



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

col 857 Lucy Powell (Labour Co-op): ... Yesterday was a very difficult day in the House of Commons, and for Mr Speaker personally, as he did his utmost to do what he thought was in the best interests of the House. We should all reflect on how we got to where we got to and accept our part in it. I welcome Mr Speaker's desire to resolve these matters in discussions with us and others across the House ...

col 858 However, let us not forget that we were discussing the most serious of matters—those of life and death, war and conflict, and how we as a country, and as a Parliament, can play our part in bringing about a much-longed-for lasting peace, based on a two-state solution. It is to be regretted that at such a time we did not show ourselves at our best and that parliamentary antics were the story, not Parliament coming together with one voice, saying, “We want the fighting to stop, with an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and a meaningful process.” We can all reflect on that. My final reflection is that I hope this place will have more time, not less, to debate and discuss these profound matters. It should not be left to Opposition day debates and urgent questions to get them aired in the first place. ...

Reports that other organisations will be targeting the homes of MPs ahead of and during the election have caused huge anxiety. It is a totally unacceptable development. ... Does the Leader of the House agree that the police should take a much more hard-line approach to so-called protests outside the homes of Members of Parliament? Can she confirm that

the police should use the powers they have to stop such protests, and say whether further guidance can be issued?

Does the Leader of the House agree that we need to look at the causes, not just the symptoms, of this sometimes toxic and febrile environment? First, does she agree that we have a duty to be careful with our language and in how we conduct ourselves and challenge one another, and that we should avoid stoking division? Next, does she agree that more should be done, with extra powers given, to regulate social media and elsewhere to tackle the spread of misinformation, disinformation, deepfakes and other dangerous material? With the rise in antisemitism, Islamophobia and hate, can the Leader of the House confirm that the Government will bring forward a hate crime and extremism strategy with urgency? ...

col 859 Penny Mordaunt: ... I remind the House that the Government will again outline our position on the very serious matter of Israel and Gaza in a written ministerial statement soon. ...

I want to say that this House will never bow to extremists, threats or intimidation. It has not, it will not, it must not. ...

col 860 Bernard Jenkin (Conservative): May I suggest that the priority of the House should be to command the confidence of our voters? I do not think that they, or indeed a majority in the House, feel that we resolved anything on the question of Gaza and Israel yesterday, so may I suggest to my right hon. Friend that the Government take up the suggestion made by the shadow Leader of the House and hold a debate on the subject in Government time, on a Government motion, so that the motion and every amendment can be considered? That would draw a line under this matter.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for his suggestion. ... I heard what he said, and will be speaking to business managers. ...

Owen Thompson (SNP): Yesterday ... was meant to be an Opposition day, and it was one of only three times in a calendar year when our party gets an opportunity to put forward its business to the House. I do not think that what we came forward with was a surprise to anyone. ... our voice was silenced: our motion could not be voted on. ...

Given that, in effect, we did not get an Opposition day yesterday, can we be allocated an alternative date? ...

col 861 Penny Mordaunt: ... frequently I disagree with Scottish National party Members on every point that they raise, but they have a right to say these things on the Floor of the House and to debate their issues. If I were able to speak in yesterday's debate, I would have been critical of how they brought forward their motion, and perhaps of their motives for doing so, but it was their right to do as they did. Our Standing Orders protect the ability of minority parties in particular to have those debates. Yesterday's decision has serious consequences for minority parties and for the Government; for instance, our amendment was the only one that mentioned the violence against women and girls that has taken place. It is important to ensure that the rights of minority parties are protected. I am very sympathetic to the SNP being given more time, and to it being knocked off the Labour party's allocation. ...

col 863 Robert Jenrick (Conservative): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the real issue of the events of the last 24 hours is ... that this House appears cowed by threats of violence and intimidation? The mother of Parliaments appears weakened and diminished as a result. We have allowed our streets to be dominated by Islamist extremists, and British Jews and others to be too intimidated to walk through central London week after week. Now we are allowing Islamist extremists to intimidate British Members of Parliament. This is wrong. It has to stop. Will my right hon. Friend organise a debate on extremism and how we tackle this challenge, which is one of the central issues facing our generation?

Penny Mordaunt: I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend. British Jews are suffering a grotesque level of hatred and abuse, which quite frankly shames our

country. He is absolutely right that there cannot be any tolerance or quarter given to individuals who threaten and try to prevent Members of Parliament conducting their business and honouring the obligations they have to their constituents ...

col 866 **Debbie Abrahams (Labour):** I have to say that I was ashamed to be a Member of Parliament last night. ... given that the Chair of the Liaison Committee and others are calling for a debate on Gaza, could she confirm that there will be a debate on Gaza in Government time, which will allow all of us to vote?

col 867 **Penny Mordaunt:** The issue of substance yesterday is a very important and serious matter. I can assure the House that there will be ample opportunities in the future to debate it on the Floor of the House ...

col 868 **Stephen Doughty (Labour Co-op):** ... my constituents in Cardiff South and Penarth are not interested in debates about procedure; they are interested in the facts on the ground in Gaza. There is sincere concern about the suffering and horror that we have seen. Could the Leader of the House urgently provide some updated guidance for how all Members can respond to concerns raised by constituents who have family in Gaza? Many of us have been trying to deal with individual cases, as well as trying to support colleagues, and we need guidance for British citizens trapped in Gaza, for citizens of allies and other countries with which we have good diplomatic relations, and for those who do not have citizenship of other places. What can be done to support those who are, for example, being denied healthcare or are in perilous situations? We need urgent guidance so that we can all help to deal with the real issue, which is the suffering and horror we see in Gaza.

Penny Mordaunt: ... I have worked with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and particularly its consular teams, to ensure that Members can get information fast, particularly during recess, when dealing with cases in which people are in peril or immediate danger. I will touch base with the FCDO and with Members after business questions to ensure that all the advice and guidance is up to date.

col 869 **Theresa Villiers (Conservative):** The most worrying thing about yesterday is that Members were being intimidated for what they say and how they vote, because of fears about their physical safety and that of their staff and family. Added to that, we have a climate of hard-line support that has seen antisemitism on the streets of our capital city. My constituents from the Jewish community feel intimidated about coming into the centre of London, so may we have a debate on how to address this intolerable climate? We cannot go on like this.

Penny Mordaunt: ... I know that people often like to beat up on Members of Parliament and what they do, but we are sent here by the British people. What we do protects their interests, and we have to be free to use our judgment to vote in the way that we think is in their interests. Anything that interferes with that is an assault on democracy ...

col 871 **Jim McMahon (Labour Co-op):** A lot has been said about the events of yesterday, but let us not forget that the outcome was that this Parliament has given a clear mandate on our position on Gaza ... That is very important. ...

col 873 **Andrew Percy (Conservative):** I was in Israel last week meeting with hostage families, survivors and friends. I actually felt safer in Israel than I do in this country at this moment in time. I have two reflections on that visit and on what happened yesterday. First, nobody in this House has any business or agency at all in telling the state of Israel where it is able to operate to seek to rescue hostages who are being raped by the Islamic terrorists who hold them. Secondly, if we have a rerun of yesterday's debate, exactly the same thing will happen again and Members will not vote with their hearts because they are frightened and scared.

