hear only the clarion call "Let's have a ceasefire." ... I simply make the case that, from here, it is easy to shout those words "Let's have a ceasefire", but it is harder to implement that in practice. ...

col 749 Allan Dorans (SNP): ... I wish to highlight the role of, and the risks taken by, three specific groups of people who receive little media coverage: humanitarian aid workers, health workers, and journalists. We owe them all a great debt of gratitude for the work that they carry out in the most dangerous circumstances, in areas of extreme conflict and suffering, with the ever-present risk of death, serious injury and disease. Since 7 October, at least 136 staff members of the United Nations—humanitarian aid workers—have been killed in Gaza. The UN's Secretary-General, António Guterres, said recently that throughout the UN's history it had never witnessed the deaths of its staff in such large numbers. As for health workers, at least 300 have been killed during the conflict.

The killing of aid workers and health workers is both unacceptable and illegal. The World Medical Association has made that clear repeatedly, and in 2002 it said: "... Access to medical assistance for the sick and wounded, whether they have been engaged in active combat or not, is guaranteed through various international agreements, including those of the Geneva Convention and of the United Nations."

Israel and those nations supporting her, including the United States and the United Kingdom, have signed up to those agreements, and their neglect in not enforcing them is criminal.

Journalists, too, have paid a heavy price to bring us reports of events on the ground. At least 126 have been killed in Gaza since 7 October, with many others arrested. ...

col 750 Any continuation of the military operation in Gaza will merely result in innocent men, women and children paying the price for a crime that they did not commit. The only way in which to prevent further loss of civilian lives, and to secure the release of hostages and the entry of lifesaving humanitarian aid, is to secure an immediate and permanent

ceasefire which includes including calling off the Rafah offensive—not tomorrow, not next week, not next month, but today. ...

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): ... I am afraid that demanding an immediate ceasefire amounts to asking Israel to lay down its arms unilaterally while its hostages remain in peril and while Hamas retains power in Gaza. Hamas official Ghazi Hamad has said that they will repeat the 7 October attack “again and again”. He said: “On October 7, October 10, October 1,000,000—everything we do is justified.”

That is shocking. Unless Hamas are defeated militarily and removed from power, there is nothing to stop them rebuilding their capacity to commit heinous acts of terrorism. ...

We must not forget the 7 October attacks in which 1,000 people lost their lives, involving sickening levels of violence and abuse: murder and mutilation; the killing of babies, children and the elderly; decapitation; and rape and sexual abuse of the most horrific kind.

... We must not forget the hostages still held in Gaza, who may well be being raped or tortured right now. No pause or ceasefire can be workable, sustainable or permanent unless it comes after the release of all hostages, the defeat and removal of Hamas from power, and an end to the terror group’s capacity to repeat their 7 October atrocity. ...

col 751 Martin Docherty-Hughes (SNP): ... British policy to Palestine has indeed been weighed in the balance and found wanting. ...

I would like to hear from the Minister ... what assurances the Prime Minister ... has received since November from the Government of Benjamin Netanyahu regarding the systematic targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure? Have their seemingly pious interventions in any way restrained the Government of Israel from their policy of genocide, all the while enabling Hamas ... a death cult—making them a partner in death, hate and crime? ...

One hundred and fifty-three nations have concluded that an immediate ceasefire is necessary to bring an end to the utter devastation in Gaza and to seek a way forward to deal with the death cult of Hamas, who, as we know, are supported by the theocrats of Iran ...

The way the State of Israel has been acting must be challenged. We cannot sidestep the issues faced by the Palestinian nation ... Palestine’s survival, and indeed that of the state of Israel, depends on it. This is a generational injustice that the Palestinian people have endured. ...The Prime Minister of Israel’s strategy is to isolate the Palestinians in Gaza from the Palestinians in the west bank. Let us remind ourselves: he is a Prime Minister who is already not only tarnished with a wicked policy in Gaza, but mired in allegations of corruption. In his Cabinet is one Minister who is a convicted terrorist and another who is a confessed fascist. ...

col 752 Michael Ellis (Conservative): ... the SNP is not interested in a solution that would both safeguard the civilians of Gaza and enable an Israeli victory over Hamas; if the SNP was so motivated, it would, for example, be putting pressure on Egypt to open the Rafah crossing as a refuge, instead of massively strengthening it. But of course, the focus is all on Israel defending itself.

Israel has been through multiple rounds of conflict initiated by the genocidal Hamas terror group in Gaza. The SNP motion, should it achieve its objectives, would cement the prospects of many more such incursions or attacks in the future. That is, of course, exactly what Hamas want: to secure endless opportunities to destroy Israel, granted by the confused logic of that motion. If the terror group is left standing, they will regroup. Hamas say as much. That is not conjecture; they make clear in interviews that they will continue their onslaught. They must not be permitted to continue as a terror statelet. ...

Hamas have no intention of laying down their arms, and Israel, as a fellow democracy, has a responsibility. ...

I was shocked last night to hear the leader of the SNP accuse Israel of committing war crimes and hear the bandying about of such phrases. This incendiary charge is not borne

out by the legality of the situation, and it is not in accordance with the facts. It is worth noting that the ICJ, in its interim ruling, said that Israel has a legitimate right to continue its campaign against Hamas. Let us not forget that all Hamas need to do is to release the hostages, including very small children, and hostilities would cease immediately. Let us not forget the third wave: the thousands of Gazan civilians crossing into Israel during the 7 October attacks. That is why civilians have been able to sell some hostages.

Israel has taken such steps despite being under no international legal obligation to, for example, provide electricity and water to the people of Gaza. It has done so despite the grave security threats posed by Hamas.

col 753 Of course, Hamas cynically destroyed those very same power lines and water pipes on 7 October, which Israel swiftly repaired.

I notice that the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) said that condemning Hamas's attack is omitted from the SNP's motion because it goes without saying. I am sorry, but at the moment in this country, and in many other countries around the world, it does not go without saying. Considering that since 7 October several thousand antisemitic incidents have been recorded in the United Kingdom, including in Scotland, and that people were celebrating outside the Israeli embassy in London in jubilation at the deaths of a thousand people before the Israel Defence Forces moved in on 7 and 8 October, it does not go without saying. ...

Anum Qaisar (SNP): ... Jewish people are not the Israeli Government and Muslims are not Hamas.

In a matter of weeks, Muslims across the world will fast from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan. It is a time to take life at a slower pace. That, however, is far from the reality for people in Gaza. They live with hospitals bombed, homes bombed, ambulances bombed, churches bombed, mosques bombed, UN schools bombed, refugee camps bombed and factories bombed—and the bombing continues. Gaza is under siege from the air and the F-35 stealth bomber, often referred to as the most lethal fighter jet in the world, is being used. Parts for this fighter jet—the laser targeting system and the weapons-release system—are made in British factories. We simply do not know if those weapons are being used by Israeli authorities in the massacre of families and children in Gaza. ...

The UK Government have the choice to stop or suspend arms export licences to Israel. ...

col 754 In their hundreds of thousands, the public have marched on the streets, a unified mass movement standing up against the status quo: people from different faiths and no faith, men and women, adults and children, and rich and poor saying that enough is enough and demanding a ceasefire. ... We cannot continue to accept the systematic and deliberate oppression of the Palestinian people. There must be an immediate ceasefire. ...

Stephen Crabb (Conservative): The backdrop to today's debate has two parts. One is the appalling outpouring of antisemitism in this country ... The other part of the backdrop to today's difficult debate is what I believe is a concerted campaign to pressure and even bully MPs to fall into line behind a very specific wording about a ceasefire, which implies an unconditional ceasefire and has the objective of keeping Hamas in place in Gaza.

Every right-thinking person in this Chamber this afternoon wants to see an end to the fighting and bloodshed. It is an appalling loss of life ... I was in southern Israel last week, and I went to one of the sites of the worst massacres that took place on 7 October. I met Palestinians as well when I was in Jerusalem last week, and everybody in the region is feeling the pain of this. Families are bleeding physically, emotionally and mentally. This time last week I was sitting with a group of parents of children and people still in their late teens who are being held by Hamas in Gaza. These mothers and fathers are worried sick about what their daughters are currently going through.

No amount of wishful thinking, or us passing a simple motion calling for an immediate, permanent ceasefire, is going to make it happen. ...

col 755 I happen to believe that if there is one single thing that would change the course of the war right now and lead to an end to the violence we are seeing, it would be the immediate release of the hostages. If there is one thing that we could unite around this afternoon, it would be a simple, one-line motion that calls on Hamas to release the hostages immediately. ...

I have several issues with the SNP's motion. First, there is no mention of the use of sexual violence and rape as a weapon of war against Israeli women. Why is that important? It is important because there is a campaign at the moment ... that seeks to deny that these atrocities happened. People are saying that Israel has somehow concocted this and that these crimes did not take place. Well, they did take place. They were recorded on mobile phones and bodycams, and they were picked up by other security cameras. There is a 47-minute film that people can watch if they make themselves available to do so—Hamas fighters having the time of their lives committing the most barbaric acts. ...

My second problem with the SNP's motion is that it contains no mention of Hamas's guilt or the fact that they started this round of conflict. ...

col 756 **Edward Leigh:** ... I have just been talking to a lady colleague who received a green card to go to speak to people in Westminster Hall. The moment she explained the Government's position and her support of their moderate amendment, she was surrounded by a screaming mob videoing her and intimidating her. All this hatred has to stop. We have to pull together in this country. Nobody in this country or in this House was responsible for the horrific attacks by Hamas. We all utterly condemn Hamas and their genocidal activities.

We must support moderates. There are many moderate people in Israel who want a two-state solution and who are horrified by the activities of settlers trying to intimidate Palestinians. We must give hope to Palestinian people. Nothing can justify the genocide on 7 October, but still there is a degree of hopelessness among the Palestinian people at the rate of settlements in the west bank and what is happening in Gaza. We must give them hope. ...

... surely we can also take a moderate and sensible position on this issue of a ceasefire. There is no point in having a unilateral ceasefire now if a death cult will use that ceasefire to go on bombing and killing innocent Israelis—it will achieve nothing. We have to have a balanced, sustainable ceasefire in which the hostages are released and Hamas's leadership is removed permanently from Gaza. ... There is no future for the Palestinian people in Gaza with Hamas in control. There will be constant warfare, hatred, disaster and bombing. We have to get rid of Hamas. We have to get the Palestinian Authority, for all its faults, back in control, and we have to push the peace process forward. ...

col 757 **Chris Law (SNP):** Late last night I returned from Cairo, which I had visited as one of the members of the International Development Committee to listen to the experience of heads of non-governmental agencies and UN agencies working in Gaza. They described a man-made humanitarian catastrophe, and I am ashamed of the moral cowardice in the response of those in the world who first failed to prevent, and are now failing to stop, the atrocity unfolding before our eyes. ... Bombs and bullets have claimed the lives of tens of thousands of innocent people. Whole families have been wiped out and whole cities left uninhabitable. Those who survive have been horrifically injured and left displaced with nowhere to go. Nothing is off limits for Israeli forces, which have been targeting and destroying places of worship, schools and hospitals. Disease, malnutrition and starvation have become inevitable. In these conditions, hope has been extinguished for so many. ... Only 150 aid trucks a day are getting into Gaza. The UK says that it is supplying aid, but that aid is sitting in trucks at the border. ...

The message from aid workers is clear: an immediate ceasefire must be implemented to stop the slaughter and to deliver lifesaving aid to the trapped people of Gaza. ...

Where else in the world has there been a war in which the majority of people killed are

women and children? They are hemmed in with no escape and, as one witness told me, they are being killed like “fish in a barrel.” ...

In Cairo, I was told of ambulances and field hospitals being targeted, of people with white flags being shot on the spot and of children as young as five being pronounced dead with single sniper shots to the head. This is not a proportionate response. It is collective punishment, pure and simple, and it is a breach of international humanitarian law. ...

col 758 **Rehman Chishti:** ... The backdrop to today’s debate is the terrible loss of innocent lives. ... All hostages have to be released. It is now February, and we have not been able to achieve the objectives of peace or the release of those hostages. ...

Afzal Khan: Prime Minister Netanyahu has confirmed that restrictions will be imposed against Palestinian Muslims wishing to visit the al-Aqsa mosque, one of the holiest sites in Islam, during Ramadan. As per international law, Israel has no sovereignty over East Jerusalem or al-Aqsa, so does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is a deliberate provocation of Palestinians? ...

Rehman Chishti: As the former UK special envoy for international religious freedom, I say that all places of worship must be protected. What we saw about three and a half years ago, when the al-Aqsa mosque was stormed on the night of Laylat al-Qadr, was absolutely unacceptable. We are now coming into the period of not only Ramadan, but Easter and Passover, which is why I said earlier, “If not now, when?”. ...

col 759 **John Nicolson (SNP):** ... Israeli bombs have killed 30,000. More than 10,000 children have died. The death toll per head of population is greater than in any conflict since the second world war. Gaza lies in ruins. People are starving. Women are enduring caesareans without anaesthetic. And yet this House has been paralysed.

I vividly recall that when I was a journalist in Palestinian refugee camps, Palestinians would come up to show me keys to lost homes their families were forced to flee in what is now Israel, when advancing guerrilla troops spread terror. Along with their old-fashioned keys, they would also show me British Palestine mandate house deeds—issued by us, guaranteed by the United Kingdom and stamped with the mark of the Crown. We owe them. At the very least, we owe them our voices raised in outrage at the collective punishment they are now enduring in defiance of international law. ...

We know we cannot force Netanyahu to stop bombing. But we can apply pressure. Silence is tacit acceptance of Israel’s actions. We can show Palestinians, who still imagine that this House has a moral compass, that we do care passionately about their plight, we lament their suffering and we despair at the lost innocence of their children, as another generation learns to associate Israel with cruelty, extremism and hate. ...

Kit Malthouse (Conservative): ... I, too, was on the emotional cross-party visit with Yachad to Israel and Palestine last week. We stood at the site of mass murder in Kibbutz Be’eri and Netiv HaAsara and heard with horror the accounts of the victims and bereaved relatives of what happened there. We also stood on a bluff above Gaza City and saw the artillery landing and heard the gunfire and the drones overhead. I contemplated the futility of 30,000 dead, and, with horror, thought of the assault on Rafah and its 600,000 children.

col 760 Various things became clear during that visit. First, there can be no military victory over Hamas—that is widely accepted across the world and is being whispered even in Israel—not least because every bomb and every bullet that lands is a recruiting sergeant for that appalling organisation. Secondly, the security of these two peoples are intrinsically intertwined. ...

