



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answer

#### Hate Crime: Greater London

**Feryal Clark (Labour) [14421]** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle hate crime in (a) Enfield North constituency, (b) the London Borough of Enfield and (c) London.

**Laura Farris:** Whilst the Government is pleased to see the overall reduction in police-recorded hate crime across forces in England and Wales in the year ending March 2023, we are clear that any instance is one too many and we remain committed to tackling these appalling offences. We are also committed to tackling the abhorrent crimes linked to the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.

The Government continues to fund True Vision, an online hate crime reporting portal, designed so that victims of all forms of hate crime do not have to visit a police station to report. We also fund the National Online Hate Crime Hub, a central capability designed to provide expert advice to support individual local police forces in dealing with online hate crime.

We are supporting the police by providing them with the resources they need. Part of this necessitates police recruitment and training – there are now over 149,000 officers in England and Wales, higher than the previous peak before the Police Uplift Programme, in March 2010. As of 30 September 2023, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has over 35,000 officers (35,006). This is higher than the pre-PUP peak in the MPS of 33,820 in March 2010. The MPS is working hard to attract

and recruit new officers and replace officers that leave, for example through retirement or voluntary resignation. Ultimately, responsibility for recruiting and maintaining officers lies with the Mayor of London and the Commissioner who are accountable to the people of London. The MPS's funding will be up to £3538.1million in 2024/25, an increase of up to £118.9million when compared to 2023/24.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/14421>

*True Vision, referred to above, can be accessed at*  
[https://www.report-it.org.uk/your\\_police\\_force](https://www.report-it.org.uk/your_police_force)

## Scottish Parliament Written Answer

### People of Jewish ancestry: BRCA testing

**Monica Lennon (Labour)** [S6W-25450] To ask the Scottish Government whether it will consider offering BCRA testing to NHS Scotland patients with Jewish ancestry, in light of NHS England establishing a national BRCA gene-testing programme for such patients.

**Neil Gray:** NHS Scotland currently offers a whole gene screening panel for hereditary breast and ovarian cancer to test for faults in both BRCA1 and BRCA2 and a range of other target genes. At present, this testing is available to people from specific population groups (including those of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage) if they meet clinical criteria that indicate a higher genetic risk of breast and ovarian cancer.

The Scottish Strategic Network for Genomic Medicine (SSNGM) was established in 2022 to develop a fully considered and sustainable genomic medicine service for Scotland. The SSNGM contains specialist Scottish Genomics Test Advisory Groups (SG-TAG) for both cancer and rare and inherited conditions, whose role is to review and assess the clinical validity and utility of new tests, and changes to the referral criteria for existing tests. The SSNGM plan to initiate a review of the existing hereditary cancer testing pathways in 2024. This review will include both the referral criteria for our existing genomic test offering and alternative testing methods and will make recommendations via the SG-TAG process.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-25450>

## Welsh Senedd Written Answer

### People of Jewish ancestry: BRCA gene screening

**Rhys ab Owen (Independent Plaid Cymru)** [WQ91377] What plans does the Minister have to follow NHS England in providing BRCA genetic testing for people with Jewish ancestry who have an increased risk of developing certain cancers?

**Minister for Health and Social Services:** Everybody has a BRCA gene but mutations in these genes can increase a person's risk of developing certain cancers. The increased risk related to Jewish ancestry is already included in professional guidelines for assessing familial risk of breast cancer. People in Wales with Jewish ancestry who have an increased risk (such as a first or second degree relative with a diagnosis of breast cancer) of developing cancers associated with a BRCA gene mutation can already seek genetic testing and counselling from the All-Wales Medical Genomics Service by contacting their GP.

<https://record.senedd.wales/WrittenQuestion/91377>

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## Israel

*See also Commons written answer 14421 "Hate Crime: Greater London" that is included in the Home Affairs section above.*

### House of Commons Ministerial Statement and Q&A

#### Israel and Gaza

*col 147* **The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Andrew Mitchell):** ... Let me begin by reiterating Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas. 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. Equally, we are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, with tens of thousands of innocent civilians killed and injured.

The most effective way to end the fighting in Gaza—the absolute focus of our diplomatic efforts right now—is to agree an immediate humanitarian pause. That 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. ...

Many people may ask, including some in this House, why we are calling for a pause but not an immediate ceasefire. ... Simply calling for a ceasefire will not make one happen. There is a different and better way to stop the fighting permanently: to push for a pause and, in it, secure a sustainable ceasefire that can hold for the longer term without a return to the fighting.

The British Government have set out the vital elements to achieving a lasting peace: the release of all hostages; the removal of 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 that provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution. Once we secure a pause, we will need to take action on all those elements to create irreversible momentum towards peace.

Meanwhile, Britain and our partners continue to do all we can to alleviate the suffering. We trebled our aid commitment this financial year, and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings. Last week, Britain and Jordan airdropped life-saving aid to a hospital in northern Gaza. ...

Women are bearing the brunt of the desperate humanitarian situation in Gaza today. Many thousands are pregnant and will be worrying about delivering their babies safely. That is why over the weekend we also announced £4.25 million of new funding for the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency ...

*col 148* It is clear, however, that the flow of aid needs to be rapidly and significantly scaled up. We have reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza, for

Nitzana and Kerem Shalom to be open for longer, and for Israel to support the UN in distributing aid effectively across the whole of Gaza. ...

We also continue to urge Israel to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. We have expressed our deep concern about the prospects and consequences of a military incursion into Rafah. More than half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, including more than 600,000 children, and they have nowhere to go. ...

The path to a long-term solution will not be easy. Ultimately, a two-state solution is the best way to ensure safety and security for Israelis and Palestinians. ...

We welcome the prospect of further normalisation agreements between Israel and Arab partners. We are committed to supporting their enduring success and efforts to ensure that normalisation delivers benefits for the Palestinians too. Our long-standing position remains that we will recognise a Palestinian state at the 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. The Palestinian people need a technocratic and effective Administration that can win the confidence of the people of Gaza. We stand ready to support the Palestinian Authority to achieve that aim, following the announcement yesterday of the resignation of the Prime Minister and the previous set of Ministers. We also remain concerned about the situation in the west bank, and have taken action in response to extremist settler violence.

I repeat our commitment to finding a lasting resolution to this conflict that ensures that Israelis and Palestinians can live in the future with dignity and security. ...

**col 149 David Lammy (Labour):** ... Since the Minister's last statement, there has been another month of intolerable civilian death, famine and disease in Gaza; another month of hostage families in Israel living in anguish; another month of worsening regional escalation; another month of war that cannot and must not go on.

Unlike the Government, Labour has always been clear that Israel must comply with the International Court of Justice's orders. The ICJ said: "Israel must take measures to ensure humanitarian access".

But last week the World Food Programme suspended its aid operations in northern Gaza. Médecins Sans Frontières said: "We no longer speak of a humanitarian scale-up; we speak of how to survive even without the bare minimum."

The Association of International Development Agencies tells me that visas for 100 humanitarian workers in Gaza and the west bank have expired or are about to expire. There have been no humanitarian visa renewals since the outbreak of this war, leaving humanitarian workers facing deportation when the Palestinian people need them most. Will the Minister tell the Israeli Government that humanitarian visas must be renewed now, that aid into Gaza must flow unimpeded now, and that Israel must comply with all measures set out by the ICJ now?

It is with modesty that we debate Gaza in this House, because it is through diplomacy, not debate in Westminster, that we will ultimately secure an end to this war. There appears to have been progress over the weekend in Paris, so will the Minister update the House on the deal involving a truce in exchange for hostages? Is he optimistic that it will be achieved by Ramadan? ... Will he assure us that the Government are being absolutely crystal clear to Israel that its threatened full offensive on Rafah must not go ahead?

I hear the Minister when he says that simply calling for a ceasefire will not make one happen, but neither will calling for a pause, which confuses our shared desire for fighting to stop and not restart. ...

**col 150 Andrew Mitchell:** ... The right hon. Gentleman asks what the Government's position is. We have been clear: we are trying to negotiate. He asks me whether I agree with him on an immediate pause to get hostages out, and to get incredibly badly needed aid in, leading to a sustainable ceasefire. He mentions

the position on humanitarian visas and humanitarian workers. There is nothing between us on that; we are doing everything we can to advance that position. The right hon. Gentleman asks me about recent humanitarian entry. I can tell him that on Sunday 25 February, 94 trucks got in, but on 22 February, 220 trucks got in—178 through Kerem Shalom and 42 through Rafah. That was the highest number since 17 January. Those figures show that it is possible to get vital humanitarian aid in, and we must do everything we can to ensure that those higher levels continue.

The right hon. Gentleman asks about the hostage negotiations. ... I am neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but I can tell him that the British Government are doing everything we can to ensure that negotiations are successful.

**Kit Malthouse (Conservative):** ... it is profoundly in the British interest for there to be a properly functioning system of international rules and laws, and that the International Court of Justice is central to that system, so what concrete steps are the Government taking to enforce the Court's ruling on the conflict—not condemn, press or discuss, but enforce it? Is it the Minister's view that an assault on Rafah, given its impact on civilians—including, as he pointed out, 600,000 children—would be in line with the ruling of the International Court of Justice?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... the rulings of the Court are binding and must therefore be respected. However, I point out to him that a recent episode of the "Law & Disorder" podcast, by three of the UK's most experienced jurists, including two senior Members of the other place, concluded that it was not possible, at the time that episode was made, to declare that Israel was in breach of international humanitarian law. ...

*col 151* **Brendan O'Hara (SNP):** ... We have been calling for a ceasefire and hostage-release deal since it became apparent that Israel's self-defence had turned into a war against an entire civilian population—a war in which, in just five months, 30,000 people have been killed, 80,000 injured, and 2 million displaced. Now, 500,000 innocent people face starvation, not because food is not available, but because of a premeditated decision to impose collective punishment—one that has deliberately stopped food getting to those who need it.

Throughout this unimaginable horror, the UK continues to profit from the carnage by selling weapons to Israel. Shamefully, there has been no real desire or attempt from the UK to make the slaughter stop. ...