What do we expect? For months I have been standing here talking about the people on our streets who are a demanding deaths for Jews, jihad and intifada, as the police stand by and allow that to happen. Last night, a genocidal call, "From the river to the sea,

Palestine will be free”, was projected on to this building. That message says no Jew is welcome in the state of Israel—in that land. This is going to continue to happen because we are not dealing with it.

Will the Leader of the House explain what will be different if we have a rerun of the debate? How will hon. Members be able to vote with their hearts and consciences? Too many will not do that at the moment because of the threats we are receiving—threats that in some cases are telling us to leave this country and that we or our families should be subjected to pain and death?

Penny Mordaunt: ... I do not think there is any Member of this House who has not received threats, intimidation and, increasingly, death threats to them and members of their family. ...

col 874 I say again to all Members of the House: we are elected to carry out our duty and take our responsibilities seriously. It is often a frightening task, but we cannot let those threats change this place or what we think is the right course of action. If we do that, they will have won. They will never win. We have to show courage and our constituents need us to show courage on these matters. We must vote and do what we think is right. ...

col 875 **Matthew Offord (Conservative):** Mr Speaker, you are entirely correct that the level of intimidation against hon. Members is unacceptable, but many of my constituents have also faced a level of antisemitism never seen before. It is welcome that commitments to prevent antisemitism are heard in this place, but often actions undermine that commitment. My constituents remind me about the calls for jihad on the streets of London, but the Metropolitan police refusing to do anything about it, and about men driving through north London threatening to rape Jewish women, but the Crown Prosecution Service declining to prosecute them. How do I reassure my constituents that this place does not treat issues of interest to my Jewish constituents differently, when last night the Labour motion came after the moment of interruption and was nodded through without a vote?

Penny Mordaunt: ... We have to end the climate that he describes. We have to ensure that every community in this country can feel safe. He will know that the Home Secretary has been doing work with police forces across the country, particularly with the Met, about the additional powers that they need to be able to tackle these issues and to identify the individuals behind this violence and intimidation. He updates the House on a regular basis and will continue to do so. We have to end this.

Patricia Gibson (SNP): Given the unprecedented breach of convention yesterday and the unseemly antics that we saw, despite the fact that we were debating the very serious slaughter in the middle east, will the Leader of the House make a statement to set out her view on the need for this House to have full disclosure on exactly what conversations took place between Mr Speaker and the leadership of the Labour party, amid grave allegations of the Labour party engaging in dark practices and possibly even blackmail before this unprecedented breach of convention, which has very sadly undermined confidence in our Speaker? Does she not agree that this is important in the interest of transparency? May I press her further and ask her to ensure that the SNP will be allocated another Opposition day, so that we can air our views, have our vote and express the concerns of our constituents about the slaughter in Gaza?

Penny Mordaunt: ... I am sympathetic to the SNP being given additional time. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-22/debates/6515BA7F-4BB9-4C2D-8A2A-B38E8AECCB33/BusinessOfTheHouse>

The previous day's debate, "Ceasefire in Gaza", referred to above, can be read at
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-21/debates/610A4D12-A333-4885-9D0B-0A225C35C043/CeasefireInGaza>

Inter Faith Network Closure

Stephen Timms (Labour): Will the Minister make a statement about the closure that has been announced today of the Inter Faith Network?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): ... As the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) said during an Adjournment debate in January, we know full well the role that faith communities play in our society. We are extremely supportive of efforts by faith groups and others to bring together people of different faiths and beliefs.

The Secretary of State wrote to the co-chairs of the Inter Faith Network on 19 January this year to inform them that he was minded to withdraw the offer of funding for the 2023-24 financial year. This was because of the appointment of a member of the Muslim Council of Britain to the board of trustees of the IFN. As the House will be aware, successive Governments have had a long-standing policy of non-engagement with the MCB. The appointment of an MCB member to the core governance structure of a Government-funded organisation therefore poses a reputational risk to the Government.

The Secretary of State invited the IFN to make representations on this matter, which it subsequently did. He carefully considered the points raised by the IFN before concluding that its points were outweighed by the need to maintain the Government's policy of non-engagement with the MCB, and the risk of compromising the credibility and effectiveness of that policy. Inter-faith work is valuable, but that does not require us to use taxpayers' money in a way that legitimises the influence of organisations such as the MCB.

The Department regularly reminds our partners, including the IFN, of the importance of developing sustainable funding arrangements rather than relying on taxpayers' money, which can never be guaranteed. The potential closure of the organisation is therefore a matter for the IFN, as an independent charity, and not the Government. The Government continue to be fully supportive of developing and maintaining strong relationships across faiths and beliefs.

Stephen Timms: Since 1987, the Inter Faith Network has been the UK's principal vehicle for inter-faith dialogue, supporting the annual Inter Faith Week, and activities and dialogue undertaken by inter-faith groups across the whole country. The network has been supported by Government funding for some 20 years. The IFN was told on 31 March last year, before the trustee appointment that the Minister referred to, that its funding would be ended from the following day. Why has the organisation been treated in that extraordinary way? Last July, the network received a letter from the Secretary of State to inform it that it would, after all, receive funding for the current financial year. That promise has never been honoured. Why not?

Given the debate in this Chamber yesterday, is it not extraordinarily stupid to be shutting down at this precise point our principal vehicle in the UK for Muslim-Jewish dialogue? Surely we need more, not to be shutting it down? Why has the Secretary of State not honoured the commitment that he made to me to meet me, the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) and the noble Lord Singh to discuss this matter before making his decision, and will the Minister pay tribute and express thanks to the trustees and officers of the Inter Faith Network for the very important contribution that they have made to UK national life over the last 37 years?

Felicity Buchan: I truly believe that inter-faith work makes a good contribution to our society. My constituency is one of the most diverse in the entire country, and I have on a number of occasions brought together my mosque, my synagogue, Christian churches and my gurdwara. We recognise the benefits of inter-faith activity. I thank the Inter Faith Network for its work; however, we have always been

clear with that organisation and any other organisation or charity that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities funds that they need to put in place alternative sources of funding. As I said, the Government cannot fund this organisation when a trustee is part of the MCB.

Theresa Villiers: ... As we have heard, it looked in July as if the problem was resolved — at least for the financial year—so it is regrettable that we are in this position. I completely understand the importance of not engaging with organisations that have hard-line views, but surely we can find some compromise to keep the IFN in business, because it does incredibly valuable work to foster respect and mutual understanding between different faith groups.