We also met some remarkable people: Rachel Goldberg, whose son, Hersh, is still being held by Hamas; Maoz Inon and Yonatan Zeigin whose parents were both killed by Hamas; and a group of young Palestinians who yearn for freedom. All of them are dedicating their lives to peace. ...

Then I returned to the United Kingdom ... The British people think that our moral compass is spinning in this House, that we have no clue what we are doing any more, yet they see

the bodies of shredded children coming across the media pretty much every day. They want three simple things: they want the killing of Palestinians and Israelis to stop; they want the hostages to be returned; and they want aid to flow into Gaza.

Our job as Back Benchers is to vote for the outcome that we want to see, not some clever process by which we might get there. ...

Andrew Gwynne (Labour): We sometimes rattle off statistics in this place and they have no real meaning, but what we do know is that, in this dreadful conflict, there are 1,200 innocent Israelis who were brutally and evilly murdered, beheaded, raped and kidnapped on 7 October. The consequence of that has been the unfolding of utterly horrific images across the Gaza Strip, with almost 30,000 men, women and children—innocent citizens—tragically killed in this brutal conflict. ...

col 761 ... Words matter and it matters that we call for a ceasefire—not a unilateral ceasefire, but a ceasefire of both sides, otherwise it is not a ceasefire. Those on the SNP Benches can laugh, but if Hamas do not lay down their arms, too, it is not a ceasefire. ...

We need a Palestinian state. We need to get justice and an end to this conflict, which has lasted for seven decades. ... It is a simple fact that the moderate voices on both sides have been drowned out for two decades. Those who believe in a two-state solution have been left at the edges. ...

col 762 **Steve Double:** I do not think that anyone in this House, or anywhere else, does not want to see a ceasefire in Gaza. ... No one wants to see an escalation, and I add my voice to those saying to Israel, “Think very carefully before escalating your action into Rafah,” but a real ceasefire has to be an agreement between both sides. Unless Hamas agree to lay down their weapons and keep to a ceasefire, a ceasefire effectively becomes Israel surrendering. ... There was a ceasefire on 6 October, and Hamas broke it with the most appalling action in killing more than 1,200 Israelis and committing the most despicable gender-based violence, sexual assault and rape. ...

Hamas broke the ceasefire that was in place in November, when the initial tranche of hostages was released. My understanding is that Egypt proposed a peace deal in December that involved a ceasefire, but Hamas refused to take part in it. We need to be very clear in this place that the biggest obstacle to a ceasefire is Hamas. ...

I want to see a two-state solution. I want us to be able to start recognising Palestine as a proper state, but that will never happen while Hamas continue their leadership in Palestine. ...

Gavin Newlands (SNP): ... We all watched in horror as the 7 October atrocity unfolded. No one in this place was not disgusted—sickened—by the act of evil of perpetrated that day. Similarly, we all watched on, horrified, as Putin’s forces invaded Ukraine and carried out unspeakable acts. ... Government and Labour Front Benchers were able to talk about near genocide and war crimes in Ukraine, yet they are unable to do so now in respect of Gaza. ...

col 763 Nowhere in Gaza is safe, even when the IDF promise that it will be. It is IDF state-sponsored barbarism.

Drew Hendry (SNP): Anyone in Gaza watching their daughter having a C-section under a tarpaulin without anaesthetic, picking up parts of their brother from around the neighbourhood or burying a child is not worrying about the wording of a motion. They want to see a ceasefire to stop all that now. ...

Gavin Newlands: ... I asked at the start what the value of a Palestinian life is. Honestly, that question should haunt the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, because I can tell them that 24 Palestinians have been killed for every Israeli killed on 7 October, and that number is going up every single day that we sit here and do nothing.

col 764 **Jerome Mayhew (Conservative):** ... the SNP motion makes no reference at all to the Hamas attack on 7 October last year. It makes no reference to the stated intention of Hamas to repeat atrocities again and again, similar to and worse than that which was

achieved on 7 October. We know that removing Hamas from Gaza—again, something that the SNP motion makes no reference to—is the only way to stop civilians, Israeli and Palestinian, from being killed. If we address only half of the issue, we will condemn any ceasefire to failure and bring about a renewed cycle of killing time and time again and a repetition of that appalling history of violence. ...

The most important thing for people in the region right now is an immediate cessation of violence, which will be achieved through a humanitarian pause. Such a pause would stop the fighting, get the aid in and allow for the hostages to come out. It is not delayed by the wider ceasefire negotiations ... but it makes space for those negotiations to take place. Those negotiations are going to have to deal with the release of all hostages. A one-sided ceasefire is no ceasefire at all, nor is a ceasefire that leaves Hamas in possession of their hostages.

The negotiations will also have to deal with the recreation of a Palestinian Government for both the west bank and Gaza, freeing the people of Gaza from the terror of Hamas: they terrorise not just Israelis, but Palestinians too. ...

col 765 Ian Paisley (DUP): ... the awful war that we are witnessing in Gaza is a consequence. It is a consequence of the unjustifiable attack on Israelis and Jewish people on 7 October ... We are not being asked to vote for the comments of ... Brendan O'Hara ... we are being asked to vote for a motion that does not contain any word about the rape of the women, the murder of the children or the unjustifiable attack. It is as if it did not happen; it is as if it were invisible. Other people in the 20th century denied things that happened to Israel and Jewish people. That is essentially what we are seeing tonight: the denial of an attack on Israel. ... Yes, it is utterly vile that it did not appear in the motion.

Kirsten Oswald (SNP): ... all of us in this House condemn the despicable behaviour of Hamas. We all call for the release of the hostages—their poor families must be in absolutely terrible situations. We all want people to stop being killed, women and children particularly, but I say to the hon. Gentleman that the remarks he just made, in which he conflated things that should never be conflated, do not show this House in the best way. We are all entitled to our views, but we need to treat this particular subject seriously and with the dignity and respect it deserves. I am sorry to tell the hon. Gentleman that he did not do that.

Ian Paisley: I am sorry that the hon. Lady's motion, which she is asking me and other Members to vote on tonight, does not contain a single word about 7 October. It is a denial, and it is invisible because it is as if it did not happen. ...

The tragedy of the thousands of Palestinian civilian casualties in Gaza is the moral responsibility of Hamas, just as the Israeli casualties are the moral responsibility and the actual responsibility of Hamas, who have deliberately and cynically initiated a high-intensity conflict in one of the most densely populated areas on earth specifically to maximise civilian deaths and to turn global opinion against Israel. ...

col 766 Rob Roberts (Independent): ... Can one of the world's greatest intelligence networks really not isolate and take out these terrorists without needing to simply level entire city blocks? If they cannot strike with more precision ... they should not be striking at all, because every time they do so, they put innocent people in harm's way. Now, in a completely foreseeable and obvious development, having been told to flee south by Israel, the plan seems to be to attack the southernmost city. I have to say that, if I were in the Israeli military and intelligence services, I would be ashamed of some of the things I was being asked to do. If I was in the Israeli military command, I would hope that I would be brave enough to say, "Stop. This isn't right. This is no longer self-defence." ...

col 767 Rosena Allin-Khan (Labour): ... it is obvious to us all, that there has not been adequate protection of civilians. Indeed, 65% of those killed were women and children, which is the complete opposite to every other battle and war where the majority is men of fighting age. Psychologists on the ground are reporting children under five years old talking

of wanting to take their own lives, because they have watched their siblings hanging dead from buildings, their parents exsanguinating in front of them, and they are now left alone to face this world. Health workers have not been protected from the war, and there have been over 300 attacks on health facilities in Gaza. Medicine has been blocked at the border, and most hospitals are non-functioning or overrun by critically injured children who are unable to be treated.

Yes, we need a peace process; yes, the hostages must be freed; yes, the wheels of international law must turn; and yes, the Palestinian people must have a recognised state. But first, today, this minute, now, we must have an immediate ceasefire to save tens of thousands of lives. This country has an historic responsibility to the people of the middle east, and it is in our strong national interest to secure a two-state solution. ...

Miriam Cates (Conservative): War is terrible and, as we have heard today, the tragic consequences of all fighting are dreadful. War should be avoided at all costs, but sometimes it cannot be. Sometimes war is necessary, such as when accommodation cannot be made, when there is no possibility of good faith negotiations, or when the cost of allowing the enemy to go unchecked is just too great. The war in Gaza is just such a war: devastating, tragic, appalling, yes, but unavoidable because of the 7 October massacre. ...

col 768 Any Government who did not then act to prevent such things from happening again would be failing in their duty to protect their citizens. There simply is no other way to keep Israelis safe than to destroy Hamas. We might wish it were otherwise, but that is the reality of the situation. We are all appalled by the loss of life in both Israel and Gaza, and we are all calling for a pause to the fighting to allow much more humanitarian aid to get through. But to call for an unconditional ceasefire now shows, I am afraid, a naive judgment of the situation on the ground.

There is no moral equivalence between a bunch of murderous terrorists and rapists attacking civilians with glee for the sole purpose of inflicting evil. ... There is no equivalence between those murderous terrorists and a nation state using conventional forces to root out a dangerous enemy, however much we may criticise their tactics. For Hamas, the civilian deaths, including of Palestinians, are the point of the conflict and were the point of the original attack. We must be clear that Hamas bear responsibility for all the deaths in this conflict. The only outcome that will secure a lasting peace is for Hamas to be destroyed. I ask those calling for an unconditional ceasefire now: do they not want Hamas to be destroyed? Why are they not calling for unconditional ceasefires in other conflicts across the world? Why are they not calling on Egypt to assist refugees, as the Polish did upon the invasion of Ukraine? ...

Those demanding votes for a ceasefire tonight will not stop at that; they will call for boycotts of Israel, an arms embargo and prosecutions of Israel in the UN. Yet again, Israel is being singled out. As the world's only Jewish state, it is being exceptionalised. We are seeing the rise in antisemitism here on the streets in the UK. We cannot afford to give into that pressure. We must respect Israel's right to defend itself and to prevent the most atrocious crimes that have happened in my lifetime from ever happening again. ...

Steven Bonnar (SNP): For too long, the leaders of the western world ... have turned a blind eye to the decades-long suffering of the Palestinian people—a blind eye to the occupation of their lands, a blind eye to the expansion of illegal settlements and a blind eye to the theft of their homes. We are and have been complicit in the continued futility of their struggle for self-determination and complicit in their pain and suffering. Arms sales to Israel from this place, which are then used to murder innocent women and children in Palestine, make us so complicit. ...

col 769 Since 7 October and the deplorable actions of that day, which have been universally condemned by my party, we have been asked to do more than turn a blind eye to the collective punishment of innocent Palestinians; we have been asked to endorse it. If it is not collective punishment, what is it? Is it merely a conflict? Is it a war, or is it more

than that? Is it genocide? If it is, are we truly prepared to keep turning a blind eye? ... We say, "No more." ...

We are being asked to turn a blind eye to genocide. It is high time that the world recognised it as such: genocide. That is what is happening in Israel and Palestine. Innocent lives are being wiped out, families are being ripped apart and communities are being decimated before our very eyes, never to return. The concern and the anguish that our Muslim and Jewish communities here in the UK are experiencing must be intolerable, watching the lives and the potential of their countrymen and women being destroyed by the senseless and horrific violence being meted out upon them. Their anguish is our anguish, their struggle is our struggle, and their fight for justice and peace is our fight for justice and peace. The world is watching. We need an immediate ceasefire now. ...

col 770 Mark Logan (Conservative): ... Israel has gone too far. It has not just gone too far today; it has already gone too far for months. I am concerned about Rafah, because we have heard time and again about innocent people's lives in Gaza and how they would not be hurt, but we have reached that figure of 30,000. How can we have any trust and belief that the 1.5 million people now in Rafah will be left untouched? ...

We have the opportunity today to call for an immediate ceasefire. Yes, that may just be signalling to an extent, but that signal must be given today to Israel, one of our close allies in the region. ...

col 771 Alan Brown: This call for an immediate ceasefire is about limiting the horrific slaughter to the 30,000 civilians already killed, and stopping more civilians from being killed by bombs and bullets, starving to death or dying from disease. Currently, one in six children in the north Gaza under the age of two are suffering from malnutrition, and 90% of children across Gaza under the age of five are already affected by one or more infectious diseases. We know that aid is available, but it is blocked by Israel, which breaches the interim ICJ ruling. If denial of electricity, food, water and medicine is not collective punishment, what is it? ...

On reprisals, the Hamas attacks were brutal, but 25 innocent Palestinian civilian deaths for every Israeli death is not justice. The ICJ will make a judgment on genocide, but the Israeli ambassador stated: "every school, every mosque, every second house has access to tunnels".

She asked Iain Dale live on air in the UK if there was any solution other than destroying every building in Gaza—she is justifying genocide in terms of physical destruction, which is a breach of article 2 of the convention on genocide. Where is the condemnation of those comments by the Israeli ambassador to the UK? There is a deathly silence. ...

It is obvious that unless there is a ceasefire, the hostages are also at risk of death from disease and starvation, or even being killed by the IDF, who unfortunately have already killed some of their own brethren. ... It is time to listen to organisations such as Jews for Justice for Palestinians, or the 25 humanitarian organisations demanding an immediate ceasefire. ...

col 772 Anna Firth (Conservative): ... I do not think that we can forget the events of 7 October. We cannot forget that it was a shocking and barbaric attack by a terrorist organisation... More than 1,400 people were murdered, one by one. More than 3,500 were wounded, and almost 200 were taken hostage. Innocent women were raped, their bodies desecrated and even booby-trapped to kill others when they found them. In the wake of that heinous attack, Israel had not only the right but the duty to protect its citizens and oppose the grave threat presented by Hamas, which has not gone away.

However—I think this is very important—there is a night-and-day distinction between Hamas terrorists and innocent Palestinian civilians who are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis every day. That is why it is incumbent on Israel to do all that it can to minimise civilian casualties by ensuring that its campaign targets Hamas leaders and operatives as much as possible.

Make no mistake: all of us in this place want to see a ceasefire, but it must be a sustainable ceasefire. ...

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Independent): ... I think we all abhor the deaths by Hamas on 7 October, as we all should, particularly those of Israeli peace activists. I can hazard a guess at what they would have wanted, and it is certainly not what has unfolded. ...