If and when we get a US deal to the UN, what action will the UK Government take? Voting for a ceasefire cannot happen in isolation. Will the UK Government stop selling weapons to Israel? Will they finally get behind the International Court of Justice investigation? Will they fund, as they did quite rightly in the case of Ukraine, an International Criminal Court investigation of Israel's prosecution of this conflict? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ...The hon. Gentleman might remember that the source of all this was the 7 October pogrom committed against the Israeli people—the worst killing of Jewish people at any time since the end of the second world war. There needs to be some balance in what is said, and the language that he uses is not helpful to the central aim that we all have: to bring about a ceasefire, and get hostages out and aid in.

Also, the hon. Gentleman should remember that Britain has the toughest weapons regulation and arms export regime of anywhere in the world. He talks about collective punishment, but the point that he misses is that our determination since day one has been to get as much food as we possibly can into Gaza. ...

**Stephen Crabb (Conservative):** ... [The Minister] mentioned the Palestinian Authority and the resignation of Prime Minister Shtayyeh yesterday. Do the reforms that he has in mind include an end to endemic corruption, to incitement to violence through the school curriculum, and to the terrible policy of paying convicted terrorists a reward for having

carried out murder?

*col 152* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... The British five-point plan encompasses most of what he believes should happen: the release of all Israeli hostages; the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the west bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package that would recognise many of the things that he has said; removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; and a political horizon that provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution. ...

**Sarah Champion (Labour):** My Committee [the International Development Committee] and I were at the Gaza border last week trying to get first-hand testimony of the 2 million stories of suffering that now represent Gaza. ... What we are hearing is just a tiny fraction of the horror that is going on out there. Will the Minister clarify one thing with the Israelis? We spoke to a senior UN security person who said that drones flying overhead are gathering data that artificial intelligence algorithms then translate into targets. We know that civilians, humanitarians and medics are being killed, so will the Minister urge Israeli defence to ensure that the algorithms protect the people that they are supposed to under international humanitarian law?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... the point that she has made is addressed by the fact that, just as in the UK military, targeting in Israel is subject to lawyers being present in the room and legal advice. ...

**Mark Pritchard (Conservative):** ... does the Minister share with me some concern that while the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority has resigned, there are still key Fatah people in place? He will know that in 2007, the Palestinian people in Gaza rejected Fatah, and we all saw where that ended up on 7 October. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... The new Government on the west bank who have resulted from the resignation of the Prime Minister over the weekend are an interim Government, and many of these points can be addressed during the period of interim Government before we move to a new Government on the west bank.

*col 153* **Richard Foord (Liberal Democrat):** I welcome the Minister calling publicly for Israel to limit its military operations to military targets. In turn, we should recall that hostage taking is strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law, and the International Committee of the Red Cross should be granted access to captives held by Hamas. ... Does the Minister agree with us that negotiations should begin from the position that the Palestinian state should be based on the 1967 borders?

**Andrew Selous (Conservative):** ... we hear increasing numbers of reports of malnourishment and even starvation of adults and children. Will the Government say to the Israelis that there really is no acceptable reason to not allow food in now?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... there is no acceptable reason. That is why the Government are pressing so hard to get additional humanitarian support into not only the southern part of Gaza, but the northern part.

**Afzal Khan (Labour):** ... The UK Government recognise the jurisdiction and independence of the ICJ, which is of course investigating the alleged war crimes and genocidal actions of the Israeli Government in Gaza. ... will the Minister confirm that his Government recognise that Israel has an obligation to comply with the ICJ's ruling of 26 January, and that the UK will support the Court's decision to issue an opinion examining the legality of the occupation?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... [Afzal Khan] will be aware of the legal position on the ICJ's rulings, which I set out a moment or two ago.

**Bob Blackman (Conservative):** In attempting to build confidence for a humanitarian pause, we have to remember that the last time a pause was negotiated, Hamas broke it, rearmed and started firing again, and stole the international aid that was going in to help those poor Palestinians. What measures will my right hon. Friend take to ensure that the precondition for a humanitarian pause is the release of hostages; that international aid

actually gets to the people who need it, and is not diverted by Hamas; and that Hamas respect such a pause?

*col 154* **Andrew Mitchell:** My hon. Friend is correct. He underlines the great difficulty in negotiating and agreeing a pause or ceasefire when one of the parties is absolutely clear that they do not want one, and that they wish to replicate the events that took place on 7 October. That is the official position of Hamas.

**Debbie Abrahams (Labour):** What is the Minister's assessment of the effect of the UK's abstention on last week's Security Council vote on the US and its position?

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are working towards a further United Nations Security Council resolution. ...

**Alec Shelbrooke (Conservative):** Hamas is a terrorist organisation full of rapists, murderers and repressors—that cannot be overlooked at any time in these conversations. The reality is that the Gaza area has had hundreds of millions of dollars and other currency invested in it. ... I ask him to ensure that as part of that rebuilding, the aid that will need to go in is used effectively to make that area the prosperous area it can be once it is free from the tyranny of those terrorists.

**Andrew Mitchell:** My right hon. Friend sets out very well one of the key aspects of the five-point plan, which Britain is doing everything we can to see implemented.

**Gavin Newlands (SNP):** Just a few weeks ago, in a debate on arms exports to Israel, the Minister for Trade Policy told Westminster Hall: "We take our obligations in this space exceptionally seriously. As I have shown before, we have acted to change policy in relation to changing circumstances on the ground."—[[Official Report, 12 December 2023; Vol. 742, c. 272WH.](#)] ...

Gaza is being razed to the ground and civilians actively targeted, potentially using the very equipment that the UK is exporting to Israel. Over 12,000 children have been butchered, with the Israel Defence Forces busy taking selfies over the ruins and bodies. What exactly will it take for this Government to suspend arms exports to Israel?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The position that the Minister set out in Westminster Hall was absolutely correct. The Government take legal advice on this matter, the arms export Committee does its work effectively, and we will continue to act on the advice that we are given when we are given it.

**Tobias Ellwood (Conservative):** ... a ceasefire is a contract between two sides that is overseen by a third party. Neither side is agreeing to a ceasefire right now, nor is there a third party in place to oversee it. ...

*col 155* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... if we study carefully the Government amendment that was tabled in the SNP debate last week, we see a very substantial degree of agreement. ...

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op):** It has been three months since the pause between 24 and 30 November, and at that point the aid could not reach people because of the infrastructure challenges. Today, those infrastructure challenges have escalated, and certainly a pause would not serve to get that aid into the places it needs to go. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Member accurately sets out the fact that what was hoped for some weeks and months ago has not been realised, but that should merely incentivise us to redouble our efforts to get the necessary aid and support into Gaza. ...

**Adam Holloway (Conservative):** Given the humanitarian situation in Gaza, what does the Minister think is stopping Hamas releasing the hostages?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... Dealing with an organisation such as Hamas is extraordinarily difficult, as we have seen over recent weeks and months.

**Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat):** Have the Government of Israel yet shared with His Majesty's Government their purported evidence of United Nations Relief and Works Agency complicity in the attacks of 7 October, and if so, when did they do it?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The review of UNRWA, as the right hon. Member may know, is

being conducted first and foremost by the independent UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, and secondly, Catherine Colonna, the former French Foreign Minister, is engaged in writing a separate report. It is to both those two organisations that the evidence is required to be delivered.

*col 156* **James Sunderland (Conservative):** Few would deny Israel's right to self-defence, but the ongoing events in Gaza are difficult to stomach. Can the Minister please confirm to the House that everything possible is being done with our international partners to demand Israeli restraint?

**Andrew Mitchell:** Yes.

**David Linden (SNP):** The Minister made great play in his statement of saying that "we also announced £4.25 million of new funding for the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency in response to an appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territories."

How can he compare that £4.25 million figure with the amount of money that UK companies are benefiting from in arms sales that are slaughtering thousands of children?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... we have tripled our aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. While it may seem like a relatively small figure, we are careful guardians of British taxpayers' money and we spend it on what we know we can do effectively. ...

**Rehman Chishti (Conservative):** Can the Minister understand that some of us who are calling for an immediate ceasefire now are doing so against the backdrop of the horrific loss of innocent lives—1,200 innocent Israelis and 29,000 Palestinians? Our previous strategy from November of getting hostages out and getting aid in through humanitarian pauses, which I supported, has not worked. ...

Please can we ensure that there is an immediate ceasefire and, as part of the Security Council resolution, that all places of worship are protected, especially as we are coming into Ramadan, Passover and Easter?

**Andrew Mitchell:** We cannot will a ceasefire unless both the protagonists are willing to endorse it. ...

**Lillian Greenwood (Labour):** We have heard details of the most appalling humanitarian situation in Rafah, with Palestinian civilians surviving on weeds, animal feed and even birdseed. Have the UK Government sought or secured any assurance that Israel will not launch a ground invasion of Rafah?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... We have given our very strong advice and view ...

*col 157* **Anna Firth (Conservative):** ... I welcome the £4.25 million of new funding for the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, but what are we doing to make sure that the money actually gets out of the agency and down to the ground to help the thousands of women who he says are waiting to give birth?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... we are seeking, through this small but vital amount of money, to meet as much of that need as we practically can. ...

**Imran Hussain (Labour):** While over 1 million people continue to starve, the aid delivered to Gaza over this month fell by half compared with January. The Minister ... is clearly ignoring reports from Human Rights Watch that Israel is blocking aid to Gaza. That is in direct contravention of the ICJ's instructions for Israel to ensure the delivery of aid to Gaza. Does the Minister not see the huge flaw in arguing for more aid to Gaza at the same time as he refuses to endorse the ICJ's interim ruling? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... That is why Britain has been pushing for the largest number of entry points, so that the aid that is available in the area can be got through those entry points to relieve people who are in the desperate need that he so eloquently summed up.

**Greg Smith (Conservative):** ...It goes without saying that aid is only of any use if it actually reaches the civilian population that needs it, and there is evidence that Hamas are misappropriating up to 60% of humanitarian aid entering Gaza, which is part of their long-term pattern of prioritising their fighters, abusing aid to produce rockets and using



construction materials to build hundreds of miles of terror tunnels for their activities. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that Hamas do not care at all about the suffering and the humanitarian need that exists in Gaza, and at no point have they shown any understanding of what is happening as a result of their using the population of Gaza as a human shield for their vile activities.