Felicity Buchan: ... What has changed since July is the appointment in November of a trustee who is a member of the MCB. In terms of inter-faith work, there are so many examples of positive, thriving initiatives across the country that are bringing people together. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities funds a number of those partners, including Near Neighbours and Strengthening Faith Institutions, which organise local-level inter-faith events to foster community cohesion. ...

Liz Twist (Labour): ... Inter-faith and multi-faith dialogue are absolutely essential components of society, not only to resolve differences but to build strong and collaborative communities that are able to come together in times of need. Given recent events—the war and violence in Gaza—that is more important than ever. As I am sure the whole House recognises, the Government have a special responsibility to facilitate positive relationships between different faith communities, and although I appreciate that the Minister has now given some explanation of why they have chosen to withdraw funding for the IFN, outstanding questions remain.

Let me ask the Minister some straightforward questions. When was the decision to withdraw funding from the network made? What impact assessment was made, and what discussions were had about the vital need to continue to promote understanding about and between different faith groups, and to encourage co-operation? When was the Inter Faith Network notified of the decision? Does the Minister have plans to increase support for other groups to make up for any loss of provision arising from this decision?

Every Department will inevitably monitor and review the grants that they award, but the House should expect that to be done in the spirit of due process. As politicians, we have a responsibility to bring communities together. At a time when divisions are being exposed, I hope that the Minister can assure the House that the Government remain committed to inter-faith and multi-faith dialogue.

Felicity Buchan: ... Again, I stress the importance of inter-faith work. I see it in my own constituency; it is very important. The Government are already supporting other institutions that do such work.

The hon. Member asked specifically for timelines. The Secretary of State wrote to the IFN on 19 January saying that he was “minded to withdraw” the offer of funding in light of what we have discussed. He invited the Inter Faith Network to make representations to him on this matter, and he received its response on 22 January. After careful consideration of those representations, he confirmed that he wishes to withdraw the offer of funding to the Inter Faith Network for the reasons that we have discussed. He wrote to the co-chairs on 21 February to inform them of his decision. I stress again that the Department has been very clear that the Inter Faith Network should have been developing other sustainable sources of funding.

Bob Blackman (Conservative): I am proud to represent the constituency in this country with the greatest adherence to religious faith, and many of those faiths are minority religions. We have a very strong inter-faith council that brings together people of all religions to sort out their differences and sort out tensions. I have had representations from the Jain community, the Zoroastrian community and others, expressing their concern that

the majority religions—the larger religions in this country—will always be able to have their say because of their strength and power, but the minority religions will not. Given the Government's decision to withdraw funding from the Inter Faith Network, what is going to take the place of that important organisation that brings together people of all faiths, enabling them to settle their differences?

Felicity Buchan: ... DLUHC continues to fund a range of partners, including Near Neighbours and Strengthening Faith Institutions; we believe in inter-faith work to strengthen community cohesion.

Holly Lynch (Labour): ... One of the things I find most concerning about how this decision has been handled is that, on occasion, journalists seem to have been in possession of letters from the Secretary of State to the Inter Faith Network at the same time as the IFN received them, or possibly before. That is no way to carry on. There has been very little attempt to have any serious conversations with the Inter Faith Network without those letters being in the public domain almost immediately. This work is more important now than ever before, so will the Minister think again about funding this organisation into the future? It is not too late.

Felicity Buchan: As I have said, very proper consideration went into this decision after we had heard representations from the Inter Faith Network. The decision on Government funding has now been made. We have always been clear that the Inter Faith Network needs to develop alternative sources of funding; institutions such as these cannot be solely reliant on Government funding.

Christopher Chope (Conservative): Is that not the point? This organisation has had about £2 million in income in the past five years, and three quarters of that income has come from the Government—from the taxpayer. Is not the message for other organisations that they should not be too dependent on taxpayer funding?

Felicity Buchan: My hon. Friend has expressed that point very well.

Wera Hobhouse (Liberal Democrat): ... Can the Minister not see how this sudden decision to withdraw funding at a time of heightened tensions only drives division, and that people in my constituency are really concerned that there is nothing that will replace an organisation as unique as the Inter Faith Network?

Felicity Buchan: As I have said, we strongly welcome all of the inter-faith work that happens across our communities. We have always been clear that the Inter Faith Network needed to diversify its funding sources, and we were also very clear that funding would not be given after 2024 in any instance. That was communicated to the IFN back in July.

Barry Sheerman (Labour Co-op): ... The closure of the Inter Faith Network is not seriously about a relatively small amount of money; it is about the message it sends at this time in our country, when all of us in this House are working for inter-faith dialogue, trying to cool the atmosphere and address the problems we know about in many communities in this country. Psychologically, it is the wrong time and the wrong move. Please, for the good of our country and for community relations, will the Government think again?

Felicity Buchan: As I have said, inter-faith work is very important, and we fund a number of organisations to do it. I will not repeat the names; I have already mentioned them. This decision was taken because, as part of the core governance of the Inter Faith Network, there is a member of the MCB, with which the Government do not maintain relations.

Debbie Abrahams (Labour): ... For this to happen in the current international context is absolutely outrageous. It is a politically obtuse decision. May I press the Minister ... about the risk assessment the Government have done to understand the impact on community relations?

Felicity Buchan: ... As I have said, very careful consideration went into this decision. It has been a long-standing policy of successive Governments, first introduced in 2009 by a Labour Government, not to engage with the MCB.

Ruth Jones (Labour): I listened carefully to the Minister's response ... that the Government take inter-faith work very seriously, but actions speak louder than words. Cutting off funding with just a few hours' notice is not helpful to this important organisation. What steps will DLUHC now take to support dialogue in any areas where it has been lost?

Felicity Buchan: ...As I say, DLUHC funds a number of organisations that work very intensively at a local level to support inter-faith work and community cohesion.

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... As images from outside this House last night made clear, it is very important that people of all faiths have a point at which to meet and to focus on the things that draw us together, rather than those that divide us. How will the Government and the Minister achieve that when this body, the Inter Faith Network, closes? How can we—that means all of us in this House together, and those outside this House—continue on journeys of embracing all faiths and increasing awareness of those faiths?

Felicity Buchan: I think understanding of faiths is incredibly important, and that is why we encourage inter-faith work, especially at a local level. I have already talked about what I do in my constituency, and I find it very valuable. In this particular instance, we cannot continue to fund the Inter Faith Network, but we do fund other organisations, and we wish them well. We have always made it clear to the Inter Faith Network that it needed to develop alternative sources of funding.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-22/debates/8A7AC494-0B10-4736-97FA-C4F3787A1C4E/InterFaithNetworkClosure>

The Adjournment Debate referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-10/debates/DDF93113-52B2-4777-91C3-E04D46E1C792/InterFaithNetworkForTheUK>

The previous day's debate referred to above by Stephen Timms was on the subject of "Ceasefire in Gaza", and can be read at

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

House of Commons Written Answer

Antisemitism

Gregory Campbell (DUP) [14814] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will ensure an urgent investigation of the anti-Semitic defacing of a birth certificate submitted to the Passport Office.