In August 2023, the United Nations noted that 172 people had been killed by Israeli forces on the west bank alone—not in Gaza, but on the west bank. Why did the UN report that figure in August? Because it had passed the grisly milestone of 170 killed on the west bank in the entirety of 2022. ... The killing by Israel of 25 times as many people as were killed by Hamas on 7 October is another grisly and sad fact, especially as the majority of the 30,000 dead are children and women.

col 773 There can be no room for hate, and we all condemn antisemitism for fear of where it can lead and has led in the past, but we see daily on our televisions where anti-Palestinianism has led: it has led to genocide. ...

The House cannot impose a ceasefire, but it can be an important domino towards that ceasefire. It can be good for the immediate saving of lives, and it can mean a safer future for Israel itself in the long term. ...

Sharon Hodgson (Labour): ... we cannot call for a ceasefire without an amendment that understands that Israel cannot be expected to cease fighting while Hamas continue with violence and holding hostages. We cannot have a meaningful and enduring ceasefire if we do not recognise that it must, by definition, be two-sided. All Palestinian civilians in Gaza must be protected. Hamas must be disarmed and have no role in the future governance of Gaza. All hostages must be freed and returned to their families. The international community must act to instigate a Marshall plan for rebuilding Gaza and the innocent lives of all those touched by this conflict. Without those conditions, I fear any ceasefire would be unsustainable and would simply destabilise the environment further, causing more suffering. ...

col 774 **Amy Callaghan (SNP):** The situation in Gaza is beyond horrific. Around 1.5 million people have been squeezed into the city of Rafah, where they fled after the Israeli Government told them it was a safe zone. They fled believing they were escaping the horrors of bombing, but that is not the case.

We have all seen the videos and heard the stories of the horrors coming out of Gaza. We have seen the stories of kids being forced to have their limbs amputated without anaesthetic. We have seen the stories of women being forced to use scraps of cloth from tents as sanitary products. We have seen the stories of journalists killed while trying to document the Israeli Government's atrocities so that the world can see. ...

It is a simple fact that the best way—the only way—to guarantee not only the safety of the Palestinian population in Gaza, but the release of all remaining hostages is through an immediate ceasefire. It is not through continuously bombing a civilian population or continuously moving the people of Gaza from one area to another, and it is certainly not by assaulting the last remaining safe zone in Gaza. ...

Sarah Dyke (Liberal Democrat): We need to recognise the gendered face of conflict ... Hamas have weaponised sexual violence against female civilians in Israel, and UN experts warned on Monday that the IDF may have killed Palestinian women and girls who were holding white flags. ...

col 775 **Dave Doogan (SNP):** ... Some 23% of my casework since October has been on the humanitarian disaster in Israel and Gaza. ...

We are approaching five months of intolerable incarceration for those who were taken hostage on 7 October. Trying to extract the remains of your family from the rubble does not bear contemplation. As the state of Israel, you know you are in difficult territory when the United States of America tells you that you have gone over the top. ...

col 776 One troubling issue is the false equivalence that pervades the debate. The 30,000

civilian deaths in Gaza do not atone for the tragedy that befell Israeli civilians. The IDF represent the democratically elected Government of the state of Israel and the people of Israel. Hamas do not represent the people of Gaza. The equivalence is completely false. What is most important is that humanity must prevail, whatever the detail. ...

col 777 Ian Blackford (SNP): ... As a Chamber, we are very good when we reflect on the horrors of genocide, when we think about what happened in Srebrenica, Rwanda and Darfur, and we ask ourselves why we did not stop the killing in those situations. Yet here we are again. Twenty-nine thousand people—women and children—have been murdered. Why? We are members of the UN Security Council and in a position of leadership, and we should be standing up today. Yes, we extend a hand of friendship to our allies in Israel, but we see that the only way we can resolve this is if we have an end to the fighting now. We recognise everything we have said about the two-state solution over many decades, and we now have to push on. ...

Yes, we want to see Israelis being able to live in peace and security. Yes, of course we want the removal of Hamas—that vile terrorist organisation—but for goodness' sake, today is the day that we must come together. Let us stand united. Let us say, "No more should innocent civilians lose their lives in Gaza." ...

Apsana Begum (Labour): When the House last voted on a ceasefire in November, 11,320 Palestinians had been killed, including 4,650 children. When the ICJ's plausible genocide ruling made clear the right of Palestinians to be protected from genocide, the death toll in Gaza had surpassed 26,000. I find myself asking again—just as I asked when 10,000 were killed and when 20,000 were killed—now that over 29,000 men, women and children have been killed, whether this Government believe that there should be any limit at all to the number of civilians slaughtered. People all over the UK are struggling to grapple with the fact that the Government seem not to understand that starving civilians, destroying schools and hospitals, and targeting refugee camps can never be viewed as part of a legitimate military campaign. ...

col 778 Any expression of Palestinian identity has all too often been deemed unacceptable over the recent period, and long before. ...

Why are Palestinians being treated differently and denied any sense of humanity? Why are Palestinian lives and dignity not being protected? ...

Neale Hanvey (Alba): ... My party's position was set out by my party leader Alex Salmond on 9 October: "There has been a long and sorry catalogue of atrocities throughout the history of this conflict. Terrorist action against civilians can never be justified and neither can military reprisals which lead to killing and maiming of children. Both sides should be told by the international community to now choose the path of de-escalation and ceasefire. There can be no lasting settlement which ignores long-standing United Nations resolutions and there is no path to peace which can be initiated by violence against civilians."

He was right, as has been evidenced by the subsequent violence, death and destruction. This serves no one, and an end to bloodshed should be the only guiding principle we observe.

At the start of the current conflict, many of us met a young Israeli man who had lost both of his peace-campaigning parents in the 7 October attack. Despite his loss, his appeal was for de-escalation, peace and the amplification of moderate voices in Israel. He described the anger in his country towards the current Israeli Government. We have also heard from Palestinian representatives who have lost every generation of their family in the ensuing IDF attacks. Those families had followed the instruction from Israel to move to the south of Gaza but they were wiped out anyway. We have heard testimony from Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders, which are witnesses to alleged war crimes. The ICJ has found it plausible that Israel's actions may amount to genocide. The Jewish Voice for Peace rabbinical council has condemned the continuing violence against Palestinians and those countries that support and enable it.

col 779 If this House cannot co-operate, and if it calls those of us who seek peace naive on a matter of such humanitarian significance, how can we expect others who are so invested in this conflict to lay down their arms and talk?

Claire Hanna (SDLP): ... I worked for relief and development agencies for 10 years before being elected to this place, and I never encountered a humanitarian context as hellish as the people of Gaza are experiencing. ...

Worse, people who express basic human emotion and solidarity with people who face the unimaginable are being met with slurs and distortions. They are smeared as being pro-Hamas and slurred as being antisemitic ... Like most of my constituents, I stand in full solidarity with the victims of the wicked Hamas attacks of 7 October. Those vile, indefensible attacks were carried out by a cynical organisation that has not allowed the people of Gaza to vote for a generation, but the attacks do not justify the horrors that have followed.

I defend Israel's right to exist. I stand in solidarity with Jewish people here and around the world, including those standing against the far-right Netanyahu Government and their excesses throughout the last summer. Netanyahu is a man who, in word and deed, has repudiated the two-state solution that many of us in this Chamber advocate, and that is the only possible outcome that does not condemn the region to years of this nightmare. ... We need to stop the bombs and the rockets, we need to release the hostages, we need to release the aid, and then we need to work every day to make it sustainable. ...

col 780 **Kenny MacAskill (Alba):** Obviously, Israel is entitled to defend itself. It is unquestionable that Hamas's actions were totally reprehensible, but we are long past the point at which Israeli action was legitimate. It has not been a matter of days or weeks; it is now months. Israel has gone beyond what international law views as acceptable.

What Israel is now doing is not a natural consequence of what Hamas did, which was evil and wicked—the retention of prisoners and the holding of hostages remain so. What is now happening is not a consequence; it is deliberate. Israel is acting to the plan of Netanyahu and others to make Gaza unliveable, which is why we have to support a ceasefire and call out Israel's actions. Israel is not simply defending its own. It is not simply looking for hostages in tunnels; it is crushing the life out of Gaza so that it will be unliveable, not for weeks or months but for years, if not forever. It is Israel's intention to flatten Gaza, which is why we have to require not just an immediate ceasefire but, ultimately, genuine peace.

That comes back to the role of Britain, which has been supine towards Israel and towards the US. The tragedy now is that it is moving from being supine, in failing to vote at the UN, to being complicit. We know that RAF Akrotiri is not simply being used by the RAF to fly into Israel; we have handed it over to the US so that it can move things into Israel. ... We also know that intelligence is being used and carried out by Britain, and that it is being shared with others. We are told it relates to the hostages, but what else do we know? We are simply not told. We know that the British Army is training the IDF and that the British military machine is seeing companies making huge profits. ...

Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru): Everyone here knows that what is unfolding in Rafah, in a refugee camp the size of Cardiff, but with treble the number of people crammed within its boundaries, is an irrevocable disaster. Yet in the light of that evidence, the Government's refusal to support calls for a ceasefire is shameful. ...

While dismissing a ceasefire, the Government claim to be working to prevent the loss of civilian life in Gaza. But where is the action and the urgency? What could the Government be doing to make a difference? Where are the export bans of arms to Israel, given the clear evidence of their use against civilians? Where is the diplomatic pressure on the Israeli Government to comply with the ICJ ruling? Where are the UK efforts to restore funding to the UN in Palestine, given the dire humanitarian situation there? Where, even, is the provision of treatment for injured Palestinian children in UK specialist hospitals? ...

col 781 The Government must be aware that the inconsistency with which Palestinians seeking to escape a warzone are being treated is set to be the subject of a legal challenge. My constituent has seen the support provided by the UK Government to Ukrainian refugees for two years. Both she and I can conclude only that the lack of similar support to refugees first from Afghanistan and now from Palestine must now be morally and legally questioned. ...

The longer we allow death and violence to continue, the more the rising reactionary forces of antisemitism and Islamophobia will continue to spread through all our communities.

Chris Stephens (SNP): ... Members who are supporting the Government amendment ... are asking us to ignore two key facts. They are asking us to ignore the International Criminal Court investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity by Israel, and they are asking us to ignore the order from the International Court of Justice, which urges the UK Government to uphold their own legal obligations to prevent Israel from committing genocide. ...

A YouGov poll in December showed that 71% of the UK public believe that there should be an immediate ceasefire in Israel and Palestine, with only 12% against. The military escalation since then, and the impending threat to Rafah, have only strengthened those views. ...

col 782 Israel has intensified the airstrikes on Rafah ahead of its threatened ground offensive. Let us remember that Rafah has 1.5 million people, including half a million children, all shielding in 20% of the Gaza Strip, without access to adequate shelter, water, food, and medical facilities. That needs to stop. ...

Richard Foord (Liberal Democrat): ... When we talk about being a friend of Israel, we should think about what a friend is. To my mind, being a friend involves being listened to. At present, I see no evidence that the British Government are being listened to by Israel. This was particularly evident when the Foreign Secretary said that the UK might recognise a Palestinian state. It was a suggestion that has been utterly rebuffed by Benjamin Netanyahu. The insurgents— Hamas terrorists if you prefer—sought on 7 October to provoke an excessive reaction. Fifteen years ago, counter-insurgency expert David Kilcullen wrote: “If insurgents can provoke an excessive government reaction against a population, this can become a very powerful motivator for retributive action.”

On this basis, the terrorists who cheered those atrocities on 7 October—the film of them is terrible disgusting and appalling—are still celebrating, because another generation will mourn dead parents and dead children and be attracted magnetically to Islamism, to the very Islamist ideology that Israel is trying to expunge by destroying Hamas.

A more successful counter-insurgency campaign would have sought to use distinction to distinguish the terrorists from the innocents—to separate the insurgent from their support.

A more successful counter-insurgency campaign would have used proportionality—not parity of lives lost, but a response that is proportionate to a limited military objective. A more successful counter-insurgency campaign would have involved long-term post-insurgency planning ...

col 783 **Christian Wakeford (Labour):** In January, I visited Israel and saw for myself the aftermath of Hamas’s attacks last October. In the kibbutz Kfar Aza, I walked the burned-out streets and saw the homes, razed to the ground. This was not the scene of a battle, but of a well-planned and ruthlessly executed massacre: a pogrom. Surprised as they slept in their beds, the residents had no chance to defend themselves. More than 60 people were murdered, 20 were taken hostage, and an unknown number of women were subjected to horrific acts of rape, torture and mutilation. Such scenes were repeated throughout the border communities of southern Israel, and at the Nova music festival, where more than 360 young people were murdered. ...

We urgently need an end to the fighting, and a permanent and sustainable ceasefire in Gaza, but that requires the perpetrators of the 7 October attacks to be disarmed, and to

have no part in the future governance of Gaza, so that they can never again—as they have repeatedly pledged to—repeat the horrific crimes that they committed against Israeli men, women and children nearly 140 days ago. It also requires Hamas to immediately release the more than 130 hostages that they continue to hold—hostages who we know Hamas have beaten, tortured and raped. ...

Within hours of the Hamas attacks, anti-Israel protesters massed outside the Israeli embassy in London, and they have continued to demonstrate in our towns and cities ever since. Some have chanted antisemitic slogans and carried racist signs. Others have glorified Hamas's butchery, and many more appear not to have noticed, or not to have been concerned, by what was occurring around them. This Manichean view of the conflict, which seeks to cast one side as victim and the other as villain, will do nothing to promote or further a desperately needed, genuine peace process that fulfils the Israelis' right to security and the Palestinians' right to self-determination. ...

col 784 Sam Tarry (Labour): ... Israel of course has a right to defend itself, and no one here is denying the horror of the 7 October attacks, which saw the largest loss of Jewish life since the holocaust. We must be clear, though, that the subsequent actions of the IDF in the past five months have gone far beyond self-defence. The scale of the carnage of the ground is unimaginable. The humanitarian system has collapsed. Thousands of civilian men, women and children are dying in their droves, with refugee camps, religious buildings, schools and UN facilities targeted and levelled on a daily basis.

At the same time as those atrocities, we have heard repeated chilling remarks from top Israeli Government Ministers appearing to condone and encourage those actions. The Minister for Agriculture called the war "the Gaza Nakba", the Minister for Heritage raised the idea of dropping an atomic bomb to flatten Gaza, the Minister of National Security stated that encouraging emigration from Gaza is a necessity, the Defence Minister said that they are fighting "human animals", and the Israeli Prime Minister himself compared Gaza to Amalek, referencing a Bible passage that says: "Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."

I note that a motion was proposed in the Knesset yesterday saying that it would never, ever support a two-state solution.