*col 158* **Drew Hendry (SNP):** Will the UK continuing to sell arms to Israel result in fewer innocent civilians losing their lives in Gaza?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I have set out the fact that Britain has the toughest arms export regulations anywhere in the world. ...

**Richard Graham (Conservative):** The scale of the humanitarian disaster in Gaza is beyond words ... yet the United Nations is saying that the reduction in the number of food trucks from January to February is 50%. Apparently, the average is 62 a day, compared with 500 a day before October. Can my right hon. Friend share with us what progress has been made in the talks on a six-week pause that would surely allow more aid to get in and more hostages out?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... On Sunday, 94 trucks got in, but on 22 February 220 trucks got in, which was the highest number since 17 January. ... not enough aid is getting in, and we need a substantial increase in that number. ...

**Florence Eshalomi (Labour Co-op):** We are less than two weeks from the start of Ramadan, and the general consensus is that the ground offensive in Rafah would add to an already catastrophic situation ... the only way we can stop this is to have an immediate ceasefire ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** I have explained to the House why calling for an immediate ceasefire will not make it happen. ...

**Jeremy Corbyn (Independent):** ... The Minister is obviously extremely well aware of the International Court of Justice judgment and the interim rulings that came with it. He will also be aware that Israel has not adhered to the requirements made by the Court. In that context, will he tell the House exactly what military aid has been sent to Israel, and exactly what the nature of the military co-operation is, and will he assure the House that no more arms will be supplied to Israel until that judgment is adhered to?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... these issues are governed by a rule of law in Britain ... The Government have no plans to deviate from those.

*col 159* **Andy Slaughter (Labour):** ... If he accepts that the absence of a ceasefire has resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands, and the horrific suffering of 2 million Palestinian civilians, does he not have a duty to call for a ceasefire now? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... a ceasefire that collapses back into fighting within weeks is not in anyone's interest. ...

**Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru):** The Foreign Secretary has called for a stop to the fighting now, but the Ministry of Defence signed a contract with arms manufacturer Elbit Systems on 17 January. That company reportedly supplies up to 85% of Israel's drones and land-based military equipment. ... in light of that, the UK's approach appears to be deeply hypocritical ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** I do not agree with that ...

**Apsana Begum (Labour):** Only an immediate ceasefire can protect civilians and implement the ICJ's historic plausible genocide ruling. ... If the Government only call for an immediate ceasefire if and when a full ground offensive in Rafah begins, what assessment has been made of whether they will have upheld their own obligations under international law, particularly in relation to the ICJ's provisional measures, including measures around the prevention of genocide?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... simply calling for an immediate ceasefire will not make it happen. The best chance to stop the fighting is for an agreement in the hostage negotiations ...

**Patrick Grady (SNP):** ... the resolution of this House is that there should be an immediate

humanitarian ceasefire. What message does it send to the UN Security Council and wider international community if the Government will not adopt the language that has been agreed by the democratic legislature to which they are accountable ...

**col 160 Jim Shannon (DUP):** ... What progress has been made to attempt to reunite the Israeli hostages with their families? What progress has been made to ensure that refugees who have to leave their homes can stay in family groups and will have access to food, water and a semblance of education?

**Andrew Mitchell:** On the hon. Gentleman's final point, we will continue to do everything we can in that respect ... he will have seen newspaper reports over the weekend about the hostage negotiations. ...

**Matt Western (Labour):** ... We are hearing reports of forced relocation up to 15 times, and many people in Gaza are reduced to eating weeds and birdfeed, with healthcare reduced to medieval methods. Clearly an immediate humanitarian ceasefire is required. Does the Minister agree that the 500 vehicles a day need to be restored as a matter of urgency, and that we should also look to restore and support UNRWA?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Gentleman is entirely right that we need a massive increase in the number of trucks getting into Gaza. ... There was a drop of important humanitarian support last week, and we hope very much that there will be more. He will also have seen that we have been working on the maritime side too. ...

**Stephen Timms (Labour):** On UNRWA, the inquiries that the Minister has told the House about will no doubt take some time, but having a hobbled UNRWA is undoubtedly exacerbating the humanitarian crisis ... What consideration is he giving to urgently resuming UK funding to UNRWA?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... Britain has fully funded UNRWA, and under our agreement with it, no funds from Britain are due until the next financial year. ...

**col 161 Kenny MacAskill (Alba):** Development assistance for the Occupied Palestinian Territories had already reduced ... before the suspension of UNRWA funding. ... the Government have refused to declare what the source was for the basis of the allegations, and where that source came from, leaving many to speculate that it is simply Israeli allegations or Israeli propaganda. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Gentleman will know that we are waiting for the interim report—the forensic report—into collusion, which the UN Office of Independent Oversight is preparing. ... British funding is up to date, and it will be paused until we have seen those reports ...

**Abena Oppong-Asare (Labour):** ... Can [the Minister] give some assurances today that the Government will commit to bringing back the funding? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** The issue of British funding to UNRWA does not arise until the next financial year, but it is only right that we wait for the two reports. ...

**Allan Dorans (SNP):** Will the UK Government take the evidence of the collective punishment in Gaza with the dehumanisation of Palestinians in the occupied west bank and come to the conclusion that the Israeli Government are authorising an oppressive regime with the goal of the complete displacement of the Palestinian people?

**Andrew Mitchell:** No ...

**Mike Amesbury (Labour):** I make a plea ... join the chorus ... calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire now. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** I have explained to the House that no matter how desirable it might be to achieve an immediate ceasefire, just calling for one and willing it will not make it happen. ...

**col 162 Wendy Chamberlain (Liberal Democrat):** Returning to the recent ICJ ruling, as I understand it one of the problems is that no country has ever responded to a call for pre-emptive steps when the court has made such a ruling. Part of that challenge is that no clear criteria have previously been set out for any country to meet. Can the Minister have discussions with his counterparts about agreeing a set of steps that would be made

available to countries in the future, so that everyone can meet their obligations?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Lady makes an interesting theoretical and legal point, and I suggest that those discussions might go on usefully between theorists and lawyers. ...

**Patricia Gibson (SNP):** The horror and huge numbers of casualties in Gaza are unfolding for all the world to see. Alone of the three largest parties in this House, the SNP has called for an immediate ceasefire—not a humanitarian pause or a humanitarian ceasefire. We have also called for an end to collective punishment, which constitutes a war crime and has cost 30,000 lives so far and left 500,000 facing death by starvation. Our constituents are rightly outraged. ...

**Emma Hardy (Labour):** Some 5% of children under the age of two are malnourished in Rafah. ...

*col 163* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... she is right about the degree of malnutrition, and that is why Britain is working closely with UNICEF and the World Food Programme. ...

**Chi Onwurah (Labour):** The possibility of an end to the killing—whatever we call it—brings hope in Gaza, Israel and, indeed, here, but I fear that divisions in our communities will remain. Many constituents have written to me upset at the difference they see in how Palestinian lives, Palestinian dignity and Islamophobia are valued in comparison with Israeli lives, Israeli dignity and antisemitism. Can the Minister go some way to perhaps addressing those concerns by condemning, for example, the Israeli Ministers and others who have ruled out a Palestinian state? Will he condemn the occupation, as well as settler violence? Will he condemn the Israeli soldiers who filmed themselves posing on the bicycles of dead Gazan children or rifling through the clothes of dead Gazan women?

**Andrew Mitchell:** Let me make it clear, as the Prime Minister has, that in our country there is no tolerance whatever for antisemitism or Islamophobia. ... She asked me about the importance of ensuring that all lives are treated equally and whether we care deeply about all those who are suffering in this conflict. Let me assure the House that we do.

**Caroline Lucas (Green):** ... the Government continue to say that they are keeping arms export licences under review, including with regard to international humanitarian law, and they confirm that Ministers are able to amend, suspend or revoke licences as circumstances require. One of the licences currently in place allows L3Harris in my constituency to manufacture components for the kinds of F-35 fighter planes used by the Israel Defence Forces in Gaza. Will the Minister publish the details of any reviews that have taken place? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** I will look into the burden of what the hon. Lady has said. ...

**Paula Barker (Labour):** ... Disease and famine are setting in, and millions of Palestinians have nowhere else to go after being told by the Israeli Government to move south—the very place where the Israeli Government are now threatening military action—for their own safety. So far, the Israeli Government have remained belligerent in the face of international pressure to show restraint. ...

*col 164* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... the British Government are working together with our allies through the United Nations, and our friends and contacts throughout the region ... to try to ensure that there is a humanitarian pause, which enables us to get the hostages out and to get aid and humanitarian relief in ...

**Deirdre Brock (SNP):** It has been suggested that if what Israel has done in Gaza becomes the accepted standard of self-defence, that core principle, which is meant to protect us all and is at the core of the international world order on which democracies are founded, is greatly undermined. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** An unprecedented set of calamities has taken place. I reiterate that Israel has the absolute right of self-defence but must remain within international humanitarian law. ...

**Ruth Cadbury (Labour):** ... Will the Minister outline what specific steps the UK

Government are taking to ensure that people from Gaza can get the medical treatment they so badly need?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... That is seen in: the work we are doing internationally in the region to try to facilitate the entry of medicines; our work with the Jordanian Government to make air drops, which include medical equipment; and our support for medical charities, some of which are based in Gaza. ...

**Mohammad Yasin (Labour):** ... Diplomatic efforts must yield results before thousands more die—it will be tens of thousands if the Rafah offensive goes ahead. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... [that] underline[s] the importance of the international community and Britain working with our allies to double and redouble efforts ...

*col 165* **Claire Hanna (SDLP):** ... What specific assessment have UK officials made of the allegations against the UN Relief and Works Agency with a view to properly funding that organisation, whose infrastructure and capacity is crucial to meeting the basic everyday needs of hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Lady underlines the centrality of UNRWA in Gaza. It has the necessary assets, which are essential for the delivery of aid and humanitarian relief. That is why we are urging the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services to produce an interim report looking into the collusion that allegedly took place. ...

**Oliver Heald (Conservative):** My right hon. Friend will be aware that the taking of hostages, and particularly civilian hostages, is considered an abomination. It is a war crime. Does he agree that one of the things that is driving the Israelis on is a desperate desire to get their people home and that anything that can be done diplomatically to try to make that happen—to get the hostages back—would really help the effort for peace?