Tom Pursglove: The Home Secretary asked officials to urgently investigate this matter as soon as he became aware of this incident on 19 February.

The incident is being taken extremely seriously. Home Office officials are working with commercial partners to complete the investigation and will ensure that appropriate action is taken.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-20/14814>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Inter Faith Network

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

Baroness Sherlock (Labour): ... Our country is strengthened by the richness and diversity of the faith traditions here, but the Government have a responsibility to help to facilitate positive relationships between different faith communities—all the more so in these difficult times.

We have now had some explanation of what has gone on here, but there are outstanding questions. First, funding for the current financial year was offered to the IFN last July, so can the Minister explain when the decision was taken to withdraw it and, crucially, whether the charity was told before the work being funded during this year had been undertaken? Secondly, have the Government made plans to make up for this loss of capacity by supporting other work facilitating relationships between faith communities?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: I can assure the noble Baroness that we have kept the IFN informed of every move that we have made on its funding issues, and it has had the chance to discuss them with us. As for other funding, I absolutely agree with her that work facilitated and supported by government is really important for inter-faith work. I personally go and see a lot of inter-faith work going on, and we are still supporting more than 800,000 a year in organisations—people such as Near Neighbours and others that are doing this important work in our communities.

Baroness Burt of Solihull (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, whichever way you look at this, the optics are not good. It was news to me that the Government do not engage with the Muslim Council of Britain. Our group met its new, and first female, secretary-general only a few weeks ago. I have two questions for the Minister. First, this has been a long-standing non-relationship, promoted quite a few years ago; is it not time that the Government reviewed this non-relationship with the Muslim Council of Britain, particularly in the light of the current situation and the fact that it works with over 500 organisations to promote knowledge and understanding of the Muslim faith and counter islamophobia? Secondly, will the Government review this decision? It is petty, wrong-headed and counterproductive. It does not put the Government in a good light—but it could if the Government were prepared to review it.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Lords, it is not just this Government; successive Governments of different colours have had a long-standing policy of non-engagement with the MCB. British Muslims are a crucial part of Britain's history and our way of life in Britain today. Each and every Muslim in every community in every corner of the United Kingdom should know that their religion will never act as a barrier to achieving their ambitions. The Government recognise the discrimination and intolerance faced by British Muslims, particularly at this time. We will not tolerate anti-Muslim hatred in any form and will seek to stamp it out wherever it occurs. This does not mean, however, that the Government have to use public funds to support the influence of organisations such as the MCB. We have no plans to review this decision.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench): My Lords, I speak as a founder member of the Inter Faith Network back in the 1980s, when it was very difficult to get people of different religions into the same room to talk to each other. That initiative owed much to Brian Pearce, a former civil servant. The Inter Faith Network has done some remarkably good work, particularly in the celebration of the millennium and getting religion in the census. There has been a difficulty in this country in that there is a sort of rule that people cannot talk about religion—people from different religions would come together and talk about anything but the commonalities and differences in their religions. There has been movement in the direction of actually discussing the importance of commonalities and building on them. It is sad that this closure is happening at this time, especially as the reason given is that the board contains a member of the Muslim Council of Britain. It is not a proscribed organisation, and it is better to have people with different views talking together to move the country forward in respect for one another.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: I completely agree with the noble Lord that it is important that we have safe places where people of all faiths can discuss the issues surrounding faith and their relationships and to get together in communities. I thank him for his work, including in the early days of the Inter Faith Network. It was funded by the department from 2007 and we have given it £4 million since then. We have

always said to it, however—as we say to any organisation that we fund—that it has to diversify its funding streams in order to become sustainable. No organisation can be reliant for ever on government funding, because we just do not know what is going to happen. I cannot reiterate the views of the Government again.

The Lord Bishop of Worcester: My Lords, I too pay tribute to the work of the Inter Faith Network. As has been stated, surely the optics of this are not good. I would like to ask the Minister how far non-engagement extends, because surely, in our society, we want to encourage dialogue, even with those organisations that may express some views with which we disagree. To not be willing to engage at all with an organisation that has not been proscribed goes against all the efforts being made to bring our society together—it seems very strange.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: I do not particularly think it is strange. It is a long-standing decision not to engage with the MCB. The Government are doing what successive Governments have done. The person was on the council as a member, but it was when they became a trustee that things became more difficult for the Government.

Baroness Butler-Sloss (Crossbench): Since it has been a long-standing arrangement that the Muslim Council of Britain should not be regarded as an organisation that the Government talk to, would the Government now be prepared to review that?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: I cannot say. Reviews like that are carried out by the Home Office. I will certainly take that back and ask the question but, as far as I know, there are no plans to look at it again.

Lord Liddle (Labour): Does the Minister think that the Government's action in this case is proportionate, given the huge importance in our society of interfaith dialogue and the fact that one person seems to be spoiling the show? Surely the Secretary of State would have a broader vision than that.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: The Secretary of State carefully considered the implications of this and of ceasing the funding, including the potential impact on the Inter Faith Network itself and interfaith relations in the United Kingdom. The noble Lord is absolutely right: interfaith work is valuable, but there are very many more positive examples of thriving initiatives across the country that bring people together. That does not require us to use taxpayers' money in a way that legitimises the influence of organisations such as the MCB.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-22/debates/4AB267FF-1699-4B52-B5EE-DD9D8F5DA31F/InterFaithNetwork>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Wera Houbhouse (Liberal Democrat) [422] Closure of the Inter Faith Network – That this House deeply regrets the Government's announcement that it will cut off funding to the Inter Faith Network; further regrets that this decision came despite new Government funding having been promised; notes with concern that islamophobia is rising and antisemitism in the UK is at the highest level on record; recognises the importance of inter faith dialogue at a time of heightened community tensions; further recognises the valuable work done by the Inter Faith Network and its branches around the country to bring communities together and nurture tolerance and understanding; further notes with concern that there is no organisation to take the Inter Faith Network's place; and urges the Government to reinstate funding to the Inter Faith Network.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61917>

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Animal Welfare Committee

Opinion on the welfare implications of different methods and systems for the catching, carrying, collecting and loading of poultry

Although dated March 2023, this report was only published on Friday

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65ce3cdf0f4eb1001aa9811a/AWC_Opinion_on_poultry_catching_carrying_collecting_and_loading_submitted_version_27.3.23.pdf

Inter Faith Network

Inter Faith Network for the UK Board Announces Closure of Charity due to Withdrawal of Government Funding

The Board of Trustees of the Inter Faith Network for the UK ... has, with much regret, agreed that the charity will close. This is linked to withdrawal by Government of funding for July 2023-March 2024 offered in July 2023, subject to conditions. In a letter to IFN's Co-Chairs from Secretary of State Rt Hon Michael Gove MP of 21 February, it was confirmed that the offer of funding was being withdrawn. ...