Those are not cherry-picked comments. They are statements from top Israeli Government Ministers. That rhetoric was a key component of the ICJ's ruling that South Africa's claims of genocide in Gaza are plausible. The place of Gazans, we were told, would be safe if they fled to Rafah. That is why, as we listen to that language, we dread the devastation that is about to be unleashed, and why only an immediate and permanent ceasefire would halt that violence.

We must work with neighbouring Arab nations to facilitate the release of the hostages, and to allow for the restoration of essential services and for international humanitarian assistance to reach those in need. We must not stop at a ceasefire. The international community must use this moment to facilitate a dialogue that builds a genuine and lasting peace. We must put our faith in the ordinary people of Palestine and Israel for a peaceful solution.

col 785 Richard Burton (Labour): ... As the UN Secretary-General said in October, those heinous attacks—crimes that we all condemn—by Hamas in October "do not justify responding with collective punishment of the Palestinian people."

An immediate ceasefire would save civilian life, allow the aid needed to enter Gaza, and help to ensure the safe release of the Israeli hostages. It could be the catalyst for the peace process that we need and for a way of meeting the International Criminal Court rulings on the genocide convention.

The alternative is thousands more deaths, ever deeper human suffering, more war crimes and the risk of a wider regional war, so it falls to every one of us today to send a signal to

our Government to do the right thing; to demand that they use every diplomatic channel to push, if possible, for an immediate ceasefire ...

Tahir Ali (Labour): The Prime Minister has on several occasions stood before this House and professed his support for a two-state solution to the crisis in the middle east. ... A viable and sovereign Palestine co-existing with a safe and secure Israel is the only path towards peace that remains open. ...

col 786 The vast majority of British people want a ceasefire. The path to peace will be a political solution: violence and military action will not achieve peace. The members of the United Nations Security Council want a ceasefire, yet the USA has vetoed it twice, with the UK abstaining on 8 December and again yesterday. I say to this Government that they should get off the fence and be on the right side of history. That said, while a ceasefire is clearly a necessary condition for peace, it is not sufficient. The recent ICJ ruling states that it is “plausible” that acts that could amount to genocide are being committed in Gaza against the people of Palestine. The British Government must therefore end the sale of arms to Israel—weapons that are being used to kill innocent Palestinians. ...

Nadia Whittome (Labour): For 137 days, tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians have been killed. Entire families have been wiped out by intense bombing that has spared no one. Israeli forces have opened fire on unarmed civilians in hospitals, in queues for aid lorries and in fishing boats. They have killed children, such as six-year-old Hind Rajab—her desperate call to the Palestine Red Crescent Society, trapped in a car alongside the bodies of her dead family members, should haunt us all. The UN has expressed serious concern about the detention of women and girls, with credible reports of degrading treatment and sexual violence by Israeli soldiers. People have lost everything they own, from their homes to their most cherished belongings, and we have seen videos of Israeli soldiers stealing or destroying those people’s possessions, including the food they have had to leave behind.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians face forced starvation. In one heartbreaking video, a girl begs her cat, “If we die, please don’t eat us.” This horrific situation is not some unfortunate accident. It could not be clearer that what Israel is doing in Gaza is immoral. It is wrong. And the International Court of Justice has ruled that it amounts to a plausible risk of genocide, yet Israeli leaders continue to defy the Court’s orders. ...

col 787 If there is one moral principle that all of us in this House should share, it is that genocide should never be allowed to take place. The ICJ has said that, under article 1 of the genocide convention, states must “employ all means reasonably available” to prevent genocide, within the limits permitted by international law, so what are the means that our Government have? They surely include doing everything they can to bring about an immediate ceasefire, increasing humanitarian aid, and ending the arms sales and military training that are enabling Netanyahu’s hard-right Government to continue their atrocities, while continuing to call on Hamas to release all hostages.

For decades, the world has been far too indifferent to the plight of the Palestinians, who are subject to oppression and discrimination simply because they are Palestinian. Israel cannot continue to deny their right to self-determination. It must end its 67-year-long illegal occupation of the west bank and its brutal siege of Gaza. The UK Government must stop their selective empathy and help create a path to safety, security and freedom for both Palestinians and Israelis. ...

Beth Winter (Labour): ... Over 70% of the 30,000 people killed are women and children. Every hour, two Gazan mothers are killed by Israeli attacks, and every day almost 200 women in Gaza are giving birth without adequate care. All this is because 1.7 million Gazans have been displaced from their homes and are living in squalor. ...

col 788 What is happening to the Palestinians is collective punishment, as the Secretary-General of the UN and countless agencies have stated ... The ICJ ... has said that there

is a plausible risk of genocide by the state of Israel. We are witnessing a humanitarian catastrophe, and we stand on the precipice of mass civilian slaughter if the Israelis attack Rafah. ...

Jeremy Corbyn: ... What we are seeing is the total destruction of society, life and hope in Gaza. I keep meeting Palestinian people who tell me how many of their relatives have been killed in Gaza. Our good friend Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian ambassador, has lost 100 members of his wider family in this conflict. ...

Israel's lack of support or recognition for international law goes back a long way. It has been found wanting under the fourth Geneva convention in so many cases in relation to the power of an occupying force. The International Court of Justice—and I attended the hearing in The Hague—listened very carefully to the South African application, and in effect demanded an immediate ceasefire, which has not happened.

When this happened and the whole thing kicked off, António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, said that this did not “come from nowhere.” It comes from decades of the encirclement of Gaza and the occupation of the west bank. It comes from the settlement policy. It comes from the inability of Palestinian people to live their lives in peace. A ceasefire now is essential, and it has to go on to end the occupation, end the settlement policy, and recognise the plight of those thousands of Palestinian refugees living in Jordan, Syria, Libya and so many other places around the world.

col 789 The United Nations Relief and Works Agency has been defunded. We are sending arms, not aid. We should be sending all the support we can. The best support we can give is to stop the arms trade with Israel, end the battle in Gaza at the moment, and bring about peace and hope for the Palestinian people.

Steve McCabe (Labour): I want a ceasefire. We need a ceasefire, and how I wish that the simple act of calling for one was enough to deliver it, as some people seem to believe. In reality, it will take a bit more than that, and we must accept that if the hostages are not released, that is a major block to a ceasefire. We should throw our weight behind talks in Egypt and Qatar and at the UN, and with the people who are making practical negotiations possible to try to bring this thing to a conclusion. It is not enough to wish for it or to march down the streets, block traffic, invade railway stations, and chant “ceasefire now.” That might make someone feel momentarily good, but it does not change anything at all. We need a much more practical approach to what we are going to do, and that has been absent from this debate, which at times to me sounded like a prosecution of Israel. ...

But I know what happened in Israel on 7 October, and I do not think that should be written out of history by people chanting for something else. ...

Claudia Webbe (Independent): ...According to Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Israeli has killed, seriously injured or maimed well over 100,000 people in Gaza since 7 October, the vast majority of them civilians, and women and children. More than 1,000 children have lost limbs, and many have had to undergo amputations without anaesthetic. Whole families and generations have been wiped out, and just this week the United Nations Human Rights Office said it believes that Israeli soldiers have engaged in arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killing and sexual violence, including the rape and execution of women and girls, and intentionally and publicly humiliated and degraded others. Israel itself has posted videos of its humiliation of civilian men.

col 790 Israel did not even pause for breath in its slaughter in Gaza when the International Court of Justice put it on trial for genocide and ordered it to protect Palestinian lives. Yet our Government continue to enable and assist the Israeli military. The UK Government must explain why they have issued at least 27 arms licences to Israel in the last 137 days—British-made bombs and weapons killing civilians in Gaza. The UN World Health Organisation and others have been warning for weeks that famine and disease in Gaza are starting to kill more civilians than bombs and bullets. The health system in Gaza has been bombed into collapse. Famine is now in Gaza, and 80% of the world's hungriest

people are in that tiny enclave. Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war. Palestinians are forced to eat grass just to survive. Palestinians in Gaza are forced to grind animal feed into flour just to survive. Cutting off funding for UNRWA, the United Nations aid organisation for Palestine, is a death sentence. Only a fraction of the bare minimum for survival is being allowed through in aid. Israel is bombing Rafah, where it drove almost the whole population for their supposed safety. Israel says that it plans a full invasion, which would trigger a catastrophe that would dwarf the horrors we have seen so far.

The UK Government are under an obligation under international law to do everything in their power to stop genocide, yet they have not taken a meaningful step to do so, and they will not even call for an immediate ceasefire to end the devastation. ...

Imran Hussain (Labour): ... A 15-year-old child growing up in Gaza today has never known peace, but this conflict has been the deadliest they have ever seen.

Almost every day for almost five months, Gaza's children have faced a multitude of dangers, whether that is from the Israeli military's bombs or sniper bullets, the grave health risks of wounds treated without anaesthetic or infection control, the acute malnourishment and disease ripping through the population or the psychological torment of being exposed to such death and destruction. These are not combatants, and they are certainly not acceptable collateral damage; they are children. It is shameful that children are wasting away, that most babies under the age of two are starving and that nearly all children under the age of five languish with disease.

Within weeks of the attack on Gaza, we saw haunting images of children begging the international community to protect them, but in the months that followed, the international community made it clear that it is not listening. The question we must ask ourselves is: what is the point of having declarations, charters and institutions if they will not even protect children? What benefit do international courts that the UK touts as the bedrock of a rules-based order offer if they will not halt the killing of children? What purpose does this international order serve if it ignores Palestinian children as being as deserving of protection as any other? The answer is simply that it has failed. Today, we can either continue that legacy of failure, or reject it and vote for an immediate ceasefire to end the bloodshed.

col 791 Zarah Sultana (Labour): ... For the last 137 days, Gaza has been subjected to indiscriminate assault. ... what is truly horrifying is that Israeli politicians and officials have said that they would unleash this atrocity on Gaza. At the start of the assault, an Israeli defence official said that Gaza would be reduced to a "city of tents". ... An Israeli Government Minister said there are "no non-combatants" in Gaza. Remember the number of children killed.

Another official said that the aim was to make Gaza a place where no human being could exist. Remember the number of people starving in Gaza. What Israeli officials said would happen has happened. The Government, to their eternal shame, have given Israel the green light, refusing to call for an immediate ceasefire and continuing to arm the Israeli military. That could change today. Voting for an immediate ceasefire—I mean immediate—would tell the world that Britain demands that the war, this brutal assault, must end now. In the face of the moral calamity we are witnessing, that is the bare minimum that the House must do. ...

col 792 Fleur Anderson (Labour): ... We visited the Kibbutzim attacked on 7 October, Jerusalem and the west bank. I met Rachel Goldberg, the mother of Hersh, a 23-year-old, similar to my 21-year-old. He loves travelling and music festivals. He waved his mum goodbye and went off to a music festival on 6 October. At 8.20 in the morning on 7 October, he sent his mum two text messages: "I love you" and "I'm sorry". She has not heard from him since.

Rachel, Hersh's mother, is an extraordinary woman. She summarised the war this way: it is not a competition of pain and tears; it is just a bunch of pain and tears. We should learn

from this. We should learn about solidarity both for the Jewish people and the Palestinian people, and find words to say that here and across our country. ...

There can be no peace in Gaza without peace in the west bank. I went to a village destroyed by illegal settler occupation. The term “settlers” sounds like a nice farming fringe activity, but that is not the case; it is an illegal and violent occupation movement that undermines peace on the west bank and in Gaza. They must be stopped now with more sanctions and calling out and dismantling the illegal outposts. What needs to happen now? We need an immediate ceasefire, with no attacks on the 1.5 million people in Rafah, a surge in humanitarian aid, the release of the hostages, a freeze on the demolition of Palestinian homes in the west bank, and the dismantling of settlement outposts.

The people of south Israel and Gaza must be able to return to their homes and rebuild. There must be international recognition of the state of Palestine, and we need resolution of the contested holy sites in Jerusalem. The Israel Defence Forces has said that it is planning 2024 to be a year of war. We are here today to say no.

Michael Shanks (Labour): The list of babies killed in Gaza before their first birthday is beyond heartbreaking. This week, at least four were killed before they had even got to the stage where they had a name. At the same time, footage emerged this week from Khan Yunis of Israeli hostage Shiri Bibas and her sons, aged four and nine months, still being held by Hamas. ... I have heard many people in this House and outside say that the situation is not complex but simple: “Vote for a ceasefire. It’s symbolic; it is sending a message. It doesn’t matter if you agree with every word of a motion, just vote for it so you vote for something.” They have said, “Think of the headline on BBC News, not the detail.” How debased our politics has become, that that is what passes for foreign policy. Words matter. Detail is important. ...

col 793 **Helen Hayes (Labour):** On Sunday I returned from four days in Israel and Palestine as part of a cross-party delegation with Yachad. We met hostage families, displaced Palestinians, NGOs working in Gaza, peace activists on both sides of the conflict, and Israeli and Palestinian official spokespeople. It was a distressing, moving and humbling experience.

The conflict in Israel and Gaza has brought unimaginable horror on Israelis and Palestinians. It has intensified the violent displacement of Palestinians by Israelis in the west bank. ... I want to bring to this House the words of an extraordinary young man, Yotam Kipnis. We met Yotam in the Be’eri kibbutz, which he returned to with us for the first time since 7 October, to visit the home from which his parents were abducted and subsequently murdered by Hamas. As we stood outside the rubble of Yotam’s home, he said “Vengeance is a valid feeling. It is not a valid policy.”

In Israel and Palestine, they talk about the day after this conflict: to get to the day after, we must first have a ceasefire. We must have a ceasefire now, before more atrocities are committed in Rafah. We need a ceasefire so that humanitarian aid can get into Gaza. We need a ceasefire for people like Yotam, who are working for peace. If they can set aside their differences and focus on what really matters—the future that Israelis and Palestinians can build of peace and security—we can put aside our differences in this House tonight and vote for a ceasefire. ...

Alison Thewliss (SNP): ... We are here today in condemnation of the atrocities committed against innocent people in Israel by Hamas on 7 October. We are here today in condemnation of the atrocities committed by Israel against innocent people in Gaza every day since then. We are here today in condemnation of the taking of hostages, indiscriminate violence, maiming, use of snipers, rape and sexual assault, starvation, and attacks in places of worship, schools and hospitals. It must stop now. A pause is not enough. Filling the bellies of starving weans one day just to bomb them the next is not acceptable.

col 794 Pregnant women—those who have not miscarried or suffered stillbirth due to the

unimaginable strain of living in a war zone—cannot time their labour for whenever that pause might fall. ...