**Andrew Mitchell:** My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right: the taking of hostages is an abomination. ...

**Tim Farron (Liberal Democrat):** As we seek to tackle the rise in the evil of racism of all kinds in our communities in response to the tragedy unfolding in Israel and Gaza, is it not vital that we distinguish between, on the one hand, the awfulness of the Netanyahu regime and their outrageous actions and, on the other hand, the decency of the Israeli people and the right of Israel to exist? ...

*col 166* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... We have a close relationship with many people across the political spectrum in Israel. He will also be aware that Israel is a rumbustious democracy in a region where there are not many democracies, and there are divergences of view among senior people in Israel. ...

**Margaret Greenwood (Labour):** ... Amnesty International UK is calling for the UK Government to suspend the supply of arms to the Israeli authorities given that serious violations amounting to crimes under international law are being committed. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... these issues should not be resolved at the whim of Ministers but through the arms export Committee, which is both independent and legally advised. ...

**Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat):** ... can the Minister assure us that our Government will do everything they can to reflect the will of this place and the people we represent in pursuing an end to the horror in Gaza and the long-term establishment of a two-state solution in the middle east?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I can assure the hon. Lady. ...

*col 167* **Zarah Sultana (Labour):** This weekend it was reported that the Government are finally starting to withdraw support for the Israeli military, suspending assistance for Israeli F-35 fighter jets and helicopters at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus, and cancelling a planned joint exercise over the Negev desert. But British-made arms are still being sold to the Israeli military, including parts for F-35 jets. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... I am afraid I have nothing to add to what I have already said ...

**Peter Grant (SNP):** The Minister has quite rightly reminded us that, as a matter of

international humanitarian law, Israel has the right to defend itself against any aggressor. He also pointed out that that right must be exercised in compliance with international humanitarian law. Could he clarify the Government's understanding of those specific conditions? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... Israel has the right of self-defence under international law, but it must be conducted within international humanitarian law. ...

**Rachel Hopkins (Labour):** ... The commissioner-general said that the obstacles to aid getting in were a lack of political will, regular closing of the two crossing points, and insecurity due to military operations and the collapse of civil order. With increasing hunger and disease in Gaza, why does the Minister not agree with me and my constituents that we need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are working towards precisely that—a humanitarian pause upon which we can build. ... we have been working closely with Jordan and the World Food Programme on convoys that have left the Jordan border. ...

**Alan Brown (SNP):** Arms sales from the Netherlands to Israel have been halted after the Netherlands court found that there is a clear risk that components were used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law. ... Does that clear court ruling not make a nonsense of the Minister's claim that the UK has the toughest arms exports licence controls in the world? ...

*col 168* **Andrew Mitchell:** I do not agree with that analysis. ...

**Neil Coyle (Labour):** ... which organisations are the Government working with to replace the humanitarian efforts of the UN Relief and Works Agency while it is unfunded ...? Can he assure the House that not a penny of UK funding is still reaching the hands of the terrorists who committed the October atrocities, and who still hold 134 hostages?

**Andrew Mitchell:** UNRWA is not unfunded. As I set out, Britain has funded it until the next financial year. ...

**Stephen Farry (Alliance):** The Government continue to be selective when they deploy the language of war crimes to different conflicts around the world. Notably, it is used in Ukraine freely, but not in reference to what is happening in Gaza. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** Britain has been at the heart of building the international rules-based system since 1946. ... the British Government have a uniform way of supporting international humanitarian law, supporting the rules of war and doing everything we can to stand up for the international rules-based system.

**Michael Shanks (Labour):** The UN has said this week that a famine stalks Gaza, especially in the north where aid has not reached people since more than a month ago ... The UN has confirmed that its inquiry into UNRWA will not report until 20 April. On a number of occasions the Minister has said that the issue of funding does not arise until the next financial year, so if we reach the next financial year and the report has not been issued, how will the Government decide whether we should re-fund UNRWA ...

*col 169* **Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Member is right on the timings of the report by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, but we are hoping for an interim report and the report of the former French Foreign Minister to inform any decisions that we make. ...

**Martyn Day (SNP):** Does the Minister agree with the International Court of Justice findings that there is a plausible risk that Israel has been committing genocide against the Palestinian people ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** It is hard to overestimate the offence caused by the extraordinary rhetoric of accusing Israel of being guilty of genocide, given the antecedents and events that took place in the holocaust during the war and the fact that more Jewish people were murdered on that one day of 7 October than at any time since the end of the second world war.

**Richard Burgon (Labour):** It is now one month since the International Court of Justice ruled that there is a plausible risk that Israel's actions in Gaza are in breach of the genocide

convention. Since then, 3,000 more Palestinians have been killed, food and essential aid is still being prevented from getting into Gaza, and now Israel is threatening to invade Rafah. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... I hope that he will share with me a common view that ... the five-point plan that has been set out so clearly by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary is the right way to address the very serious difficulties to which he alludes.

**Carol Monaghan (SNP):** We have heard many times about Israel's right to defend itself. In fact, the Minister started his statement by reiterating Israel's right to defend itself. On Sunday evening in Gaza City, the Israel Defence Forces fired on Palestinians who were waiting for food aid trucks to arrive. Ten were killed. Does the Minister believe that that was a legitimate act of self-defence?

*col 170* **Andrew Mitchell:** Unlike the other forces involved in this dreadful conflict, Israeli soldiers and members of the IDF are taught, as part of their basic training, about international humanitarian law. As I mentioned, there are lawyers embedded in the military forces as they make decisions on actions. That is not something that we see in other forces in the region and non-state actors. Although all deaths are to be regretted, we underline that international humanitarian law is very clear that all parties must respect it. ...

**Zarah Sultana:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In response to a question from the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), the Minister said that the arms export Committee does its work effectively. However, that Committee, formerly known as the Committees on Arms Export Controls, no longer exists. It last met publicly in December 2022, and last month its responsibilities were transferred to the Business and Trade Committee, which will scrutinise arms exports alongside a huge number of other matters. That means that, contrary to what the Minister suggested, this House no longer has a Committee specifically focused on scrutinising arms exports. What advice can you give me on ensuring that the Government take seriously the scrutiny of arms exports, given the Minister's apparent lack of understanding? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... The regime is clear, no matter where responsibility for it sits—and it is, I believe, among the toughest to be found anywhere in the world.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-27/debates/D05B7810-FB34-40B8-8AA9-28CDC3F36270/IsraelAndGaza>

*The International Court of Justice 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>

*The episode of the "Law & Disorder" podcast referred to above by Andrew Mitchell can be heard at*

<https://shows.acast.com/65aa5c04a3555100168f5eec/episodes/law-in-gaza>

*The Government amendment in the SNP debate, referred to above by Andrew Mitchell, can be read at*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-21/debates/610A4D12-A333-4885-9D0B-0A225C35C043/CeasefireInGaza#contribution-F87F372A-2C96-48FB-BB73-449AB5C7A38F>

## House of Commons Written Answers

### Arms Trade: Israel

**Chris Law (SNP)** [14350] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether she has sought legal advice on the implications for her policies on arms export licences to Israel of the International Court of Justice's decision on the request for provisional measures in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

**Greg Hands:** All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the UK's Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, including with regard to international humanitarian law.

All licences are kept under careful and continual review and the Government is able to amend, suspend, refuse or revoke licences as circumstances require.

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade receives legal advice as appropriate, on all matters related to import and export licensing, as part of advice from officials. Any legal advice received is subject to legal professional privilege and as such we do not comment on legal advice that may or may not have been sought or received.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/14350>

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

*The Criteria referred to above can be read at*

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

### **Gaza: Genocide Convention**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [14689] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of Israel's compliance with the provisional measures set forth by the International Court of Justice in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

**Andrew Mitchell:** We respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and we are clear 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 Humanitarian Law, as we have said from the outset. Our view is that Israel's actions in Gaza cannot be described as a genocide, which is why we thought South Africa's decision to bring the case was wrong and provocative.

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

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

We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law to be respected and civilians to be protected. We have previously assessed that Israel is committed and capable of complying with IHL. We regularly review our assessment.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/14689>

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

### **Gaza: Israel**

**Dan Carden (Labour)** [14372] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of an Israeli military incursion into Rafah.

**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 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/2024-02-16/14372>

### **Gaza: Israel**

**Dan Carden (Labour)** [14374] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the United Nations statement entitled Gaza: Rafah invasion would be a disaster 'beyond imagination', warn UN medics, published on 14 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 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 Foreign Secretary has also underlined the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, and to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/14374>

*The statement referred to above can be read at*

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/02/1146522>

### **Gaza: Israel**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [14688] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the proposed Israeli military expansion into Rafah; and whether he has made representations to encourage Israel to comply with international law.

**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 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.

There must be a reduction in civilian casualties. All parties must act within International Humanitarian Law. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

The Government continues to press these points in engagement with Israeli counterparts, most recently when the Prime Minister spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 15 February.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/14688>

### **UNRWA: Finance**

**Kenny MacAskill (Alba)** [15371] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 21 February 2024 to Question 14107 on UNRWA: Finance, what the allegations were; and from whom those allegations were received.

**Andrew Mitchell:** As the UN Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, set out on 26 January, the Israeli Authorities provided the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) with information about the alleged involvement of UNRWA



employees in the horrific attacks on Israel on 7 October. The UN quickly moved to set up two investigations.

As we have set out, we are pressing the UN Office of Internal Oversight and Catherine Colonna to produce a rapid interim report, and we want UNRWA to give detailed undertakings about changes in personnel, policy and precedents to ensure this can never happen again. We are working with allies to try to bring this situation to a rapid conclusion - not least because UNRWA have a vital role to play in providing aid and services in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-22/15371>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

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

*The UN Commissioner-General's comments referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/serious-allegations-against-unrwa-staff-gaza-strip>

### **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [14715] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what progress he has made with international partners on opening more land borders for aid to enter Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The FCDO is actively engaging with international partners and those operating on the ground to do all we can to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We have trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings. The Foreign Secretary has discussed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation there with Prime Minister Netanyahu. He reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza, for Nitzana and Kerem Shalom to be open for longer, and for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza.