Mr Gove's letter of 21 February notes that: "The Government has had a policy of non-engagement with the MCB since 2009. Whilst I recognise that the MCB was already a member of the Inter Faith Network when the previous offer of funding was made, I find their membership regrettable and it is deeply concerning that an MCB member could be appointed into your core governance structure. This increases the proximity between government funding and an organisation (the MCB) with which the Government has a long-standing policy of non-engagement. This is even more important in the case of funding for a prominent and nationally active organisation such as the IFN, which would carry too great a risk of compromising the credibility and effectiveness of that policy."

The Board has sought with energy to diversify IFN's funding base. However, the kind of work done by infrastructure and backbone bodies - such as linking, sharing good practice and fostering dialogue - is not eye-catching and easy to fund and does need some financial support from Government. ...

As IFN's Co-Chairs had earlier explained to Mr Gove in a response of 22 January to his letter of 19 January, "It is fully understood that Government can choose not to engage with bodies for reasons that it is not required to make public. However, it would be difficult for a charity to do so where a body has not been proscribed, had legal action taken against it or unless there were to be a clear issue of reputational damage (not always, of course, a straightforward matter to judge)."

IFN's Co-Chairs also commented that: "It is not easy to see how IFN's purpose (the value of which it has always been believed the Government appreciates) could be achieved by sowing division - and division would certainly be sown if there was an attempt to expel from membership, without its having been proscribed, found guilty of illegal actions or in some way acted so as to bring reputational damage to IFN, an organisation that has among its members (and therefore represents) over 500 national, regional and local Muslim organisations, mosques, charities and schools. Although the Government can choose not to engage with it, that is not a sensible option open to the IFN if it is to achieve the purposes for which the Government funds it in the first place." ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/news/news-release-inter-faith-network-for-the-uk-board-announces-closure-of-charity-due-to-withdrawal-of-government-funding>

TOP

Holocaust

Scottish Government

Humza Yousaf Henry Wuga has spent decades reminding us, and inviting us to reflect upon the horrors of Holocaust. He has given so much time, particularly to our young people, cautioning us that antisemitism and hatred in all its forms has no place in our society. Happy 100th birthday Henry! [plus link to a video of an answer about Henry Wuga during First Minister's Questions]

<https://twitter.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1761001692881985802>

TOP

Israel

See also oral answers “Business of the House” that is included in the Home Affairs section above.

UK Parliament Ministerial Statement

Israel and Gaza

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Andrew Mitchell): [HCWS289] The Government support Israel's right to self-defence, in compliance with international humanitarian law, against the horrific terror attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023. We condemn the slaughter, abuse and gender-based violence perpetrated on 7 October 2023, Hamas's use of civilian areas, their continued failure to release hostages and their ongoing launching of attacks into Israel. We are working to end the fighting in Gaza, to stop the further loss of civilian lives and create the conditions for a permanent peace. The most effective way to end the fighting in Gaza is to agree an immediate humanitarian pause, which we have consistently called for. This would allow for the safe release of hostages and a significant increase in the aid going to Gaza. Crucially, it would also provide a vital opportunity to establish the conditions for a genuinely long-term and sustainable ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

That is a position shared by our close partners, and what our diplomatic efforts are focused on. We have set out the vital elements for a lasting peace, namely:

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

We are increasingly concerned about the growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza and recognise the urgent need to significantly scale up the flow of aid getting in. All parties must take immediate steps to ensure unhindered humanitarian access, ease restrictions on humanitarian supplies and ensure the UN and aid agencies can reach civilians in need throughout Gaza.

The UK is stepping up support. We have tripled our aid commitment. In the last week, family tents provided by the UK and Qatar have arrived in Rafah, and on Wednesday the UK and Jordan air-dropped lifesaving aid to a hospital in northern Gaza, providing four

tonnes of vital supplies including medicines and food for hospital patients and staff. We remain deeply concerned at the number of civilian casualties to date, and at the prospect of an Israeli military offensive into Rafah. Over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensuring aid can reach the people who so desperately need it. We continue to urge Israel to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming citizens.

Ultimately, a two-state solution is the best way to ensure safety and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. Our long-standing position remains that we will recognise a Palestinian state at a time that is most conducive to the peace process.

The Palestinian authority has an important long-term role to play and will need continued support from us and our partners, but it must also take concrete steps on reform. We remain concerned about the situation in the west bank, and have taken action in response to extremist settler violence.

We are committed to finding a lasting resolution to this conflict that ensures Israelis and Palestinians can live in the future with dignity and security. It is the aim of the Government to see an end to the fighting as soon as possible and the creation of a permanent peace based on a new political horizon for the region.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-23/debates/24022320000010/IsraelAndGaza>

House of Commons Written Answers

Arms Trade: Israel

Caroline Lucas (Green) [13982] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will make an assessment of the implications for her policy on arms exports to Israel of the press notice by Amnesty International entitled Israel/OPT: New evidence of unlawful Israeli attacks in Gaza causing mass civilian casualties amid real risk of genocide, published on 12 February 2024.

Greg Hands: The Government continues to monitor closely the situation in Israel and Gaza.

All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against our Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, including with regard to international humanitarian law. All licences are kept under careful and continual review and we are able to amend, suspend, refuse or revoke licences in response to changing international circumstances.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/13982>

The press notice referred to above can be read at

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/israel-opt-new-evidence-of-unlawful-israeli-attacks-in-gaza-causing-mass-civilian-casualties-amid-real-risk-of-genocide>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Rafael Advanced Defense Systems: Arms Trade

Tommy Sheppard (SNP) [13787] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what (a) value and (b) type of (i) import and (ii) export licences have been granted to Rafael Advanced Defence Systems Ltd in the last five years.

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

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

The most recent publication was on 16 January 2024 and covered licensing

decisions made between 1 April – 30 June 2023.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-08/13787>

Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, referred to above, is an Israeli company.

Gaza: Israel

Chris Law (SNP) [14351] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the implications for the UK's obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of the International Court of Justice's order relating to the case of the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v Israel), published on 26 January 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: We respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

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

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

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/14351>

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, referred to above, can be read at

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

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: Israel

Dan Carden (Labour) [14682] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment the Government has made of the potential implications for the Government's policies of the statement on Gaza by the Prime Ministers of Australia, Canada and New Zealand issued on 15 February 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: We are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah. 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. The Prime Minister pressed this in his engagement with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 15 February.

The immediate priority must be a humanitarian pause in the fighting, which is the best route to secure the safe release of hostages and significantly step up the aid reaching Gaza. We want that pause to lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to further fighting.