It cannot be anything other than collective punishment. As the International Court of Justice has found, there is a plausible risk that genocide is being perpetrated by Israel. More deaths will follow without a ceasefire and without the full flow of humanitarian aid, which Israel has been holding up, being allowed in. The Palestinian Red Crescent has seen its lifesaving work disrupted by Israeli forces. There is a real fear for the people now sheltering in Rafah—1.4 million of them—if a further attack lands on them.

There are many ways to die in Gaza, from disease or starvation as well as from bombardment. And what of those who survive—the 1.9 million displaced, homeless and destitute, left among the rubble of their lives; those who are orphaned; and the 70,000 injured and suffering enduring trauma? We must not forget those people either.

I have listened carefully to activists from the Gaza Families Reunited campaign who want to allow those with families in the UK to be reunited with them, and to bring families to sanctuary here. The UK has granted very few visas to Palestinians over the years—only 1,300 since 2014. ... None of them have found a safe and legal route, because none exists. People are fundraising to bribe their way out of Gaza for lack of a safe and legal route, all the time worrying and waiting for news of whether their relatives are dead or alive. There has been a scheme for Ukraine. Why is there, as yet, no scheme for Gaza? ...

col 795 We know what the consequences will be if there is no ceasefire and we continue as we are now: thousands more people will die. ... and it will be on our conscience if we choose not to act. ...

We have an obligation, a very special obligation, when it comes to the middle east. During every moment for which we delay and equivocate, more people die. It could not be more crucial than that. This is not a debate about semantics or procedures; it is about principle. It is about the people of Gaza. It is about saving lives.

The hostages must be released. Aid must be allowed in. Negotiations must begin. It is on all our consciences here in this place if we do not stand with our international partners, with countries around the world, with international aid organisations and with the United Nations. We must have a ceasefire, and we must have it now.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): ... On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that Mr Speaker is a servant of this House and that he takes his responsibilities to us extremely seriously. ...

We all have obligations in this place to ensure that all views can be expressed, and that individual Members and parties of all colours and sizes can have their say. ... Mr Speaker has stated in the decision that he has taken today, and that he is entitled to take, that he wished for all propositions on the Order Paper to be put to the House.

However, that decision has raised temperatures in this House on an issue where feelings are already running high, and that has put right hon. and hon. Members in a more difficult position. It also appears, from the advice of his Clerk, that the decision was taken against the long-standing and established processes and procedures of this House, and that the consequence may be that the Government are not able to respond to Opposition day motions. As such, the Government do not have confidence that they will be able to vote on their own amendment. For that reason, the Government will play no further part in the decision this House takes on today's proceedings.

col 796 I would like to stress that the Government's position on Israel and Gaza remains unchanged ... We want to see the fighting in Gaza end as soon as possible, and we never again want to see Hamas carry out the appalling terrorist attacks that Israel was subject to. We know that just calling for an immediate ceasefire now, which collapses back into fighting within days or weeks, is not in anyone's interests. ...

I fear that, regrettably, Mr Speaker has inserted himself into that row with today's decision and undermined the confidence of this House in its ability to rely on its long-established Standing Orders to govern its debates ...

Madam Deputy Speaker (Rosie Winterton): ... I think it will be helpful if I explain that if the Government do not move their amendment, the Questions will be first on the current amendment, and secondly on the motion itself, either as amended or in its original form. ...
col 797 Lucy Powell (Labour Co-op): ... Last time I looked, those on the Government Benches had a majority in this House. If they do not like the amendments before them, they could vote this evening to defeat them. *[Interruption.]* But they have now decided, I understand, not to vote on them, so perhaps we have to ask whether they do still command a majority in this House and whether they are trying to hide behind some other reason. ... There are a large number of Opposition Members who want to express their view this evening by being able to vote for an amendment in their name. *[Interruption.]* ...
Mr Speaker had every right to let us have a say on our amendment this evening and to have the maximum number of options. ...

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let me just confirm again that if the Government do not move their amendment, the other amendment and the main Question will be taken.

Stephen Flynn (SNP): ... May I begin by re-emphasising that we are all here tonight to vote on a motion on the civilian deaths in Gaza and the appalling situation that is being faced by nationals in Israel, too? ...

First, if I have listened correctly to what has just been said, on an SNP Opposition day, should the Labour party's amendment be carried, the SNP's vote will not be held. Secondly, if I have correctly read the Clerk of the House's letter to all Members, which was sent to the Speaker, this was a consequence that the Speaker was warned of. Madam Deputy Speaker, can you please advise me: where on earth is the Speaker of the House of Commons, and how do we bring him to the House to explain to the Scottish National party why our views and our votes in this House are irrelevant to him?

col 798 Madam Deputy Speaker: ... I have explained that, as I understood it, there were going to be three votes tonight. The Government have withdrawn their amendment. The consequence is, as the hon. Gentleman says, that if the Labour party amendment is passed, it will be added to the SNP motion. ... He is right to say that if there is a Division, there will be just one vote, but if it goes through, we move on to the next business.

Karen Bradley (Conservative, Chair of the Procedure Committee): ... My understanding from the advice I have seen is that Standing Order 31, whereby the motion is put first, did not apply because there were two amendments. If there is now only one amendment, surely we should revert to Standing Order 31.

Madam Deputy Speaker: ... if the Government amendment is not moved, we revert to the amendment from the Labour party and that amendment has been moved. ...

Stephen Flynn: ... I am afraid that you did not provide me with clarity in relation to, first, where the Speaker of the House of Commons is and, secondly, what mechanisms are available to Members to bring him to this House to explain why the SNP Opposition day has turned into a Labour Opposition day. Thirdly, and most importantly, I must insist to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the SNP motion is voted on first, as the Chair of the Procedure Committee has just outlined. ...

col 799 Owen Thompson (SNP): ... As I understand the advice from the Clerks, if the Labour amendment were to be put first and passed, that would amend the text of our motion. Given that that amendment would remove all of the text of our motion, we would not have a vote on the text of our motion, on our Opposition day. How can that possibly be allowed to happen?

Madam Deputy Speaker: ... The Speaker set out very clearly this morning the reasons for his decision to give the widest possible scope for different views to be heard and voted on. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson), the SNP Chief Whip, knows that we would have been able to vote on all three propositions. However, because the Government motion has been withdrawn, that is not possible ... Because the Government

are no longer participating, I will put the Question on the Labour amendment ...
If it is passed but SNP Members do not agree with the wording, they can vote against it. ...

Philip Davies (Conservative): ... On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It seems that Mr Speaker was put under intolerable pressure. Nicholas Watt, the political editor of BBC "Newsnight", tweeted: "Senior Labour figures tell me @CommonsSpeaker was left in no doubt that Labour would bring him down after the general election unless he called Labour's Gaza amendment." ...

Madam Deputy Speaker, can you assure the House that everything will be done to identify who put that intolerable pressure on Mr Speaker?

col 800 **Madam Deputy Speaker:** ... That tweet is wrong. The statement is incorrect ...

Stephen Flynn: ... Can you please advise me on where Mr Speaker is? What mechanisms are available to bring him to the House? As we wait for the deliberation on that question, I move that you use the power that I trust you have to suspend this House until Mr Speaker is brought here. ...

Madam Deputy Speaker: ... I will not be suspending the House. We need to put these questions. Mr Speaker will be in his place tomorrow. ...

Brendan O'Hara: ... The House and its procedures have descended into absolute chaos, simply because of a decision taken by the Speaker earlier today. Is it too much to ask that the Speaker is asked to come to this House to explain exactly why he took those decisions, the consequences of those decisions and how he intends to get this House out of the mess it finds itself in?

col 801 **Chris Bryant (Labour):** ... There are perfectly legitimate views, on different sides, as to the propriety of today's proceedings. ...

Far more importantly, surely, is the fact that the behaviour of many hon. Members in the Chamber today will have made a lot of people in this country very nervous about the way we conduct our business when dealing with some of the most important matters of state. Most significantly, it has been the tradition of British parliamentary democracy that if a Government lose control of their foreign policy, they have lost the confidence of the House, by definition, and consequently there is an immediate general election. ...

Charles Walker: ... People are frightened. People have weaponised this debate in this Chamber. Whips are frightened for their flocks, because Members of Parliament now feel that they have to vote in a certain way in order to safeguard their safety and that of their family. That is a far bigger issue than the debate we are having tonight, because if people are changing their votes or their behaviour in this place because they are frightened of what may happen to them or their family out there, we have a real problem. ...

col 802 **Neil O'Brien (Conservative):** ... I believe that today the SNP has been treated unfairly. But it is not just the SNP that has been treated unfairly. Those of us who would like to vote for the SNP motion must now, if we want to do so, vote against the Labour party's amended motion—a motion that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Sir Chris Bryant) has just said would, if we voted for it, lead to an immediate general election, so we are being placed in an unfair position if we wish to support the SNP motion. We have now seen the exit of SNP Members and many Conservative Members from the Chamber. We are clearly in an intolerable situation. ...

I believe that the current Speaker is a man of honour who has done a great deal over recent years to restore the reputation of the Chair after a dark period for this House. However, even if he believes that the constitutional innovation that he has introduced today is a good one, this was not the time to change the rules. ... May I suggest, Madam Deputy Speaker, that if you are not prepared to suspend the House, we at least defer the Divisions that are supposed to be happening this evening until we can resolve these issues?

Finally, because in this House it is courteous and traditional that the person about whom one is talking is always in the Chamber when they are discussed, we should defer those

Divisions so that we can hear from Mr Speaker himself before we come to vote on these issues, because otherwise a great injustice is being done to the SNP and to other Members of the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: ... I just want to be clear again that there was the ability to have a vote on all three motions that were before the House. The situation has changed, but that does not mean that I would then withdraw the questions and not put them, because they are still before the House, and I intend to proceed with them in the way that I have suggested.

John McDonnell (Labour): ... I was going to suggest that the Speaker displayed immense flexibility this morning, and that that flexibility was exerted again to enable us to have a separate vote. However, now that the SNP Members have gone, there is no other way that I can do this to ensure that my constituents know that I will be voting for the Labour amendment, but I would also have voted for the SNP motion. I want that on the record.

col 803 Karen Bradley: ... As there is no longer a Government amendment, I am confused about why we are not returning to the order of precedence set down in Standing Order No. 31.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Because of Standing Order No. 31, I am bound to take the Labour party amendment first and then move on to the SNP motion. ...

William Wragg (Conservative): I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163).

The House proceeded to a Division.

Ayes 20

Noes 212

Question accordingly negatived

Amendment (a) agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House believes that an Israeli ground offensive in Rafah risks catastrophic humanitarian consequences and therefore must not take place; notes the intolerable loss of Palestinian life, the majority being women and children; condemns the terrorism of Hamas who continue to hold hostages; supports Australia, Canada and New Zealand's calls for Hamas to release and return all hostages and for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, which means an immediate stop to the fighting and a ceasefire that lasts and is observed by all sides, noting that Israel cannot be expected to cease fighting if Hamas continues with violence and that Israelis have the right to the assurance that the horror of 7 October 2023 cannot happen again; therefore supports diplomatic mediation efforts to achieve a lasting ceasefire; demands that rapid and unimpeded humanitarian relief is provided in Gaza; further demands an end to settlement expansion and violence; urges Israel to comply with the International Court of Justice's provisional measures; calls for the UN Security Council to meet urgently; and urges all international partners to work together to establish a diplomatic process to deliver the peace of a two-state solution, with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable Palestinian state, including working with international partners to recognise a Palestinian state as a contribution to rather than outcome of that process, because statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and not in the gift of any neighbour.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-21/debates/610A4D12-A333-4885-9D0B-0A225C35C043/CeasefireInGaza>

Standing Order 31, referred to above by the Speaker, can be read at

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmstords/1020/body.html>

The Statement from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights referred to above by Colum Eastwood can be read at

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>

The International Court of Justice interim ruling (Order) referred to above can be read at

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

House of Commons Speaker's Statement

col 806 Mr Speaker (Lindsay Hoyle): I wish to respond to the point of order raised by the Leader of the House.

Today's debate was exceptional in the intensity with which all parties wished to secure a vote on their own proposition. It took decisions that were intended to allow the House the widest range of propositions on which to express a view. I wanted to do the best, and it was my wish to do the best, by every Member of this House. I take very seriously—*[Interruption.]* No, the danger—that is why I wanted everybody to be able to express their views. I am very, very concerned about the security of all Members. *[Interruption.]* I was very concerned, I am still concerned, and that is why the meetings I have had today were about the security of Members, their families and the people involved.

I have to say that I regret how it has ended up. It was not my intention. I wanted to ensure that all could express their views and all sides of the House could vote. As it was, in particular, the SNP was ultimately unable to vote on its proposition. I regret with sadness that it has ended up in this position. It was never my intention for it to end up like this. I was absolutely convinced that the decision was made with the right intentions. ...

I did not want it to have ended like this. I want to say to the House that I will meet with all the key players of each party. I think it is right that I meet with each one. ... I am honest to this House, I am true to this House, and I believe in all Members of this House. I have tried to do what I thought was the right thing for all sides of this House. It is regrettable, and I apologise for a decision that did not end up in the place that I wished. ...

I will meet with the leaders and the Chief Whips. Let us have a discussion on what is the best way forward. I say again that I thought I was doing the right thing and the best thing, and I regret, and I apologise for, how it has ended up. I do take responsibility for my actions ...

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): ... I thank you for coming to the House, for saying you will reflect on what has happened today ... I thank you for recommitting yourself to those responsibilities today and for coming to the Floor of the House.

col 807 Mr Speaker: To respond, that is what I tried to do in the first place. It ended up in the wrong place, and I do apologise to all and in particular to the SNP. ...

Stephen Flynn (SNP): ... May I begin by echoing your sentiments in relation to the debate that was had in this Chamber on the most important of matters with regards to the safety of civilians in Gaza and, indeed, in Israel? There has been a difference of view in the House today, but I think that difference of view has been expressed in a way that we can all agree has been in a positive fashion and the best fitting way of any functioning democracy.

Mr Speaker, while I acknowledge your apology, the reality is that you were warned by the Clerks of the House that your decision could lead to the SNP not having a vote on our very own Opposition day. As a result, we have seen the SNP Opposition day turn into a Labour party Opposition day. I am afraid that that is treating me and my colleagues in the Scottish National party with complete and utter contempt, and I will take significant convincing that your position is not now intolerable.

Mr Speaker: ... I understand the feeling. ...