We have supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. 750 tonnes of life-saving food aid arrived in the first delivery in December and a second delivery of 315 tonnes was made in January. We are getting on with aid delivery through funding multiple implementing partners including other UN agencies and international and UK NGOs. This support is helping people in Gaza get food, water, shelter and medicines.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/14715>

### **Gaza: Food Aid**

**Dan Carden (Labour)** [15157] 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 decision of the UN World Food Programme to pause deliveries of food aid to northern Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are greatly concerned by the pause in aid distributions by the UN World Food Programme in Northern Gaza, and by the difficulties that are hindering relief delivery efforts. We have reiterated the need for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza. As we have said, Israel must take steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza, including allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses, opening more routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity. The Prime Minister discussed this in his call with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 15 February.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-21/15157>

### **Palestinians: Refugees**

**Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour)** [14676] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of Palestinian refugees on regional stability in the Middle East.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The Government firmly rejects any suggestion of the resettlement of Palestinians outside of Gaza.

Gaza is Occupied Palestinian Territory and will be part of a future Palestinian state. We support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people.

Our position is that settlements are illegal. No Palestinian should be threatened with forcible displacement or relocation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/14676>

### **Gaza: Internally Displaced People**

**Dan Carden (Labour)** [15325] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 21 February 2024 to Question 14355 on Gaza: Internally Displaced People, whether he has had discussions with Israeli counterparts on guaranteeing the right to return of Palestinians displaced from their homes in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The Prime Minister noted in his call on 15 February with Prime Minister Netanyahu the importance of continuing to abide by International Humanitarian Law and protecting civilian infrastructure, including shelters.

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

We have also been clear that the international community will need to make a massive effort to deliver a reconstruction plan for Gaza.

We want the fighting to stop now. We are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-22/15325>

### **Gaza: Orphans**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [14717] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has held discussions with his counterparts in the Middle East on the potential merits of developing a plan to support orphaned children in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** From our £60 million of committed aid, we have provided targeted support for children through our £5.75 million contribution to UNICEF. Our funding is supporting their work to amongst other things, assist over 5,800 children with severe malnourishment and 853,000 children, adolescents and caregivers affected by the conflict, to receive emergency and child protection services, including mental health and psychosocial support.

The UK is a founding member and key donor to Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. ECW is supporting education preparedness work in Gaza. We continue to support the wider delivery of education in Gaza, including through NGOs, UN partners, the World Bank, and the Global Partnership for Education.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/14717>

### **Muhammad al-Araja**

**Matthew Offord (Conservative)** [14531] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment his Department has made of the potential implications for its policies of the killing of Muhammad al-Araja at the Rafah

border crossing in Gaza on 16 February 2024.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are aware of these reports.

We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to be respected and civilians to be protected. Too many civilians have been killed.

Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

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

Vital steps include 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/2024-02-19/14531>

### **Egypt: Gaza**

**Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour)** [14675] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the implications for his policies of reports of construction work on the border between Egypt and Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** Egypt is a key regional partner in supporting the Government's response to the crisis, and we welcome efforts by Egypt in getting aid into, and British Nationals out of, Gaza. The Government is 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, 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/2024-02-19/14675>

## **House of Lords Ministerial Statement and Q&A**

### **Israel and Gaza**

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

**col 933 Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour):** ... It is sad, but since the last Statement, there has been another month of intolerable conditions, civilian deaths, famine and disease in Gaza, and of course another month of hostages' families in Israel living in complete anguish. The ICJ said that Israel must take measures to ensure humanitarian access; last week, the World Food Programme suspended its operations in northern Gaza; and MSF said: "We no longer speak of a humanitarian scale-up; we speak of how to survive even without the bare minimum", and that bare minimum is having a disastrous effect, particularly ... on women and girls, and especially on children. Children are now suffering hugely from malnutrition, which has not only an immediate impact on their health but even much longer-term impacts, which will last throughout the rest of their lives.

Today, in the other place, in his response to Minister Mitchell's Statement, David Lammy mentioned the report from the Association of International Development Agencies, which said that visas for 100 humanitarian workers in Gaza and the West Bank have expired or are about to expire, with no humanitarian visa renewals since the outbreak of the war,

leaving many workers facing deportation at a time when Palestinian people need them most. ...

I hope the Minister can reassure us that the Government will make the strongest possible representations to ensure that these visas are extended or renewed.

Minister Mitchell also mentioned ... the increase in aid ... but what assessment have we made of that increase and what further increases are needed to meet the horrific conditions that are currently applying in Gaza? ...

*col 934* Do His Majesty's Government believe that a full-scale Rafah offensive would be consistent with the ICJ ruling? ...

We need some clarity on the sorts of messages that we are giving to the Israeli Government with regard to a possible assault on Rafah. ...

The talks in Paris over the weekend appear to be making some progress. ... I hope the Minister can tell us exactly what we are doing and particularly what the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, is doing, to ensure that we are working with our allies to do our utmost to ensure that those talks are successful.

I think that most people in this House agree that both sides should stop fighting now and all hostages should be released. We also agree, when talking about a two-state solution, that we need—as the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, said earlier this month—to work with our international partners to give hope to that process and to move towards recognising a Palestinian state—not wait for the end of the process but give hope so that talks and negotiations can succeed. ...

*col 935* **Baroness Smith of Newnham (Liberal Democrat):** ... I wonder whether the Minister could say a little more about what tripling aid means. Tripling sounds great, but what does that mean in practice? What does “Four tonnes of vital supplies” actually mean? What percentage of people who have been displaced in Gaza are actually being fed through the aid that is coming through? What percentage of people in Gaza are without food and clean water at the moment? ...

Minister Mitchell in the other place talked about a two-state solution and said that His Majesty's Government's position is that “we will recognise a Palestinian state at a time that is most conducive to the peace process”.

Can the Minister tell us how the Government will know when it is most conducive to the peace process? ...

Finally, in all the penumbra of the situation in Israel and Gaza there is the spectre of Iran in Yemen, Iraq and Syria and on the border with Lebanon. Have His Majesty's Government given any further thought to proscribing the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and what assessment have they made of the wider security situation, particularly on Israel's northern border with Lebanon? ...

*col 936* **The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon):** ... I will first say that both I and my noble friend Lord Cameron are fully immersed in this. ... We are very much engaged on the current live discussions. ... Of course we want an immediate stop in the fighting. ... We can play on—I have said this from the start—whether it is a pause, ceasefire or cessation, but we need to make sure that the fighting stops and that the conditions are there to allow for it to stop on a permanent basis. We do not want any loss of life. If there is a legacy that we can provide to those 1,200 Israelis who lost their lives and to the now thousands who have lost their lives in Gaza, it is ensuring that on this occasion, the end means the end, and that we build that sustainable peace and deliver the two-state solution that everyone wants. ...

We have rightly had concerns raised about UNRWA, but we have been working through that to ensure that other agencies get the support they need and, as the noble Lord, Lord Collins, said, the visas to operate. ... To be frank, the Israeli Government themselves also recognise the importance of that humanitarian support. International humanitarian law is important, and Israel's obligations under

that as a state are very clear. ...

A week or so ago, together with the Prime Minister, I met the hostage families at No. 10. They also had other meetings while here in London, which the UK Government facilitated. ... We must ensure that we leave no stone unturned and no door unopened—both for the families, to give them the support they need, and to ensure that their loved ones are returned. Meeting with the hostage families is always heartrending. ...

*col/ 937* We are asking Israel to ensure the safety of aid convoys; to ensure that the UN has people, vehicles and equipment, and fuel within Gaza; to open the crossings, Kerem Shalom in particular, seven days a week; to remove restrictions to ensure greater consistency on goods; to allow unencumbered access to aid coming from Jordan; to open the Ashdod port as a route for aid to reach Gaza; to open the Erez crossing to allow direct access to the north of Gaza; and to restore water, fuel and electricity connections. ...

To take one example, the £4.25 million of aid to which I alluded will ensure that the UNFPA—the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency—can support 100,000 vulnerable girls and women in Gaza. ...

The Government are pursuing a five-point plan with key partners to ensure the release of the hostages and the scaling up of aid ... We are sometimes seeing a double-digit number of trucks going through on a daily basis. This is not enough. The target has always been 500 to 600 trucks. ...

We are also looking at a third element—reconstruction. We are asking every country, whether a partner in the region or our traditional partners, to say what they can do in this respect. ...

My noble friend the Foreign Secretary and I visited Lebanon together. We made a specific offer to the Lebanese army to ensure that we see a scaling down of the current rise in attacks from Hezbollah and of the conflict with Israel.

*col/ 938* We want to ensure that the Lebanese army moves in, and that the Hezbollah grouping moves north of the Litani river. Quite specific conversations are happening in this respect. ...

**Lord Pannick (Crossbench):** My Lords, the Minister rightly included among the vital elements for a lasting peace the removal of Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel and Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza. How are we to achieve these aims unless Israel continues its military campaign?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... the Israeli army is one of the most sophisticated. It has said that its operation has moved into a new phase in which it can focus on specific military targets and on where it sees that some of the missiles which continue to be launched on Israel are targeted. It has also made quite public declarations that it wishes to protect the civilian population. ... We have made the point to Israel that specific provision for the number of civilians in Rafah—particularly women and children—is an important consideration. I fear that a ground offensive without these provisions will result in a humanitarian catastrophe.

**Lord Swire (Conservative):** Can my noble friend tell me how he reconciles Prime Minister Netanyahu's recently articulated vision for post-conflict Gaza and the possibility of a two-state solution?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... the current Prime Minister and Government of Israel do not articulate the two-state solution. However, it is the long-standing position of successive British Governments and, as I have again articulated, it is our firm view and that of the US, key partners in Europe and key partners in the region that the two-state solution is the only solution that will provide the sustainable security, justice and peace that are equally deserved by Palestinians and Israelis.

**Lord Grocott (Labour):** ... the Minister has repeatedly referred to the need for a sustainable peace and a two-state solution ... The Foreign Secretary has made clear that

that will inevitably include the recognition of a Palestinian state. I would like the Minister's response to a significant but unfortunate development in the last 10 days that makes a two-state solution that much more remote: the statement by Prime Minister Netanyahu ... making it plain and explicit that Israel's control over the West Bank will remain indefinitely and that he is totally opposed to a two-state solution. ...