The vital elements for a lasting peace are 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 capacity 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/14682>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2024/02/14/joint-statement-prime-ministers-australia-canada-new-zealand-rafah>

Gaza: Israel

Chris Law (SNP) [14352] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on Israeli military action in Rafah.

Andrew Mitchell: As the Prime Minister has told Prime Minister Netanyahu and regional leaders, we are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah. 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. The immediate priority must be a humanitarian pause in the fighting, which is the best route to secure the safe release of hostages and significantly step up the aid reaching Gaza. We want that pause to lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to further fighting.

That remains the focus of all our diplomatic effort.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/14352>

Palestinians: Detainees

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [15002] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made representations to his Israeli counterpart on the (a) location and (b) manner of the detention of Palestinians in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government is clear that administrative detention should only be used when it is justified in accordance with international law. Those under detention should either be charged or released. The UK is committed to working with Israel to secure improvements in its detention practices and repeatedly calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law. This has been repeatedly raised with Israeli counterparts.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-20/15002>

Mansour Shouman

Kerry McCarthy (Labour) [13930] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his Canadian counterparts on the rescue of Mansour Shouman.

David Rutley: The UK and Canada are close partners and friends. Ministers speak regularly to discuss international issues, including the wider conflict between Israel and Hamas. FCDO Ministers have not held discussions with Canadian counterparts regarding Mansour Shouman.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/13930>

House of Lords Written Answers

Hamas: UNRWA

Lord Blencathra (Conservative) [HL2268] To ask His Majesty's Government when they first received any information or intelligence of allegations that staff of UNRWA were aiding and abetting Hamas.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, called myself on 26 January to report that Israel had brought allegations against 10-12 UNRWA employees who Israel claims had taken part in Hamas' 7 October attack, and to outline the actions

that UNRWA had taken.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-07/hl2268>

Hamis: UNRWA

Lord Blencathra (Conservative) [HL2318] To ask His Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the number of UNRWA staff who supported Hamas either by participating in the 7 October attacks or by spreading Hamas propaganda in UNRWA schools and medical facilities.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Government is appalled by allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. We are aware that the UN has terminated the contracts of ten individuals identified in the allegations.

We are pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations. We are looking to our partners in the UN to carry out a robust and comprehensive investigation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-08/hl2318>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UK steps up health support for women and girls in Gaza

... The Foreign Secretary has announced new funding to tackle the sexual and reproductive healthcare crisis in Gaza. The £4.25 million in UK aid will help ensure UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, can provide life-saving support to vulnerable women and girls.

This support is expected to reach about 111,500 women, around 1 in 5 of the adult women in Gaza. It will support up to 100 community midwives, the distribution of around 20,000 menstrual hygiene management kits and 45,000 clean delivery kits. ...

Women and girls are particularly at risk from disease, pregnancy complications and gender-based violence in Gaza currently, with 85% of people displaced and currently just 13 out of the 36 hospitals partially functional, with one specialist maternity hospital functioning.

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said: Women are bearing the brunt of the desperate humanitarian situation in Gaza today. Many thousands of women are currently pregnant and will be worrying about delivering their babies safely.

This new UK funding will help make giving birth safer and improve the lives of mothers and their new-born babies.

We need to see an immediate pause in the fighting so we can secure the safe release of hostages, get more aid in, and allow organisations like UNFPA to do their vital work effectively.

UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem, said: In Gaza, the reality for women and girls is horrific – and getting worse each day. They have little to no access to essential health services and menstrual supplies, and many are forced to give birth in unsafe conditions that put their lives and those of their babies at risk.

The support of the United Kingdom and other partners is vital to get lifesaving resources directly to women and girls in desperate need. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-steps-up-health-support-for-women-and-girls-in-gaza>

Updated Travel Advice: Israel

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

Updated Travel Advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

Scottish Parliament Written Answer

Funding: UNRWA

Stephen Kerr (Conservative) [S6W-24924] To ask the Scottish Government how much funding it has provided to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in each year since 2019.

Kaukab Stewart: Since 2019 Scottish Government has provided £750k to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). This funding was transferred on 1 December 2023 in response to UNRWA's flash appeal for those caught up in the conflict between Hamas and Israel. This funding was a one-off contribution in response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We have no plans for further contributions at this point in time.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-24924>

Scottish Government

Humza Yousaf The UK Government must stop sending arms to Israel. From bombing refugee camps to the killing of thousands of innocent women and children, there can be no justification for continuing to send arms. I have written to the PM urging him to take action.

<https://twitter.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1761746073293402391>

Middle East Eye Scotland's First Minister @HumzaYousaf has urged the UK government to end arms sales to Israel over its "flagrant breaches of humanitarian law" in Gaza. Yousaf said this during an upcoming exclusive interview with MEE's Real Talk series [plus video]

<https://twitter.com/MiddleEastEye/status/1761730928102068455>

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 22 February 2024: China, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mauritius

verbatim transcript

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/186/186-20240222-ora-01-00-bi.pdf>

video recording: China, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Japan, and Jordan

(other countries not yet available)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZIOc_62IbBw&list=PLwoDFQJEg_0ZqM1ECRfvXfPZtxNtgb8f9&index=2

Hearing of 23 February 2024: Namibia, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Indonesia, Qatar, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Sudan, Switzerland, Syria, Tunisia

verbatim transcript

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/186/186-20240223-ora-02-00-bi.pdf>

video recording *not yet available*

Please note that video recordings of all hearings both of this case, and the case of “Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)” have been removed from the ICJ website. They are, however, still available on the ICJ youtube channel.

Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)

11 January 2024: South Africa’s presentation of its case

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Q_zTb9dfGU&list=PLwoDFQJEq_0ZqM1ECRfvXfPZtxNtqb8f9&index=12

12 January 2024: Israel’s presentation of its case

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imn9daDE2dQ&list=PLwoDFQJEq_0ZqM1ECRfvXfPZtxNtqb8f9&index=11

26 January 2024: ICJ Ruling: President Donoghue’s delivery of the Order

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1niAwMbBC6g&list=PLwoDFQJEq_0ZqM1ECRfvXfPZtxNtqb8f9&index=10

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

19 February 2024: State of Palestine

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpkF9Zjhj7s&list=PLwoDFQJEq_0ZqM1ECRfvXfPZtxNtqb8f9&index=7

20 February 2024: South Africa, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands, Bangladesh, and Belgium

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1B7DNmpqBU&list=PLwoDFQJEq_0ZqM1ECRfvXfPZtxNtqb8f9&index=6

and, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, and Chile

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouvsrsG54FY&list=PLwoDFQJEq_0ZqM1ECRfvXfPZtxNtqb8f9&index=5

21 February 2024: Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, and United States of America

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RWSH-uS-o&list=PLwoDFQJEq_0ZqM1ECRfvXfPZtxNtqb8f9&index=4

and, Russian Federation, France, The Gambia, Guyana, and Hungary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVMHVullvjs&list=PLwoDFQJEq_0ZqM1ECRfvXfPZtxNtqb8f9&index=3

Underlining “Desperation and Scarcity” in Gaza, Special Coordinator Appeals for Ceasefire as Possible Israeli Military Operation Looms Over Rafah

... **Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process**, said that, after almost 140 days of devastating war, there is still no end in sight for those impacted by the horrors unleashed on 7 October, nor for the people in Gaza. ... “What I saw was shocking and unsustainable,” he reported, expressing concern over a possible full-scale Israeli military operation in the densely populated Rafah area, where some 1.4 million Palestinians are sheltering near the only point of entry for goods. “I cannot stress enough how urgently we need a deal that will bring about a humanitarian ceasefire and the release of hostages,” he asserted ...