Lucy Powell (Labour Co-op): ... The amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition was this evening passed unanimously, and therefore—*[Interruption.]* Yes, it was. *[Interruption.]* And therefore—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not think that now is the time. ...

Kit Malthouse (Conservative): ... There are two points in what Mr Speaker just said on which I seek your clarification. First, he implied that the proceedings of the House were manipulated by outside intimidation, with regard given to things said outside on social media and reacted to within the House. Quite an important Rubicon has been crossed, and it may have been crossed without the consent of Members. I would like to know where the processes of the House are likely to go, given the outside influences that may be brought to bear. I would be grateful for some clarification on that.

col 808 Secondly, as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have the greatest respect for you, but, bluntly, you seem to have rammed through two decisions that were quite important to a lot of Members in which no individual vote will have been recorded. A number of us had thought quite carefully about how we were going to vote in those Divisions. ... I wonder if it is possible to either void them or run them again.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Rosie Winterton): ... The fact is, I put the Question and nobody called against it ...

Hon Members: Not true.

Jacob Rees-Mogg (Conservative): ... It was quite clear from the level of noise when the Question was put that the view of the Deputy Speaker was being challenged. I think it is absolutely extraordinary that that noise level was deemed to be “Aye”. It is inconceivable that anybody hearing it would have thought it was “Aye”. ...

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am extremely sorry. I took it on the voices. I was quite clear where we were. *[Interruption.]* The whole thing would have been considerably clearer if the Government had not withdrawn at that position.

Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru): ... It looks like chicanery. I rise to ask a question on behalf of the small parties. What precedent has been set today ... How can we ever have faith in the future that our voices and our votes will actually be heard ...

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think that the hon. Lady heard what Mr Speaker said—that he intends to talk with people. ...

Paul Bristow (Conservative): ... I seek your guidance on how I can make my views more known to my constituents. I was one of the first Members of Parliament to call for the release of hostages, combined with a permanent ceasefire. I lost my Government job as a result. Because people misrepresented my position, someone suggested on social media that they would show my wife a real man. Someone else suggested that they would attack me and my family. Already today, Labour councillors in my patch are tweeting that I have not supported a ceasefire. I wanted to vote with the Scottish National party motion on a ceasefire. Can you advise me how I can make my constituents clear of my views, given that I was not able to vote?

col 809 **Madam Deputy Speaker:** I think the hon. Gentleman has put his views on the record by what he just said.

Alan Brown (SNP): ... how many Labour Opposition day debates have taken place since 7 October in which no motion on a ceasefire was tabled? Why did Mr Speaker think, suddenly today on an SNP Opposition day, that it was really important that a Labour amendment be selected ...

Sarah Owen (Labour): ... had the Conservative Government not withdrawn from the process today, would we have had three votes?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am quite clear that there was the opportunity for three votes. ...

Caroline Johnson (Conservative): ... my understanding is that Mr Speaker made his decision earlier today on the basis that there would be three votes rather than two. Once

the Government withdrew their amendment and there were two votes rather than three, was the decision to put the Labour amendment before the SNP motion made by you, Madam Deputy Speaker, or Mr Speaker? Secondly, it is routinely the case that if a Division—in this case on whether to sit in private—is completed after 7 o’ clock, as this one did, the motion would fall. Can you explain why it did not?

col 810 Madam Deputy Speaker: First, it is Standing Order No. 31 that ruled on the order in which the votes were to be taken. ... with reference to it coming after 7, once an amendment is before the House, it has to be decided on. ...

Marion Fellows (SNP): ... Back in October, as soon as I could after the heinous actions of Hamas, I called for a ceasefire, and I have held firm to my belief since. My constituents have written to me in huge numbers telling me to vote for a ceasefire. I carry five proxy votes, and today I have not been allowed either to vote on my own behalf or to use those five proxy votes that I hold. ... how do I ensure that the way I would have voted, which was for a ceasefire, is recorded in the House?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think the hon. Lady has made very clear what she would have done, and I am sure that she and all colleagues here will find ways in which to express that view.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-21/debates/24022166000002/Speaker'SStatement>

House of Commons Library

Letter from Clerk of the House Tom Goldsmith to Speaker Lindsay Hoyle MP regarding the convention governed by Standing Order 31 and the decision to allow an Official Opposition spokesperson to speak and move an amendment before a Government minister in response to an SNP spokesperson moving their Opposition day motion

... the decision to allow an Official Opposition spokesperson to speak and to move an amendment before a Government minister in response to an SNP spokesperson moving their Opposition day motion represents a departure from the long-established convention for dealing with such amendments on Opposition days, governed by Standing Order No. 31. Where an orderly Government amendment to leave out some words of the motion and insert others is tabled and selected, the expectation is that such an amendment is then moved by the minister in the second speech of the debate and, once the amendment has been moved, the Standing Order provides that the first question considered by the House at the end of the debate must be on the text of the original motion. If that is negated, the question is put on the Government’s amendment. When introducing the proposal in 1979 the Leader of the House said the arrangements were “so that a vote could take place on the Opposition’s own motion” (Hansard 31 October 1979 vol 972 [c1278](#)). The procedural impact of the decision taken today is that the first division is likely to be on the Official Opposition’s amendment rather than on the SNP’s motion; and, depending on the outcome of any such division, it is possible that the House will not be able to vote on the SNP motion (nor on the Government’s alternative proposition).

In taking this step, I recognise that:

- a) Your decision is not specifically precluded by any Standing Order;
- b) The Speaker and his Deputies have complete discretion regarding the order in which to call Members to speak;
- c) The Speaker has discretion over which amendments to select;
- d) There have been two occasions in the last 25 years or so when an amendment has been moved by an opposition party Member from a party other than the one to which the day had been allotted (as well as one when a government backbencher

moved an amendment) and on one of those occasions, the Official Opposition Member was called to move his amendment before a minister was called – however, in those few circumstances, no Government amendment had been tabled; and

- e) You have been motivated by giving the House what you considered to be the widest choice of decisions on alternative propositions, on a subject of immense importance, on which people in and outside the House have the strongest of views.

Nevertheless, I know that you understand why I feel compelled to point out that long-established conventions are not being followed in this case. ...

To read the letter in full see

<https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2024-0193/Speaker.docx>

House of Commons Oral Answers

Prime Minister's Questions

Stephen Flynn (SNP): ... As it stands, some 60% of the buildings in Gaza are either damaged or destroyed. Much of the farmland is in ruin; some 30,000 people are dead, 70,000 are injured, and 1.4 million are currently sheltering in Rafah, awaiting an imminent Israeli onslaught. Surely the Prime Minister must accept that that does not amount to self-defence.

The Prime Minister: I share the concern of many Members about the high rate of civilian casualties and, indeed, the growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. That is why we have called consistently for an immediate humanitarian pause, which would allow for the safe release of hostages and more aid going into Gaza, so that we create the sustainable conditions for a long-term and enduring ceasefire. That is what our diplomatic efforts are focused on, and that is what I impressed upon the Israeli Prime Minister last week when I spoke to him.

Stephen Flynn: Tonight, this House will have the opportunity to join the majority of the international community and say that enough is enough, that the killing in Gaza must stop and that the hostages must be released, and the best way to do that is to send a clear and united message that we back an immediate ceasefire. Surely, all of us, irrespective of our political allegiance, can agree on that very issue?

The Prime Minister: Of course, we want to see the fighting in Gaza end as soon as possible, and never again allow Hamas to carry out the appalling terrorist attacks that Israel was subject to. The hon. Member talks about the UN resolution, but just calling for an immediate full ceasefire now, which collapses back into fighting within days or weeks, is not in anyone's interest. We must work towards a permanent ceasefire, and that is why the right approach is the approach that we have set out and the United States has set out in its resolution, which is for an immediate humanitarian pause to get hostages out and aid in, so that we then can create the conditions for a sustainable ceasefire. In the meantime, we are doing everything we can to increase the amount of humanitarian aid that we bring into Gaza—something I discussed with the King of Jordan last week—and we will have more updates in the coming days of more airdrops into Gaza, but also just in the last couple of days, that have managed to deliver family tents into Gaza, which are providing much-needed shelter for very vulnerable people.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-21/debates/F9EAC2E4-7C9A-4AB4-BD1B-800401FDD4B0/Engagements#contribution-1F476F17-F497-41E0-A535-102BCBC714C3>

Prime Minister's Questions

Pete Wishart (SNP) [901468] I was in the House on 18 March 2003 when this House

voted to go to war in Iraq on the demands of the then Labour Government. What followed was death, misery, and destruction on an almost unimaginable scale. Voting against the Iraq war is the vote I am most proud of in my time in this House. Today, after 29,000 deaths in Gaza, we face a vote of similar significance. Does the Prime Minister believe that MPs today should look back with that same pride, knowing that they have done everything possible to stop the death, destruction, and misery tonight?

The Prime Minister: Nobody wants to see the fighting in Gaza go on for a moment longer than is necessary, and nobody wants to see innocent civilians suffer. That is why we are doing absolutely everything we can to bring about an immediate humanitarian pause, allowing for the safe release of hostages, which the hon. Gentleman failed to mention I believe, and also getting more aid into Gaza to create the conditions for a genuinely sustainable ceasefire. That is the position shared by our allies, that is what our diplomatic efforts are focused on, and that is what our motion tonight will reflect.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-21/debates/F9EAC2E4-7C9A-4AB4-BD1B-800401FDD4B0/Engagements#contribution-EDF53947-951D-4B09-98E8-F9200F4D06AC>

Prime Minister's Questions

Patricia Gibson (SNP) [901472] When important matters of life and death are voted on in this House, does the Prime Minister think MPs should vote according to their party Whip or according to their conscience?

The Prime Minister: This afternoon the House will have an opportunity to consider its approach to the situation in Israel and Gaza. Our position is crystal clear: we have called, and will always call, for an immediate humanitarian pause, which would allow the safe release of hostages and more aid to go into Gaza, to create the conditions for a genuinely sustainable ceasefire. But just calling for an immediate, full ceasefire now, which would collapse back into fighting in days or weeks, would not be in anyone's interests. We are committed not just to an immediate humanitarian pause, but to finding a lasting resolution to this conflict that delivers on the promise of a two-state solution and ensures that Israelis and Palestinians can live in the future with dignity and security.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-21/debates/F9EAC2E4-7C9A-4AB4-BD1B-800401FDD4B0/Engagements#contribution-D42CB6BC-02C6-4329-8F23-F29F438078C5>

House of Commons Written Answers

West Bank: Violence

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [13137] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will apply Magnitsky-style sanctions to (a) Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, (b) Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, (d) David Chai Chasdai, (e) Einan Tanjil, (f) Shalom Zicherman and (g) Yinon Levi, in the context of (i) the US President's executive order in relation to settler violence in the West Bank and (ii) the Foreign Secretary's announcement that he will ban those responsible for settler violence from entering the UK.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK continues to take a strong stance against settler violence and urges Israel to take stronger action to stop settler violence and hold the perpetrators accountable. As noted, we will prevent those responsible for settler violence in the West Bank from entering the UK.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-05/13137>

Gaza: Israel

Dan Carden (Labour) [14354] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what diplomatic steps he is taking to help ensure compliance with 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.

Andrew Mitchell: We respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ICJ's ruling is binding. We have stated, however, that we have considerable concerns about this case, which is not helpful in the goal of achieving a sustainable ceasefire. Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas in line with International Law, as we have said from the outset. Our view is that Israel's actions in Gaza cannot be described as a genocide, which is why we thought South Africa's decision to bring the case was wrong and provocative. The court's call for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza is a position we have long advocated. We are clear that an immediate pause is necessary to get aid in and hostages out, and then we want to build towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to the fighting. FCDO Ministers hold regular meetings with their counterparts.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/14354>

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>

Gaza: Internally Displaced People

Dan Carden (Labour) [14355] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what diplomatic steps he is taking to help ensure that Palestinians who were displaced from their homes in Gaza are able to return to them.

Andrew Mitchell: We have been clear that want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. The most important step in getting Palestinians displaced by the fighting in Gaza back to their homes will be securing a sustainable ceasefire. We are clear that an immediate pause is necessary, and then we want to build towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to the fighting. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands and 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/2024-02-16/14355>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [14108] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 8 February 2024 to Question 13138 on UNRWA: Finance, if he will publish a breakdown of funds allocated to (a) OCHA, (b) UNICEF, (c) the World Food Programme, (d) Egyptian Red Crescent Society and (e) any other partners.

Andrew Mitchell: UK funding to specific agencies and organisations includes the following:

- £7.75 million to the OCHA Pooled Fund to support up to 139,000 people in Gaza and the West Bank with food, water, sanitation, health, education and protection services through NGOs
- £1.35 million to OCHA to support analysis of needs and coordination of humanitarian aid

- £7.75 million to UNICEF to support up to 89,200 beneficiaries in Gaza with protection, nutrition, education, health, Water Sanitation and Hygiene services, and Gender-Based Violence services
- £8.25 million to the World Food Programme to provide in-kind food assistance to up to 53,500 beneficiaries
- £7.75 million to Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement to support up to 140,000 beneficiaries in Gaza and the West Bank with food, livelihoods, water, sanitation, health and protection

In addition, the UK is providing:

- £1.5 million to WHO to support Emergency Medical Teams and essential medical supplies
- £1 million to Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO) to facilitate medical supplies to Gaza
- £900 thousand to UNOPS to facilitate humanitarian access and delivery of aid supplies

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/14108>

The answer referred to above can be read at

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

UNRWA: Finance

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [14107] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 8 February 2024 to Question 13138 on UNRWA: Finance, what the sources for the allegations referred to were.

Andrew Mitchell: As we have said, we are pausing any future funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) whilst we review these concerning allegations. We are pressing the UN Office of Internal Oversight and Catherine Colonna to produce a rapid interim report.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/14107>

The answer referred to above can be read at

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

UNRWA: Textbooks

Neil Coyle (Labour) [14089] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the findings of the report published by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education entitled UNRWA Education: Textbooks and Terror, published in November 2023.

Andrew Mitchell: We are aware of the findings of this report. We take any allegation of the promotion of racism and discrimination extremely seriously and have been clear that incitement to hatred or violence is unacceptable and should have no place in education. Any allegations of breaches of UN staff regulations and rules, including neutrality breaches, are reported to FCDO and investigated. We continue to urge all parties to condemn incitement wherever and whenever it occurs. The UK-supported 2021 review of the Palestinian Authority (PA) curriculum found improvements in content, with previously flagged materials removed. What we really need to see is further curriculum reform from the PA and we continue to raise this with them regularly.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/14089>

The report referred to above can be read at

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

The review referred to above can be read at

<https://owncloud.gei.de/index.php/s/FwkMw8NZqCAJgPW/download/Report%20on%20Palestinian%20Textbooks.pdf>

House of Lords Written Answer

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Lord Blencathra (Conservative) [HL2269] To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to work with other countries which have suspended funding to UNRWA to create a new independent funding agency to deliver aid to Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: 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 pause 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.