**col 939 Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... The Palestinians deserve a state, and that is what we are working on. My noble friend Lord Cameron articulated the important issue of recognising Palestine at the appropriate time within the process that is currently under way. It does not need to happen on day one, but nor does that mean it will happen at the end of the process. It is important that we work with key partners, and the issue of recognising Palestine, including at the UN, is part of that process. ...

**Lord Walney (Crossbench):** ... It is hard for the Minister to maintain both the laudable position that there must be no future for Hamas in Gaza, and that its capability to repeat the 7 October atrocities must be removed, and the position that the only way to a sustainable ceasefire is if both sides agree.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... First and foremost, Hamas has kidnapped Israeli citizens. As challenging as it may be, we need to ensure that, when it comes to a negotiation, those people who can deliver an outcome that we all desire—the release of the hostages—are pressurised, advocated upon and implored. ... We are clear that, for the here and now, that first pillar that needs to be delivered—hostages being released and aid going in—depends on Hamas agreeing to it. ... Equally—and I think this is consistent—Hamas does not believe that Israel should exist. That is totally incompatible with the position of not just the UK but many countries around the world. There is a need for a reality check here: terrorism does not result in recognition as a state. ...

**col 940 Lord Dobbs (Conservative):** ... Hamas does not accept the right of Israel to exist, and the Israeli Government do not accept a two-state solution. When two combatants will not agree on ... the only solution—a two-state solution—surely the inexorable logic is ... enforcement. Is it not the case that the only way we will get a peace settlement in the Middle East is by the international community enforcing its will on these two combatants in a way that we have not yet considered?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... Israel is a recognised state with international obligations and is important as a partner and friend. We remind it of its obligations. Those with influence over Hamas are reminded that violence is never a means to an end. Enforcement means we ensure that every lever of our diplomacy, every lever we have working with our international partners, is used on both sides to ensure, first and foremost, that the fighting stops; secondly, that we build the process to ensure sustainable peace; and, thirdly, that it is understood that there will be no future peace unless we have two nations that recognise not only their own sovereign right to exist but, equally, that the people and citizens of those two countries must enjoy equal rights, security and justice.

**Lord Turnberg (Labour):** ... UNRWA was certainly in league with Hamas in many of its recent actions, and on 7 October. Now it seems to be playing a role in preventing aid getting across. I heard today, for example, that it was preventing forklift trucks appearing at crossings to allow the transfer of goods. It was also stopping the world food agency getting food in, which Israel is trying to promote. UNRWA is playing a bad game. ...

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** UNRWA has been severely challenged over the reports and allegations made against specific members of UNRWA staff. ... the UN acted quite decisively on the individuals whose names were shared by Israel with UNRWA. ... I am not aware of the specific report about forklift trucks that the noble Lord raises. I will certainly look into that.

**col 941** ... the Secretary-General and former French Foreign Minister Colonna are

conducting an investigation into the specifics of UNRWA and its future. It is important that the concerns that we and our international partners have raised are fully mitigated before we look at any future funding and support for UNRWA.

**Lord Hannay of Chiswick (Crossbench):** ... I think [the Minister] is saying now—perhaps he will confirm this—that, for any short-term pause or ceasefire to be sustainable, it needs to be anchored in a medium to long-term diplomatic negotiation about Israel and Palestine and their respective statehoods. Does he not think that the position he has spelled out this afternoon risks once again slipping back into a situation in which Israel, which we all recognise as a state, declines to recognise Palestine as a state, and the longer-term negotiations therefore get nowhere?

Would it not be better to think in terms of a situation in which all participants in the negotiation for a long-term solution—not just Israel and Palestine; it would certainly need to include all the Arab states around—recognise from the beginning that they are talking about two states and that the only point of the negotiations is to determine their mutual relationship in peaceful coexistence?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... I can assure the noble Lord that is exactly what we are doing. ... we are working very much with key partners in the Gulf; we are working with those countries which have peace agreements with Israel—namely, Jordan and Egypt—but also, importantly, the Abraham accord countries, which are also playing an important role. ...

**Lord Anderson of Swansea (Labour):** ... Obviously, Israel must have security guarantees, and presumably the new Palestine state must be demilitarised with proper guarantees, but how does the noble Lord see the next steps? ...

*col 942* **Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... Before we can go anywhere in terms of the political horizon, we need the fighting to stop ... that is exactly where we are focused—in terms of those who have influence over Hamas, but also we are working very closely with Israel to create the conditions to allow the hostages to be returned and for aid to enter Gaza on the scale that is now needed to avert a humanitarian catastrophe. ...

**Lord Clarke of Nottingham (Conservative):** ... The difficulty is there seems to be not the slightest prospect of Hamas ever agreeing to accept the continued existence of Israel and not the slightest chance of a Netanyahu Government agreeing to a two-state solution, which they would regard as giving Hamas a victory for its 7 October activities—and they probably have the majority of the Israeli population at this present time agreeing with them at least on that. ...

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... there are details that are currently under way with regard to securing what is necessary for Israel and providing it with security guarantees. That will constitute a presence beyond the Israeli Army that is currently in Gaza that has the confidence of the Palestinians within Gaza, but, importantly, has the security guarantees that Israel needs. ...

*col 943* **Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (Liberal Democrat):** ... How will we in the UK, the US and others get that aid to the people of Gaza and not let it be taken from them by Hamas to store in its tunnels and feed to its workers? ...

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** Obviously, the situation in Gaza is fluid, but there are processes that we have to go through that include Israeli checks as the aid goes into Gaza, so there are mitigations in place. ...

**Viscount Stansgate (Labour):** ... Like me, other Members of this House may have seen the video footage of the air drop that was made to the hospital in northern Gaza of UK aid in co-operation with the Jordanian air force. Can the Minister assure the House that this is the type of practical activity that will continue for as long as necessary, bearing in mind that, although he said earlier that hundreds of trucks were needed every day, this type of targeted assistance, which, as I understand it, went directly to where it is needed, will continue for as long as possible?

col 944 **Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** I can make that assurance ... To pick up on the previous point, such aid deliveries could not be achieved unless they were co-ordinated with Israel. ... We are working on maritime and air access, and I emphasise access through operational points at the border, particularly Kerem Shalom, which is six lanes wide and was made for the very purpose of ensuring that aid could be delivered expeditiously into Gaza. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-27/debates/B9FB3FDF-7623-4773-AA7E-096D7B4283A9/IsraelAndGaza>

*The International Court of Justice ruling (Order) referred to above by Lord Collins of Highbury, can be read at*

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

*Information about the five point plan, referred to above by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, can be read at*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-29/debates/08A4F56A-BA86-4A9B-BAF8-854C100E498B/IsraelAndTheOccupiedPalestinianTerritories#contribution-40CA12C3-4F1D-419D-BCAC-28A19901B53F>

## House of Commons International Development Committee

### Humanitarian situation in Gaza

**Q90 ... Matthew Hollingworth:** My name is Matthew Hollingworth. I am the country director for the World Food Programme in the state of Palestine. I came out of Gaza last Monday late afternoon or early evening. I was there for a week prior to me going out to Egypt. Before that, because I am based in Jerusalem, I was here. Then I had been in Gaza before for 10 days a week earlier.

The World Food Programme in Gaza today is providing emergency food assistance and nutrition assistance to approximately 1.3 million to 1.4 million people each month. With the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, we are the two largest organisations providing food assistance, in particular in the strip. We have an agreement in terms of our division of labour on whom we provide assistance to.

**Dr Brennan:** My name is Dr Rick Brennan. I am the regional emergency director for the World Health Organization in the eastern Mediterranean, based in Cairo. Our region covers 22 countries. We have some of the largest and most complex humanitarian emergencies in the world, from Gaza of course to Sudan currently, Somalia, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Yemen and so on. We always have our hands full and no more than today, with the two truly catastrophic crises in Gaza and Sudan. ...

My role with respect to Gaza is that I oversee what we call the WHO's technical and operational support for our response inside Gaza. I bring together the resources from right across the organisation to support our operation. I have spent only 48 hours inside Gaza since the start of the war and that was two weeks ago, but I am in daily contact with our team there. What I saw in my two days on the ground confirmed everything you have seen, thought and heard about the desperate situation in Gaza. ...

I am a humanitarian veteran. I have been in this field for 31 years. I rarely use the term "catastrophic". We have been using it with respect to Gaza since November. ...

**Q91 Chris Law (SNP):** ... When you say "catastrophic" ... you give some examples of what that looks like?

**Matthew Hollingworth:** ... The key issue today in Gaza is that it is 100% manmade. It is something that has happened in four months. I do not think that I have ever seen the speed at which the situation has deteriorated in the Gaza Strip. I worked in Gaza City 25 years ago. I was in Gaza City a week last Sunday and it looks nothing like it once did. 75% of it



is destroyed. If it is not entirely destroyed, it is extraordinarily badly damaged. The roads, the tarmac, the water pipes and the sewage pipes are torn up.

There is rubbish rotting everywhere. There is a smell of death in buildings and from buildings. There is a stench of excrement in the air. It is dusty. It stinks and it is overpowering. It is where 300,000 people live, and are trapped and can hardly move. It is under bombardment every day. You wake up to the sound of drones and you go to sleep listening to the sound of drones. It is hell on earth, to be honest with you.

I have seen horrible situations around the world because of natural disasters. I have seen the terrible things that man can do to man and the impact of war, but what you see in Gaza is something that has happened so quickly and is so devastating. To most of the Gazans I have met, it is so bewildering because it has been so destructive. One in 100 have died in this war. ...

You meet walking zombies in Gaza because people just cannot believe the situation they are living in. We use the word "catastrophic" in the food security world to describe famine, where people not only miss meals but go days without eating. Their health deteriorates and, in relation to that hunger, the merest of illnesses can be fatal. That is the level of catastrophic hunger you are starting to see in places such as Gaza City. ...

"Catastrophic" is a difficult word to understand, but when you break it down scientifically it is very clear. People will die and have already started to die of hunger-related illnesses, including children, old people and the most vulnerable people who are already compromised with chronic illness. It is happening.

**Q92 Chair (Sarah Champion, Labour):** "Famine" is a technical term. I wonder whether you can describe what that looks like and when that definition comes in. ...