According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, 4,327 Palestinians were killed and over 7,000 were injured in fighting and Israeli operations in the Strip between 18 January and 16 February, bringing the total Palestinian fatalities in the war to more than 28,000. Many of these are women and children. In addition to the approximately 1,200 fatalities on 7 October in Israel, the Israel Defense Forces reported 235 personnel killed in Gaza since ground operations began. 160 UN staff have been killed in Gaza — the largest single loss of life in the Organization’s history.

Battles have continued across Gaza, including intensified airstrikes in the densely populated Rafah area, he continued. Hospitals, schools and other protected sites continue to be severely impacted by military operations ... Internally displaced persons face acute shortages of food, water, shelter and medicine, communicable diseases are rising amid unsanitary conditions and over 2 million people face extreme food insecurity. “This desperation and scarcity has led to a near total breakdown in law and order,” he stressed, adding that 84 per cent of health and education facilities are damaged or destroyed and 62 per cent of all roads and electricity feeder lines are unusable. ...

While spotlighting ongoing investigations into allegations that 12 staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) were allegedly involved in the 7 October attacks, he recognized that the Agency remains “the backbone of humanitarian response on the ground” and called on donors to guarantee the continuity of its operations. Turning to the occupied West Bank, he said that 27 Palestinians, including eight children, were killed by Israeli security forces. Highlighting the severe risk of further regional escalation, he said that, across the Blue Line, exchanges of fire between Israel and Hizbullah continue to intensify. Firing from Syria towards the Israeli-occupied Golan and strikes by Israel against targets in Syria also continue. Additionally, Houthi forces continue to launch attacks against vessels in the Red Sea, with strikes reported against Houthi targets in Yemen. ...

Christopher Lockyear, Secretary General of Médecins Sans Frontières, said that people violently forced to Rafah in southern Gaza are bearing the brunt of Israel’s military campaign, living in fear of a ground invasion — fear rooted in experience. Just 48 hours ago, as a family sat around their kitchen table in a house sheltering medical staff and their families in Khan Younis, a 120mm tank shell exploded through the walls, ignited a fire, killed two people and severely burned six others. This happened despite every precaution taken to protect humanitarian staff and family members from such an attack, as warring parties were notified of the location and the building was clearly marked with the medical organization’s flag. ...

He went on to report that, for 138 days, doctors and nurses have done everything they can to enact a meaningful humanitarian response, only to watch as a health system they have supported for decades is systematically obliterated and their patients and colleagues are killed and maimed. ... Since 7 October, medical workers and patients have been forced to evacuate nine different health facilities, most recently from Nasser Hospital following a raid.

Deploring that surgeons have had no choice but to carry out amputations on children without anaesthesia, he said that medical teams have added a new acronym to their vocabulary: “WCNSF” — wounded child, no surviving family. The psychological injuries they suffered have led children as young as five to say they “would prefer to die”, he recalled, adding that — although his organization’s staff are scared and beyond exhausted — they choose to continue working despite increasing risks. ...

Nonetheless, the protection of civilians in Gaza cannot be contingent on Council resolutions that “instrumentalize humanitarianism to blur political objectives”, he said. The responsibility to protect civilians, infrastructure, health workers and hospitals falls first on the parties to the conflict. But it is also a collective responsibility — one that rests with the Council and its members as parties to the Geneva Conventions. The consequences of casting international humanitarian law to the wind will reverberate well beyond Gaza, he stressed ...

The representative of the United States said that the best way to advance an enduring peace is to create an independent Palestinian State that exists side-by-side with Israel. However, this vision faces obstacles, including the holding of hostages by Hamas and other groups, he said, stressing that there can be no sustainable ceasefire in Gaza without the release of such hostages. ... As for the more than 1 million Palestinians in Rafah, Washington, D.C., has been clear that a major ground offensive there would result in civilian harm and destabilize the region. “We have communicated our concern to Israel clearly,” he underscored, adding that civilians in Gaza would not be in harm’s way if Hamas did not embed itself into them.

The representative of the Russian Federation, sounding alarm over the catastrophic situation in the Gaza Strip, asked: “Can we even bear to hear more?” ... Condemning deliberate policies to expel Palestinians from Gaza, he noted that they will “inevitably result in Gazans breaching the border with Egypt”. Additionally, he condemned the use of force against the sovereign nations of Syria, Iraq and Yemen, spotlighting the direct threat this poses to international peace and security.

The representative of Malta expressed regret that, on 20 February, the Council once again failed to call for a permanent ceasefire. Israel’s announcement that it will be advancing its ground offensive into Rafah is extremely alarming, as is its plan to displace the acutely vulnerable population there. This will only serve to perpetuate the forced displacement of Palestinians and further enflame regional tensions. ...

The representative of Japan, while calling for the immediate release of all remaining hostages held by Hamas and other groups, noted that 75 per cent of Gaza’s population is displaced. He also pointed out that the World Food Programme (WFP) has had to pause food deliveries to northern Gaza, urging Israel to open additional border crossings and secure humanitarian corridors. Further, he called for a humanitarian ceasefire ...

The representative of the United Kingdom said that Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The fighting must stop now. However, she emphasized that “simply calling for a ceasefire now doesn’t make it happen and won’t make it sustainable”. Instead, she called for an immediate suspension in fighting to get aid in and hostages out, and then progress towards a permanent ceasefire. To provide a pathway towards a two-State solution, it is vital to release all hostages, form a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package, and remove Hamas’ capability to launch attacks against Israel. Gravely concerned about the prospect of an Israeli offensive on Rafah, she said that it would have disastrous consequences for half of Gaza’s population sheltering there. She also urged all parties to call for calm and not inflame tensions around the holy sites during Ramadan.

The representative of Switzerland ... Deeply concerned about the effect of the collapse of the health system in Gaza on civilians, including nearly 70,000 wounded ... asserted that “the occupying Power has the duty to ensure the provision of food and medical

supplies to the population” under Article 55 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. “This must be done now,” she said, adding that the International Court of Justice has been clear: Israel must take effective measures without delay to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian aid throughout Gaza and it must comply with the Court’s order. “In the short term, we see no alternative to UNRWA in saving lives, providing shelter and organizing assistance to civilians in Gaza,” she added. ...