Any future funding decisions will be taken after this point.

We are getting on with aid delivery and 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/2024-02-07/hl2269>

House of Commons Petition

Ceasefire in Palestine

Martyn Day (SNP) [P002917] I rise to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk on the ceasefire in Palestine. I have never had as much correspondence on a single issue as I have on this matter; I said that before, when I presented a petition calling for a cease in the arms trade to Israel, but it is doubly the case now. ...

The petition states:

“The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to join with others in the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, so that the processing of rebuilding and finding a lasting peace with a two-state solution can commence.” ...

The petition of the residents of the constituency of Linlithgow and East Falkirk.

Declares that the attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7th October 2023 were acts of terror, and unequivocally condemns the taking of hostages and the loss of innocent lives in those attacks; condemns the disproportionate response of the Israel Defence Forces, including acts which the International Court of Justice have said are plausibly genocide; mourns the growing death toll of women, men and children; further that the petitioners declare for the urgent release of all hostages and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population; and notes the calls by the United Nations for an immediate ceasefire on all sides of the conflict and the global consensus in support of a two-state solution.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to join with others in the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, so that the processing of rebuilding and finding a lasting peace with a two-state solution can commence.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-21/debates/0DAE7998-18A9-48A1-9DD4-BACE478E4413/CeasefireInPalestine>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza: UK statement at the UN Security Council

... we all know that Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We want the fighting to stop now.

But simply calling for a ceasefire now doesn't make it happen and won't make it sustainable. That is why we are calling for an immediate suspension in fighting to get aid in and hostages out, and then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and death.

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

Current negotiations are critical to secure the release of the hostages held in Gaza as well as progress towards our shared objective of a sustainable ceasefire. The UK government continues to work intensively with partners across the region to support this and we call on all actors to do the same.

President, we are gravely concerned by the prospect of an Israeli offensive on Rafah which would have disastrous consequences for the civilians sheltering there with nowhere else to go.

Over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who so desperately need it.

That is why the immediate priority must be a suspension in the fighting, which is the best route to secure the safe release of hostages and significantly step up the aid reaching Gaza.

We are also gravely concerned that the UN World Food Programme has had to pause deliveries of food aid to northern Gaza. We continue to stress the need for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza, including in the north as the Special Coordinator referred to. And for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza. Nitzana and Kerem Shalom must be open for longer.

Israel must also ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, and take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

As we approach Ramadan, we urge all parties to call for calm and not inflame tensions around the holy sites. We call on everyone to respect their sanctity and security.

Now more than ever we need to generate momentum towards a permanent peace. The UK will continue to work intensively in support of a two-state solution which guarantees justice, peace and security for the people of two states - Israel and Palestine. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/palestinian-civilians-are-facing-a-devastating-and-growing-humanitarian-crisis-in-gaza-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

Deter, Disrupt and Demonstrate – UK sanctions in a contested world

20. We will continue to use sanctions to respond to live threats and deteriorating situations.

... Following the October 2023 attacks in Israel, in co-ordination with the US, we used our

counter-terrorism sanctions to target Hamas leaders and financiers as part of wider efforts to disrupt Hamas's terrorist activities. ...

25. As appropriate, we can issue licences to grant permission for certain activities to take place which would otherwise be in breach of sanctions. This permission can either be given to specific individuals or entities who apply for a licence, or via a General Licence that individuals and entities can use on an ongoing basis if they meet specific conditions. ... We have also issued a General Licence for humanitarian activity in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. ...

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65d720cd188d770011038890/Deter-disrupt-and-demonstrate-UK-sanctions-in-a-contested-world.pdf>

Department for Business and Trade

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Israel

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65d4a14738fef9001ab5b067/israel-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2024-02-22.pdf>

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65d4a48d1419100011f45314/occupied-palestinian-territories-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2024-02-22.pdf>

Scottish Parliament Debate

Palestine and Israel

Motion debated: That the Parliament notes with concern reports of the recent upsurge in violence in Palestine and Israel, which, it understands, has seen more than 28,000 people, including mostly women and children, killed by Israeli forces in Gaza, 1,400 people killed by Hamas and other terrorist organisations in Israel, and more than 300 Palestinian civilians killed by Israeli armed settlers in the West Bank; believes strongly that there is no justification for inflicting terror or killing innocent civilians, or for the taking of civilian hostages, and condemns violence in all its forms; notes with concern what it considers to be the risk of disease and malnutrition in Gaza as a consequence of the Israeli blockade of the strip, which, it believes, may itself constitute a breach of international law; recognises what it sees as the critically important relief work of organisations such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) and Medical Aid for Palestinians, and notes that the UK Government and others are being urged to continue to financially support this work; considers that this conflict did not begin on 7 October 2023, and notes the belief that a lasting peace with justice will only come through a negotiated settlement; notes the calls for an immediate ceasefire in Palestine and Israel to allow diplomatic discussions to take place that will safeguard innocent civilians; further notes the reported ruling by the International Court of Justice and the view that there may be a case to answer that the actions of Israel in Gaza constitute genocide against the Palestinian people; commends the work of Israeli human rights organisations, including B'Tselem and Breaking the Silence, which, it considers, continue to make the case for a lasting and just peace in what it sees as these horrific times; notes the calls on the UK Government, including from communities in the Glasgow Provan constituency, to do its part in working with other UN nations to demand an end to deadly military action in Gaza and settler violence in the West Bank, and to bring to justice those responsible for terror attacks and any who may be guilty of war crimes or incitement to genocide, and further notes the calls on the UK Government to recognise the State of Palestine.

12.56 Ivan McKee (SNP): It gives me no pleasure to open the debate. I would much rather be celebrating the creation of a Palestinian state, or a state of Israel and Palestine that allows all the people between the river and the sea to live in peace, justice and equality. ... The latest conflict in Israel and Palestine has claimed the lives of more than 30,000 people since October of last year, the majority of whom are women and children, and the vast majority in the Gaza strip. The conditions in Gaza, as reported by Oxfam and others, are horrendous: there is disease, malnutrition and the destruction of health services and living accommodation. ... The work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and others in doing what they can to mitigate those conditions is increasingly difficult, and needed more than ever. Continued funding for that work is essential.

The conflict did not start on 7 October; it has been on-going for more than 75 years. This is the 15th Israeli military invasion of the Gaza strip since 1948, with the most recent in 2008 and 2014. The Gaza strip has been under siege since 2007. The Israeli Defence Forces' Dahiya doctrine, as described to us by members of Breaking the Silence, which is the organisation of former IDF service members who are dedicated to highlighting human rights abuses, is based on the principle that there will be no end to the conflict. Therefore, a major strategic objective of any military operation is to deliver as much destruction to civilian infrastructure as possible so that the next, inevitable clashes are delayed for as long as possible.

The slaughter in Gaza committed by the Netanyahu regime has now claimed as many victims as Putin's flattening of Grozny in the first Chechen war, or the Assad regime's siege of Aleppo.... Tens of thousands have died as politicians in the west have prevaricated over semantics. ... The Netanyahu regime operates as it does because it perceives there to be a green light from the international community. ...

I commend the Government of South Africa ... for taking a case to the International Court of Justice. An initial ruling of that court indicates that there may be a case to answer that the actions of Israel in Gaza constitute genocide against the Palestinian people. Incitement to genocide is also a crime. It is not hard to find potential examples. There has been talk of flattening Gaza, turning it into rubble, eliminating everything and making it a place where no human can exist, creating a humanitarian crisis and removing all restrictions on the actions of soldiers. There have been calls for collective punishment, which is itself a war crime, and depriving civilian populations of food, water, electricity and healthcare. That is not the rhetoric of some fringe figures, but the words of the leadership of the Israeli Government and the IDF. ...

Let us not forget what is happening in the west bank ... land theft continues; Palestinian rights continue to be eroded; and deaths of Palestinian civilians have soared to more than 300 in the current period. The reality, of course, is that there can be no military or security solution to the problems of the region. After nearly five months of bombardment of Gaza, the fighting continues, the tunnels are still there, the IDF continues to take casualties, Hamas continues to function, and the hostages have still not, for the most part, been found or freed. Indeed, the IDF has perhaps managed to shoot more hostages than it has liberated. ...

We all want to see the release of hostages, and the quickest way to do that is through an immediate ceasefire and negotiations. ... Those negotiations must also lead to the recognition of a Palestinian state ...

The motion also recognises the many Israeli and Jewish voices that condemn the actions of the Netanyahu regime, recognising that it not only makes the lives of Palestinians hell, but prolongs the conflict and makes Israelis less safe too. ... I have attended and spoken at rallies, calling for a ceasefire, and I have been heartened and encouraged by the number of Jewish voices present and speaking at those events.

I leave the last words to Jewish voices of the past that resonate today. From the leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Marek Edelman: "To be a Jew means always being with the

oppressed, and never the oppressors”.

From Dutch Holocaust survivor Hajo Meyer, talking about the situation in Palestine: “Never again, for anyone”. ...

13.03 Jackson Carlaw (Conservative): ... I pay tribute, as I have done previously, to the many interfaith organisations in Scotland that are working around the clock, every day, to do all that they can to maintain cohesive relations here, with some real track record of success. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude for ensuring that a very tense international situation does not dissolve into a very serious situation in our own country. ...

... events since 7 October have unfolded as badly as, or even more badly than, any of us could have anticipated or predicted ... it does not seem to me that we are anywhere near a resolution, or even a mitigation, of what is currently a desperately difficult position in the region. ...

I think that people are troubled by why I and some others are reluctant to join in the call for an immediate ceasefire. ... However, contained in the calls for a ceasefire must be a recognition that there has to be a ceasefire on all sides. That means that rockets in and out of Gaza have to stop.

It must be recognised that the hostages have to be released. Some 134 of them still remain unaccounted for, including Kfir Bibas, who is one year old, Ariel Bibas, who is four years old, and Agam Berger, who is 19 years old and of whom nothing has subsequently been heard. Implicitly, that means that, at some point, there has to be a way forward in Gaza that does not leave the Hamas regime in place dictating the future, because it has made it clear that it will not respect a ceasefire and that it will resume its attacks on Israel at the earliest opportunity. We cannot have a ceasefire in which Israel ceases and Hamas fires ... Meanwhile, aid can now come into the country unrestricted. Some 13,000 trucks have entered at three crossing points. At the moment, there are 450 trucks in Gaza with aid that cannot be distributed. ...

People ask me, “Why do you bother with any of this?” I stand here in a Parliament with Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Protestant and Catholic MSPs, but no Jew—never a Jew. ...

As the member representing 50 per cent of Scotland’s Jewish community, I believe that I have a responsibility to articulate arguments on their behalf ... However, that is not the same as endorsing all the actions of the Israeli Government.

13.07 Neil Bibby (Labour): ... The situation in Gaza is tragic and heartbreaking. ... Many innocent lives have been taken or destroyed. Countless children have died, and children continue to die each and every day. There are many families in Scotland with relatives in Gaza and Israel who have been impacted by the horror. ...

Cessation of the violence is the only thing that will help, right now. We need an end to the fighting and to rocket fire going into and out of Gaza. That is needed in order to allow hostages to be safely exchanged while they are still alive, and for food, medicines and other aid supplies to get safely to those who need them.

We also need to say with one voice to Israel that it has, like any other state, the right to defend itself, not least from indiscriminate terrorist attack, but that every state also has a responsibility to exercise restraint and to be proportionate in its responses. There are legitimate questions to be asked about Israel’s actions. ...

We should also say with one voice that an assault on Rafah, where 1.5 million people are crammed together in unimaginable conditions with nowhere to go, would be unconscionable ...

On 7 October 2023, we saw the largest loss of Jewish life, inflicted by Hamas, on any single day since the Holocaust. As Ivan McKee said, since then almost 30,000 Palestinians—the majority of them women and children—have been confirmed killed.

This has been an on-going situation for decades. From the ashes of this tragedy, there must be a renewed emphasis on a two-state solution ... That includes a safe and secure Israel, where the horrors that were inflicted by Hamas—which is a brutal antisemitic terrorist organisation—on 7 October can never happen again. It includes a viable

Palestinian state alongside it, with safe borders and, ultimately, recognition for that Palestinian state—a state that, as Anas Sarwar recently put it, “is not in the gift of a neighbour”, but is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people. ...

13.11 John Mason (SNP): ... Clearly, antisemitism is not the same as valid criticism of Israel, but neither are the two completely distinct and unconnected. Most of the Jews whom I know in Scotland and England have family and friends in Israel. It is the only Jewish state in the world and is, according to the Bible, the land that God gave his chosen people. Having said that, it does not mean that we cannot criticise the Jews or Israel. God himself is hugely critical of his people in much of the scriptures, not least when he punished them by exiling them to Babylon and elsewhere.

Therefore, is not antisemitic for some to say that the present Israeli offensive has been over the top and has possibly crossed the line from defence to revenge. At the same time, we need to be balanced in our approach. For example, to say that we must not sell arms to Israel, but that it is okay to sell arms to Saudi Arabia or other countries that have much worse human rights records is somewhat inconsistent. ...

Of the Palestinians who have been killed, I gather that Hamas claims that 6,000 were military, whereas Israel claims that 12,000 were Hamas fighters. ...

It seems that the number of civilian deaths in Gaza has been greater because Hamas deliberately built tunnels for military purposes directly beneath hospitals and residential areas. On that point, where did all the resources for those tunnels come from? Perhaps the situation for ordinary people in Gaza would be better today if resources had gone into civilian infrastructure rather than being diverted for military purposes.

I think that the United Nations, particularly the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, has some responsibility in that regard. Going forward, we need an agency that is more neutral than UNRWA to help the people of Gaza to rebuild. ...

Both Israel and Palestine are relatively small entities in world terms. Much larger players, including the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran, have key parts to play. They can put pressure on the respective sides to get to the table and negotiate. ...

I will finish on a more personal note. While I was in London just after the new year, I attended a Jewish synagogue one Friday evening. Only about 15 to 20 people were there, but three security guards were needed on duty. What happens in Israel and Gaza affects us here, too. ...