**Matthew Hollingworth:** ... By the time you are at famine-like conditions, risk of famine and famine itself, you are at catastrophic levels of food insecurity. ...

Essentially, as I said, you start to talk about catastrophic food insecurity when people are missing days of food, where they are ill and sickness is caused because of that lack of nutrition. It is beyond the slow decline of health because of the slow decline in the amount of food available. It is when it is acute and beyond crisis levels. It is beyond emergency levels. ...

**Q93 Chris Law:** ... Often we hear that the operations in Gaza are precise and targeted towards Hamas. What is your experience from what you see on the ground? If I could follow up on that, have you seen acts that you would describe as clearly in breach of international humanitarian law?

**Matthew Hollingworth:** There is no question that there is 21st century weaponry in use that is extraordinarily precise, but there is also weaponry that has been in use for the last 200 years at least. That includes shellfire, mortars, bullets and grenades, which are anything but precise. ...

I have seen large numbers of civilians hit. One could argue, or it would be argued, that people are collateral and in the wrong place at the wrong time, but the bottom line is that the violence is everywhere. ...

In terms of international humanitarian law, there is no question that it is being tested as much as it has ever been tested anywhere in the world in terms of what we can and cannot negotiate and how long it takes us to have access to people. It is not just the timeliness but also the ability for us to go and deliver where we must and demand to go and deliver. We are constantly frustrated because of a lack of co-ordination, i.e. a lack of approval to move into areas. ...

If we do not receive clearances to go outside of hours when roads are congested and people are around, criminals opportunistically will take aid. It is Hobbesian in the Gaza Strip right now. It is a survival of the fittest situation because people are so desperate and the criminal gangs are starting to take over. We are approaching a point where it is almost at the level of anarchy in parts of the Gaza Strip. ...

**Q94 Dr Brennan:** We have had facilitated missions over the last week and a half to Al-Nasr Hospital and Al-Amal Hospital. In terms of access to the north, I have some data here on the 77 missions requested by the UN to the north between 1 January and 12 February. Of those, 12 were facilitated, three were partially facilitated, 39 were denied, 14 were impeded and nine were postponed. ...

Matthew mentioned that there have been almost 30,000 traumatic deaths since the start of the conflict. We estimate that 65% of those deaths are among women and children. That is the inverse of what you would expect in a normal war. ... There are also close to 70,000 injuries, and these are not just broken bones. These are complex war injuries, such as penetrating injuries to the head and chest, spinal injuries, burns, amputations and multiple injuries.

That data has been questioned in several quarters because it comes from the Ministry of Health. It is important to point out that three different academic institutions have looked at the data and think that they are reasonable estimates. It has been validated. ...

We have established disease outbreaks of diarrhoea and hepatitis, and terrible soaring rates of skin infections and childhood infections such as chickenpox and so on. That situation could certainly worsen and we expect it to worsen.

Matt has talked about the food crisis. In northern Gaza, over 15.5% of kids under the age of two now are acutely malnourished. Prior to the conflict, less than 1% of kids under the age of five across Gaza were malnourished. ...

In that context, with these soaring needs, we have seen this massive and acute degradation of the health system. Prior to the conflict, there were 36 public hospitals functional in Gaza. Today, there are 12 hospitals functioning, and they are only partially functioning. They are only minimally functioning. ... Only seven of 23 UNRWA clinics are functioning. ...

**Q95 Chris Law:** ... you have talked about a worst-case scenario. Under an immediate ceasefire, what is the best-case scenario?

**Dr Brennan:** If there is an immediate ceasefire and no disease outbreaks, there would be about 6,500 excess deaths. If there is an immediate ceasefire and outbreaks, there would probably be around 11,500 excess deaths. If it is status quo, it is around 58,000 to 65,000 deaths. ...

**Q96 Matthew Hollingworth:** ... we are currently trying to work through a temporary pause of deliveries into northern Gaza and Gaza City ... The reason we paused after those deliveries was twofold. First, on two consecutive days we took a convoy of 10 trucks of food to Gaza City. When we crossed into Gaza City, tens of thousands of people swarmed forward, desperately trying to get their hands on the assistance that we were bringing.

Because they came too close to the checkpoint, the tank opened fire on them, killing some and hitting my vehicle on the Sunday. That was because, again, they were just too close. Even with that situation, with a light machinegun firing in their direction, people still continued to run forward. I cannot imagine how hungry you must be, or how hungry or sick your family must be, for you to be willing to continue running in waves into machinegun fire for a box of food.

When you see the risks that people are willing to take just to get a bag of flour or a box of food, it behoves us to continue to try to support. We also have to take tough decisions to try to make sure that the people we serve are not put into further danger than they are already living in when we are providing them aid. That is the primary reason why we stopped deliveries to Gaza City.

The secondary reason why we stopped is that, on the second day, our teams came under at least five, if not six, waves of attempting violent looting by criminal gangs. They were tipped off that we were going to be trying to get assistance again into Gaza City. They beat up our drivers, threatened our people, smashed our trucks and indeed ended up stealing about 40% of what we desperately needed to get into Gaza City. ...

There is use of rockets, missiles, mortars and shellfire. You add to that, as I said, an approaching anarchy-like situation. The state that existed has been degraded. There are no police on the streets to bring civil order. The ones who are on the street are the bullies who are opportunistically filling that space. ...

**Dr Brennan:** ...There have been over 150 UN staff killed since the start of the conflict, including a WHO staff member, a 27-year-old national staff member who was running our limb reconstruction project. She was killed together with her six-month-old son, her husband and around 50 members of her family. ... In addition, there have been over 120 journalists killed. ...

**Q97 Dr Brennan:** ... There are numerous examples that are similar. When I was in Gaza the other day, one of our drivers told me of three of his siblings who had been killed together with their entire families, including their spouses and kids. That was 19 killed from his family in separate attacks. ...

**Q98 Virendra Sharma (Labour):** ... You also said that you were there about 25 years ago. How would you compare then, the situation of people's own food and vegetables growing, and now? In addition to this, is there any food being produced in Gaza at this stage?

**Matthew Hollingworth:** Prior to this crisis, Gaza was a very significant producer of its own food, including fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, chicken meat and eggs. There were issues in Gaza that were poverty-related in terms of food insecurity, but in production and food availability it was doing well. You have seen a very significant deterioration in the amount of land that is available and safe to farm. There is a harvest that has been lost, animals that have been killed and fodder that is no longer available to animals, which either are being killed because they cannot be fed or have already perished.

The food-producing capacity of the Gaza Strip has been decimated. When it comes to cattle, sheep, goats and chicken, replacing them and rebuilding that stock will take many years. ...

In areas where there has not been such active ground fighting, you see areas where the greenhouses still stand and the fresh vegetables—tomatoes and cucumbers—are still grown and are available, but it is in those areas that have yet to be included in the ground warfare, so that can change. ... in Rafah, a lot of the fresh vegetables that are available are still grown in those greenhouses. ...

At the time I was in Gaza City, spices were for sale because they still had them in stock. People were not buying those. Some dried nuts were for sale. Citrus fruit was for sale because some of the citrus farms were still accessible. There was very little else and certainly no mainstays of diet. There was no wheat flour, bread, lentils or rice. ...

**Q99 Matthew Hollingworth:** We need to be seeing 500 trucks going into Gaza at the moment to make a difference.

**Q100 Chair:** Is that per day?

**Matthew Hollingworth:** Yes. You are talking about food needs, water, sanitation and hygiene needs, shelter needs, medicine needs and other health materials. Those are the four critical areas that we know must be switched on in terms of the delivery if we are going to make a big difference to people's lives right now. ...

We need a vast increase in the amount of assistance going in. To do that, we also need to see other corridors. It is crazy at this moment that we only have a southern corridor to bring humanitarian materials and commercial materials into Gaza Strip. ... If you look at the price of flour today in Rafah, it is 979% higher than it was pre-crisis. Vegetable oil is 198% higher. Salt is 467% higher. ...

**Q101 Matthew Hollingworth:** At the moment, the politics in Israel post 7 October are such that there is a strong view from the population that aid should not go directly from Israel into the Gaza Strip. Hence all aid is going from Egypt, either to Kerem Shalom or through Nitzana, in order to then end up in the Rafah crossing and enter the Gaza Strip.

**Q102 Rosena Allin-Khan (Labour):** ... would it be fair to say that Israel is prohibiting food getting into Gaza?

**Matthew Hollingworth:** We need to see more food getting in. If it is a question of Israel stopping all food going in, it is not. Are we seeing enough going in? Are we seeing every opportunity used for assistance to go in, including food? Are we seeing every corridor and entry point being open to enable food to go in? The answer is no to all those questions. ...

**Q103 Rosena Allin-Khan:** As you stated to us in Egypt and have said already today, if I may paraphrase ... you have made that case to Israel and it has not been forthcoming to allow the proportion of food in that is required to feed people in the Gaza Strip.

**Matthew Hollingworth:** We need a lot more to get in, particularly to the north, if we are going to stop a famine in its tracks. Right now, we are not able to do that.

**Q104 Rosena Allin-Khan:** You have made that case.

**Matthew Hollingworth:** Yes, absolutely...

**Q105 Rosena Allin-Khan:** ... can you talk a bit more about those with chronic or ongoing conditions, such as cancer or diabetes, or those who require dialysis, things that would ordinarily be quite easy to come by when Gaza was operating, even though not in the full capacity that we would enjoy? ...

**Dr Brennan:** ... prior to the conflict, Gaza, with all the constraints that it existed under with, essentially, the blockade, actually had a pretty good health system and pretty good health outcomes. If you look at the 22 countries across our region, when you look at the main health indicators it was probably pretty middle range. Given the circumstances, it did quite well and had a solid response to the Covid pandemic, for example. The major cause of death in Gaza prior to the conflict was exactly what you were saying, the chronic diseases: heart disease, strokes, diabetes, cancer and so on.

This major disruption to the functioning of the health system puts people who have been treated for chronic diseases at enormous risk of complications and death from those diseases, particularly the dialysis and cancer patients. We have not been able to put together a comprehensive enough strategy to target those people, because they are on the move. Clinics are working one day and then they are not the next day. Hospitals are not functioning and so on. ...