The representative of France called for an urgent ceasefire that guarantees the protection of all civilians and the entry of aid. Expressing concern over the humanitarian situation in Gaza, he underlined the need to open the Port of Ashdod, a direct land route from Jordan and all access points to the Strip. Additionally, Israeli military operations must stop, he asserted, opposing an offensive in Rafah that can only lead to humanitarian disaster of a new magnitude. ... Underscoring the need to condemn the 7 October terrorist attacks, he called for the release of all hostages. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15600.doc.htm>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN report calls for accountability, justice for violations by all parties in OPT and Israel

A UN Human Rights Office report ... calls for accountability and justice across the board for serious violations of the laws of armed conflict and other gross human rights violations committed by all parties in Gaza, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel over the 12-month period up to 31 October 2023.

“The entrenched impunity reported by our Office for decades cannot be permitted to continue. There must be accountability on all sides for violations seen over 56 years of occupation and the 16 years of blockade of Gaza, and up to today,” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, said.” ...

The report raises a broad range of concerns of unlawful killings, hostage-taking, the wanton destruction of civilian property, collective punishment, and deprivation of essential services, strikes on civilian infrastructure, forced displacement, incitement to hatred and violence, sexual assault and torture, all prohibited by international human rights law and/or international humanitarian law (IHL). ...

Türk urged all parties to immediately cease violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law and to conduct prompt, independent, impartial, thorough, effective, and transparent investigations into all alleged violations. All those responsible for violations must be held to account in fair trials. ...

The report said Al Qassam, the armed wing of Hamas, and other Palestinian armed groups committed serious violations of international law on a wide scale on 7 and 8 October. These included attacks directed against civilians, wilful killing and mistreatment of civilians, wanton destruction of civilian objects and the taking of hostages, which amount to war crimes. Accounts that members of Palestinian armed groups and others committed rape, sexual assault, and torture require further investigation and full accountability in accordance with international law.

The ensuing military response by Israel - and its choice of means and methods of warfare - have led to massive suffering of Palestinians, including the killing of civilians on a broad scale, extensive, repeated displacement, destruction of homes, and the denial of sufficient food and other essentials of life, the report states. Women and children have suffered especially. Clear violations of international law have been committed, it adds.

Additionally, the severe restrictions on the supply of basic services and humanitarian aid imposed by Israel on Gaza have raised the spectres of famine, dehydration, and the spread of disease. ... The blockade and siege imposed on Gaza amount to collective

punishment and may also amount to the use of starvation as a method of war, which are war crimes, and may also, depending on further investigation, amount to other serious crimes under international law, the report states.

The report identified three emblematic incidents, amongst numerous others, which further raise very serious concerns about compliance with international humanitarian law. Two strikes on Jabalia Refugee Camp and one on Al-Yarmouk, Gaza City, involved the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in densely populated areas. ...

“The use of such weapons in densely populated areas raises serious concerns as to how such attacks comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in the conduct of military operations, given the indiscriminate effects of such weapons when used in such areas and the foreseeability of the extensive loss of civilian life,” said Türk. ...

The report also decried attacks damaging or destroying a large number of hospitals across Gaza. Medical facilities are protected infrastructure under international humanitarian law. The UN report also called for accountability with respect to Israeli practices in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Since 7 October, it noted a significant increase in unlawful killings, mass arrests, ill-treatment, and disproportionate restrictions on movement.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/un-report-calls-accountability-justice-violations-all-parties-opt-and-israel>

Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/55/28)

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc5528-human-rights-situation-occupied-palestinian-territory-including-east>

Arms exports to Israel must stop immediately: UN experts

Any transfer of weapons or ammunition to Israel that would be used in Gaza is likely to violate international humanitarian law and must cease immediately, UN experts warned ...

“All States must ‘ensure respect’ for international humanitarian law by parties to an armed conflict, as required by 1949 Geneva Conventions and customary international law,” the experts said. “States must accordingly refrain from transferring any weapon or ammunition – or parts for them – if it is expected, given the facts or past patterns of behaviour, that they would be used to violate international law.”

“Such transfers are prohibited even if the exporting State does not intend the arms to be used in violation of the law – or does not know with certainty that they would be used in such a way – as long as there is a clear risk,” they said. ...

Over 29,313 Palestinians have been killed and 69,333 injured in Gaza since 7 October 2023, the majority being women and children. “Israel has repeatedly failed to comply with international law,” the experts said.

The experts noted that States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty have additional treaty obligations to deny arms exports if they “know” that the arms “would” be used to commit international crimes; or if there is an “overriding risk” that the arms transferred “could” be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law. European Union member states are further bound by EU arms export control law.

“The need for an arms embargo on Israel is heightened by the International Court of Justice’s ruling on 26 January 2024 that there is a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza and the continuing serious harm to civilians since then”, the experts said. The Genocide Convention of 1948 requires States parties to employ all means reasonably available to them to prevent genocide in another state as far as possible. “This necessitates halting arms exports in the present circumstances”, the experts said.

The experts welcomed the suspension of arms transfers to Israel by Belgium, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and the Japanese company Itochu Corporation. The European Union also recently [discouraged](#) arms exports to Israel. ...

The experts noted that arms transfers to Hamas and other armed groups are also prohibited by international law, given their grave violations of international humanitarian law on 7 October 2023, including hostage-taking and subsequent indiscriminate rocket fire.

The duty to “ensure respect” for humanitarian law applies “in all circumstances”, including when Israel claims it is countering terrorism. Military intelligence must also not be shared where there is a clear risk that it would be used to violate international humanitarian law. “State officials involved in arms exports may be individually criminally liable for aiding and abetting any war crimes, crimes against humanity or acts of genocide,” ...

The experts stressed that the duty to “ensure respect” additionally [requires](#) all States to do everything reasonably in their power to prevent and stop violations of international humanitarian law by Israel, particularly where a State has influence through its political, military, economic or other relations. Measures could include:

- Diplomatic dialogue and protests;
- Technical assistance to promote compliance and accountability;
- Sanctions on trade, finance, travel, technology or cooperation;
- Referral to the Security Council and the General Assembly;
- Proceedings at the International Court of Justice;
- Support for investigations by the International Criminal Court or other international legal mechanisms;
- National criminal investigations using universal jurisdiction and civil suits; and
- Requesting a meeting of the parties to the Geneva Conventions.

Most of these measures are also relevant to fulfilling the duty to prevent genocide. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/arms-exports-israel-must-stop-immediately-un-experts>

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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>

Amendment Paper

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0155/amend/criminal_rm_rep_0226.pdf

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>

Amendment Paper

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54390/documents/4458>

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

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

Genocide Determination Bill

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

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

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

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

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

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

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

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

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

Scottish Parliament

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

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

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 9 days**

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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