13.15 Pauline McNeill (Labour): ... As we all speak today, Israel launches more air strikes in Rafah. Sadly, there will be even more deaths than the 30,000 civilians who have been killed so far. Up to 100,000 have been injured, and 10,000 children have been killed. There are no functioning hospitals and no services to protect people. There will be no emergency services to rescue people from under the rubble. ...

Some 1.7 million people have been displaced—more than once. Some of them were already refugees, from 1948 and 1967, but now many have been displaced five, six or seven times.

The speed of the bombing, the unprecedented scale of the military operation and the indiscriminate nature of the weapons that strike Gazans—including white phosphorous—make the situation like nothing we have witnessed in any recent modern war. ...

The strategy has been laid bare. The Israeli hostages—who must be protected and released—are not even a priority for Netanyahu, as is clear from the statements that he has made. Members of his Government have also said that there is no such thing as an innocent Palestinian, and others who are more extreme have said that they want, if they can clear Gaza, more settlements and Palestinians removed.

It is about time that we stood up and said that the dehumanisation of the Palestinian population—the denial of their rights and of their existence—is not tolerable. ...

While all that is happening, there is more violence on the west bank. We will not see much of it because we are watching what is happening in Gaza, but the violence there is quite horrific. Israeli settlers, who are illegally in the occupied territories, are stealing Palestinian

homes and being protected by the Israeli army while they do so.

I believe that Palestine is the moral question of our time, and that the matter is not just about standing up for a ceasefire now. ... 75 years after the Palestinians were promised a state of their own, and after 56 years of illegal occupation, more than 100 countries now recognise Palestine. It is not out of step to do so. ...

13.19 Fulton MacGregor (SNP): ... On 21 November last year, I stood in the chamber and fully condemned the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel and the following collective punishment of the Palestinian people by Israel. I said that all hostages must be released. I stand by those comments and fully condemn violence in all its forms.

What has happened since we last debated the issue in the chamber should shock and shame us all. ...

Some suggest that, while Hamas still exists, the slaughter is justified. I am fully of the opinion that it is not. Innocent people are being killed and, as we have said, many of them are children. ... Jewish voices are increasingly condemning Israel's actions. ...

... A friend said to me recently: "If this was literally anywhere else in the world, it would not be tolerated." He is right ...

13.23 Ross Greer (Green): ... Is there any doubt now that it is a genocide? More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, including at least 12,500 children. We know that that number is an undercount, because the reality is that the vast majority of those who have been reported as missing are dead under the rubble ...

I want to read from an article in the *Los Angeles Times* by American surgeon Dr Irfan Galaria, who spent time in Gaza in recent weeks. He said: "... On one occasion, a handful of children, all about ages 5 to 8, were carried to the emergency room by their parents. All had single sniper shots to the head. These families were returning to their homes in Khan Yunis, about 2.5 miles away from the hospital, after Israeli tanks had withdrawn. But the snipers apparently stayed behind. None of these children survived."

The Hamas attack on 7 October was horrific. It was evil and unjustifiable. ... in the days after, a lot of attention was paid not to the very real stories of horror from that day but to a false story of 40 babies being murdered in a kibbutz. I note that many of the news organisations that reported that story are silent about the actual massacre—the verified massacre—of children and the deliberate slaughter and execution of toddlers and babies taking place in Gaza, even when it is recorded on video. Children are having their limbs amputated and women are giving birth by caesarean section without anaesthetic, because Israel is blocking medical supplies from getting in.

Gazans are being collectively punished, which is a war crime—we all know that it is a war crime. ...

... the UK arms Israel, gives political support to Israel and blocks Israel from being held to account at the United Nations. ...

We need an immediate and permanent ceasefire. We need the release of all Israeli and Palestinian hostages, including the children who are held in Israel's jails. We need Israel to withdraw to its 1967 borders and end the siege of Gaza and the occupation of the west bank. That is what we need for a lasting peace.

13.27 Foysoil Choudhury (Labour): ... The daily death rate in Gaza is higher than in any other major 21st century conflict. ...

The Israeli air force has reported that it has struck 30,000 of what it has identified as Hamas targets in Gaza since its offensive began. Those strikes have completely destroyed 70,000 housing units and damaged 290,000 more, with 392 education facilities, 11 bakeries, 123 ambulances, three churches and 184 mosques reported to have been completely or partially destroyed.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has reported that not a single hospital in the Gaza strip is fully functioning. As a result of the lack of functioning healthcare, more than 200,000 cases of acute respiratory infections and more than

500,000 cases of communicable diseases have been recorded. Supplies of food, proper sanitation and clean water are now seriously insufficient.

Just last month, the IPC warned about serious food security concerns. It said that 2.2 million people are now at imminent risk of famine, with 378,000 of them designated at phase 5, which means an extreme lack of food, starvation and the exhaustion of coping capabilities.

Israel has the right to protect its citizens, but it also has a responsibility to abide by international law and to minimise the number of civilian casualties. The situation in Gaza has gone far beyond a justifiable response to the attacks on 7 October. ...

Israel's war cabinet has now warned that, if the remaining hostages are not released by the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, it will broaden its offensive in southern Gaza and push into the city of Rafah.

The Rafah crossing to Egypt remains one of the only possible routes out of Gaza. Rafah is currently home to more than a million Gazan civilians who have been displaced and have fled there to seek shelter. If a ground invasion takes place, the death toll could be unimaginable. ...

13.31 Marie McNair (SNP): ... As a forward-thinking and compassionate nation, we cannot stand by while an obvious genocide happens. ...

Two days ago, Andrew Gilmour, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights from 2016 to 2019, said: "Israel's onslaught against Gaza is probably the highest kill rate of any military killing anywhere since the Rwandan genocide in 1994." ...

Most of us have never experienced anything close to the level of horror in Gaza, so comments from Dr Salim Ghayyda have stuck with me. Dr Ghayyda grew up in Gaza and he has family there. He now works as a consultant paediatrician in Inverness.

When discussing his family, he said; "The stories of immense suffering I hear from them every day. Every part of their life turns into an astonishing amount of suffering. There is nothing in their life that you could consider a life, actually. Water is contaminated and they eat one meal a day. The number of children killed is around 12,000 to 14,000. Do you know how many children there are in Inverness? 14,000. Imagine we, the Scottish people, wake up one day and all the children in Inverness have been killed. ...

13.35 Richard Leonard (Labour): ... I say to the Government that it cannot vote in favour of a ceasefire and condemn collective punishment and continue to fund the firms in Scotland that are arming the Israeli Government. ... Supplying arms to a country that is in breach of international law is itself a breach of international law. ...

We condemn the action of Hamas on 7 October. I do not support Hamas. I want peace. I want the return of all hostages. When we call for a ceasefire, we are calling for a ceasefire on both sides. But history did not start on 7 October. The story of the Palestinian people is a story of injustice, of forced dispossession, of forced displacement, of forced dispersal and of forced disinheritance. Today, once again, innocent people, including thousands upon thousands of children, are being punished for a crime that they did not commit.

There is a deep revulsion against what is happening, the terror of what is happening, the criminality of what is happening and the morality of the slaughter of innocents, including children. That is why it would be a betrayal to remain silent. That is why the calls that we have heard since October for pauses or de-escalation are tantamount to indecision at best and to compliance with the reign of violence that has so far killed 30,000 people, 40 per cent of whom are children, at worst. ...

13.39 Bill Kidd (SNP): ... Last November, I said: "I put on record my condemnation of the horrific, inhumane terrorist attack on Israelis that was carried out by Hamas on 7 October."—[\[Official Report, 21 November 2023; c 39.\]](#)

Today, I reiterate that condemnation, and I add to it my condemnation of the horrific, inhumane actions that we have since witnessed unfolding against the innocent civilian population of Gaza. ...

More than two thirds of those who have been killed—more than 200 a day—are women and children. Families have been torn apart. Of those who have been injured, there are children who are traumatised for life, their limbs amputated without pain relief, left screaming in the darkness for hours without end. ...

It saddens me to listen to young people who are affected by what they hear and see happening in Gaza, but who feel powerless and inexperienced, and unable to speak out, and it saddens me to see the mental distress that that causes them. In that respect, education about the history and the seeds of today's conflicts is invaluable. ...

13.42 Carol Mochan (Labour): ... There are about 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza, and 40 per cent of those pregnancies have been classed as high risk. Nevertheless, 180 women still give birth daily—can you imagine? ... they must carry a child while being exposed to constant bombing and try to give it adequate nutrition in a country that is being starved to death. ...

As the International Court of Justice noted in its recent order, under international law, that is illegal and Israel must stop doing it. Nevertheless, since that ruling in January, reports of exactly the same actions have come out. ...

The situation has gone well past the point of self-defence, and the leadership of both Hamas and Israel are engaged in a fatal battle to the death that will spill further across the region ... We must not remain silent. We must have an immediate ceasefire. ...

13.45 The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Kaukab Stewart): ... The Scottish Government has been consistent in condemning the abhorrent terrorist actions of Hamas, whose vile and merciless attacks on 7 October represented the single worst massacre of the Jewish people since the Holocaust, and in calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire by all sides in Israel and Gaza. A ceasefire is the only way that we can halt the catastrophic human suffering in Gaza and allow hostages to be released. I repeat the Scottish Government's demands for Hamas to release immediately and unconditionally all hostages and to cease all missile attacks against Israel.

Hamas can have no future in Gaza. The cycle of violence must end. The bombs and rockets must stop. Humanitarian and medical facilities must be protected, and civilians, wherever they are, must be given unrestricted access to the basic necessities of life. Israel, like any other country, has the right to protect itself and its citizens from terror. However, in exercising its right to defend itself, Israel must abide by international humanitarian law. The First Minister has urged the UK Government to accept that the time has come to speak out forcefully and make it clear that Israel's military action has gone way beyond a legitimate response to the appalling attacks of 7 October. ... It is therefore correct that any potential breach of international law, including the crime of genocide, should be investigated by the appropriate authorities and international bodies. The interim ruling of the International Court of Justice on 26 July was clear: the killing and destruction in Gaza must stop, urgent humanitarian assistance must be provided to prevent more suffering, and hostages must be released immediately. ... We need to make sure that we are on the right side of history and that we reflect the views of the people. ...

We must recognise the deep trauma that the Israeli people have suffered as a result of the 7 October attacks and acknowledge that the Jewish communities globally, including those in Scotland, feel that trauma. The conflicts in the middle east do not justify racial or religious hatred of any kind. In recent weeks, we have seen a shocking global increase in antisemitism and Islamophobia. I emphasise that there is no place in Scotland for such behaviour. The Scottish Government is committed to building supportive and safe communities where divisive narratives will not resonate. We will continue to engage closely with our communities across Scotland to provide vital reassurance and ensure that nobody feels marginalised. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15714&i=134085#ScotParlOR>

Scottish Parliament Motions

Pauline McNeill (Labour) [S6M-12196] Supporting the Recognition of the State of Palestine – That the Parliament supports the recognition of the State of Palestine and what it sees as the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence, and sovereignty; understands that 138 United Nations member states have recognised the State of Palestine as of February 2024; notes the UK Parliament decision of October 2014 in favour of statehood; believes that state recognition is consistent with, and necessary to achieve, the Scottish and UK governments' desire for a two-state solution; considers that such a two-state solution would end the ongoing 76-year conflict and the 56 years of what it regards as the illegal military occupation of the Palestinian territories, and that it is key to ensuring peace and security for the people of Palestine and the people of Israel; believes that statehood recognition is the best way to ensure the dignity of, and justice for, the Palestinian people, given what it sees as the wasted years of failed peace talks; considers that it could also enable talks to progress under the auspices of an agreed international interlocutor, who could seek to agree any final status issues with Israel; believes that a functioning independent Palestinian state would enable the development of diplomatic and normal trade relations with other states, and also the development of its political, security, legal, economic and socio-cultural dimensions, and further believes that this would be the basis for lasting peace in the region for the peoples of Israel and Palestine and neighbouring states.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12196>

Maggie Chapman (Green) [S6M-12204] United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East – That the Parliament commends the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which began its operations on 1 May 1950; understands that this work comprises human development and humanitarian services, including primary and vocational education, primary health care, relief and social services, infrastructure and camp improvement, microfinance and emergency responses, including in situations of armed conflict; believes that the work of UNRWA is especially vital at this time when, between 7 October 2023 and 7 February 2024, over 27,000 Palestinians have reportedly been killed in the Gaza Strip, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, with around 70% of those killed reported to be women and children, and over 67,000 people reported to be injured; understands that, according to UNRWA's own figures, over 75% of the population have been displaced across the Gaza Strip, with at least one million people living in or near emergency or informal shelters; further understands that, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 300 people have been killed in the West Bank; understands that UNRWA is providing essential services, including shelters, water and sanitation, medical consultations, child vaccinations, psychosocial support for displaced individuals and families, and food distribution, despite the severe impact of war on its premises and the people within them; mourns the loss of over 150 UNRWA workers who have reportedly been killed since the beginning of hostilities; understands with disappointment and severe regret that several states, including the UK, USA and other key donors and longstanding partners, have suspended funding for UNRWA, based on what it sees as unsubstantiated allegations against a very small number of the agency's staff; believes that this suspension is an entirely disproportionate response, and that both UNRWA and the UN have responded rapidly and robustly to the allegations; further believes, with deep sadness, that, unless funding is quickly restored, UNRWA will be obliged to suspend its operations, leading to an ever deeper humanitarian disaster, more deaths, including those of children, and increased instability in the region, and urges the UK and other states to restore funding as a matter of the utmost urgency.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12204>

The International Court of Justice initial ruling (Order) referred to above can be read at <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

Scottish Government

Humza Yousaf Westminster is broken and many are right to be angry. I'm proud of @theSNP for bringing demands for an immediate ceasefire to the Commons, forcing Labour to change their position, which I welcome. The suffering has to end. There must be an immediate ceasefire. Enough is enough. [plus video]
<https://twitter.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1760414537700835737>

International Court of Justice

Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (Request for an Advisory Opinion)

Hearing of 21 February 2024: Colombia, Comoros, Cuba, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Russian Federation, France, The Gambia, Guyana, Hungary

verbatim transcript

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/186/186-20240221-ora-01-0-bi.pdf>

video recording

<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1b/k1bb8jev65>

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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>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Enhanced Dataset [England] (closing date 5 March 2024)

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/clinical-audits-and-registries/female-genital-mutilation-datasets/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-enhanced-dataset-overview-of-2024-consultation>

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

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

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