**Q106 Rosena Allin-Khan:** ... can I ask you, very honestly, whether you have seen and heard accounts of hospitals and healthcare facilities being targeted?

**Dr Brennan:** We have heard numerous report of military action that has impacted hospitals and clinics, absolutely. For example, our team was in Al-Amal Hospital just a couple of days ago. Over the few days before they entered, the hospital was hit approximately eight times by military fire. When they went to Al-Nasr Hospital—you may have seen some of the videos—there was extensive destruction. ...

WHO has documented over 380 attacks on hospitals, clinics and healthcare more generally in Gaza. ...

UNRWA was the largest provider of healthcare across Gaza and, I know, also an important partner with WFP. ... Every humanitarian agency is gravely concerned about the defunding of UNRWA. We have to be honest. We are the second biggest actor in health in Gaza. There is no chance that we will be able to compensate for gaps left by the defunding of UNRWA. ...

Perhaps the final point I might make is that ... I want to acknowledge the suffering that the Israeli people went through on 7 October. Nothing that we have said today diminishes that suffering, but it is very important that you understand the gravity of the situation right now and how we are in a downward spiral that, if we make the right choices, we can avert.

**Q107 Rosena Allin-Khan:** I absolutely note your point about 7 October. That is a sentiment that we all absolutely share. ... We have heard about journalists who have been killed. It is a disproportionate number of journalists compared to any other conflict.

We have heard about the over 150 UN staff who have been killed. We have heard about the disproportionate number of medical staff who have been killed. ... Are either of you aware of targeted attacks on healthcare workers?

**Dr Brennan:** ... We have documented over 380 attacks on healthcare. It is not within our mandate or our level of expertise to say whether a specific attack is targeted or to determine who the perpetrator is. ...

**Q108 Dr Brennan:** ... In the early stages of the Ukraine crisis, there were a lot of attacks on healthcare as well, but nothing in my direct experiences compares with this in terms of the scale of attacks in the period of time. ... I might add that, over the last few months, we have also documented over 300 attacks on healthcare in the West Bank. Again, during the attacks on 7 October, there were attacks on healthcare inside Israel by Hamas, as well as deaths during that assault.

**Q109 Matthew Hollingworth:** ... the events of the first convoy that I was on and that managed to succeed in getting into Gaza, which was on Sunday 18 February. That is when tens of thousands of people just swarmed our trucks. I was in the last vehicle. People were jumping on to trucks and throwing boxes down. People were catching them and running. They were weak and people were falling over. They could not carry the boxes of food, each of which weighed 26 kilos. It is astonishing to see. It is astonishing when it is literally tens of thousands of people who are suddenly appearing out of ruined buildings and rubble.

Because they were so close—they were coming right into the area around the Israeli frontlines and their checkpoint—the tank fired at them. One man was cut down right in front of me, with a bullet wound to the abdomen, and one suffered a chest wound and died immediately. They were within arm's reach. What was frightening is that people stepped over them, picked up the boxes that they had held and took them. At this stage, death and desperation are so normal in so many places, which is a frightening thought for anybody in the world. It is not normal. It is abnormal. It is horrifying. Those poor people will be mourned by their families, but, in the hurry to get aid to family members, to friends and for themselves, people just carried on. What I find strange is just that carrying on and that normalcy around something that is so horrifying and abnormal.

I hasten to add that it is very important that we now have systems in place. We have spent a lot of time talking with the Israeli Defence Forces and with the people in that area to establish a means to deliver, so that people do not panic, do not think that the trucks are going away and do not run forward into a frontline area to get aid. They know that there is a safe area where we will drop the assistance and that they can go to safely. ...

**Dr Brennan:** ... Since 7 October, we have documented 977 attacks on healthcare, of which 780, or 80%, have occurred in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. That includes Gaza and the West Bank.

A lot is said about the use of hospitals and medical facilities by Hamas for military purposes, and WHO has documented militarisation of health facilities. Our big concern is the way in which that finding is being managed. If a health facility is being used for military purposes and is still maintaining its lifesaving functions, there are very clear principles guiding military engagement with that facility under international humanitarian law. Those principles are proportionality, precaution and distinction.

We have very significant concerns that those principles are not being consistently applied when health facilities that have allegedly been militarised are being addressed. If a medical facility is being used for military purposes, for whatever reason, it does not mean that it is open to direct attack. There are principles that guide engagement in that context, and we have very serious concerns about how that engagement has been managed in a number of instances

**Q110 Dr Brennan:** Staff have been devastated. Their losses are enormous. They have lost their homes. They have lost their livelihoods. They have lost their loved ones. They

have lost their incomes. ...

Because of those losses, I would have to say that a significant proportion of our staff are certainly not nearly as functional in their day-to-day work as they might be. All of them have been displaced more than once...

In addition to all of those losses, there is the constant bombardment. There is the constant fear. ... People are living in that fear, day in and day out. The accumulated stresses are hard for us to describe. ...

**Q111 Dr Brennan:** The UN and NGO partners have set up what is called a joint operations centre in Rafah. ... Each day, staff within our organisation have specific tasks to deliver on that plan: to ensure the delivery of health services, to ensure that we have a supply line working for the drugs, to set up surveillance to detect and prevent the spread of infectious diseases. ...

The team is structured. We use a best practice for emergency management called the incident management system. We have structured our team around that, so that everyone has a particular function and is working on various elements of the plan. We have the trauma experts working on that. We have the infectious disease experts working on that. We have the co-ordination experts working on that.

It sounds a lot crisper and better organised than it is. Of course, it is a chaotic environment. ...

**Q112 Gareth Bacon (Conservative):** ... To what extent has this crisis impacted your ability to deliver in the wider area? ...

**Dr Brennan:** We have operations in the West Bank. We still try to maintain our support there for similar types of activities: the delivery of health services, the delivery of supplies, disease surveillance and control, as well as that important co-ordination function. We have limited resources. We have multiple crises to which we are responding across our region. There are gaps in what we are able to do in the West Bank right now. ...

We are very concerned about the wider fallout. There are political and security implications, not only for Lebanon but certainly for Syria, for Yemen, as we have all seen with the attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea, and in Jordan and Iraq. ...

**Q113 Gareth Bacon:** To what extent does what has happened to UNRWA make things more difficult for you? We heard ... that UNRWA does things that other agencies do not do and, in fact, it is, in some ways, more akin to a Government. It collects the rubbish. It provides schools as well as hospitals. If you defund—for reasons that are widely talked about and understood—what is, in effect, a Government of the area, in some ways, how does that affect you as WHO in delivering your services?

**Dr Brennan:** UNRWA has 13,000 staff in Gaza. WHO has 30. Of course, those 13,000 UNRWA staff are not just health staff, but, as you rightly say, they run multiple clinics; they run education and schools. They are running shelters and setting up health posts right now for people who have been displaced. They are the biggest healthcare provider in Gaza.

If all of their clinics closed tomorrow—and we know that over two-thirds of them are not functioning right now—we do not have the capacity to step in and compensate for those gaps. Even after the war, if there is no UNRWA to run those vital social services, it is hard to imagine WHO or other agencies being able to step up and fill the gap. ...

**Q114 Dr Brennan:** ... At this stage, I cannot say that we have seen an impact. We will start to see that at the end of March, until when UNRWA has funding. ...

I have been to UNRWA facilities. It really does heroic work. As I mentioned before, the health outcomes in Gaza prior to the war were very impressive, given the circumstances. UNRWA can take a lot of credit for that. In any large organisation, you are always going to have people who do the wrong things and maybe do very bad things, but the whole UNRWA organisation should not be tainted because of that. ...

**Q115 Chair:** I share your picture of a future without UNRWA, and we just have to try to

hope that that does not happen. ... Could you describe the situation in relation to water, what that does to a human and what the bare minimums are that we ought to be advocating for in order to keep people alive? One wishes that we could advocate for them to have dignity, but I do not think that that is coming in the very near future.

**Dr Brennan:** A minimum standard of clean water would be three litres per person per day. We estimate that, right now in Gaza, it is 1.8 litres per person per day. People are probably getting six to seven litres in total, including unclean water. The minimum standard is 15 litres of water per person per day, not only for drinking but for cooking and for personal hygiene, and so we are well below international standards. ...

An important example is sanitation, where, in some UNRWA shelters, they estimate that there is one latrine per 400 to 500 people. The minimum standard is one per 20 people. Imagine if you had to share one latrine with 20 people, let alone with 400 to 500 people. It is a huge health risk. There is open defecation in a lot of these places. ...

That puts young girls at risk in the darkly lit collective centre, with so much overcrowding. If a young girl is menstruating or wants to defecate, where does she go? That puts her at greater risk of sexual abuse and gender based violence, which is an issue that we have hardly touched on. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14345/html/>

## Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

**The UK calls for an immediate pause in fighting, then progress towards a sustainable ceasefire. Statement by Ambassador Barbara Woodward at the UN Security Council meeting on food security risks in Gaza.**

... we are witnesses to a desperate situation in Gaza which is worsening day by day. In Rafah and the South, people are crammed into tents if they're lucky, but without sufficient food, water or hygiene. In North Gaza, as we've heard from the World Food Programme, humanitarian organisations cannot get aid to people who desperately need it. Hunger is at catastrophic levels. As ever, the most devastating impact falls on the most vulnerable: women and children.

To address this, three things need to happen:

First, we call on all parties to stop fighting immediately. This is crucial to get aid in and hostages out, and then progress towards a sustainable and permanent ceasefire. This is the only way to alleviate catastrophic hunger and suffering in Gaza.

Second, we urge Israel to allow more aid into Gaza, and to facilitate distribution throughout the strip. Thousands of trucks are stuck in Egypt and Jordan, containing food, shelter and other essentials. We need more crossings opened for longer, including Kerem-Shalom. We need unencumbered access for aid coming from Jordan; we need the full opening of Ashdod Port. Key to this too is increasing the speed and capacity of aid screening operations, including at Kerem-Shalom and Nitzana to allow this life-saving aid to reach those who need it as soon as possible.

We are particularly concerned that the World Food Programme has had to suspend aid deliveries into Northern Gaza, due to the breakdown of law and order. Airdrops cannot substitute for land-based delivery; humanitarians need safe and unhindered access to the North through the Erez Crossings now.

We urge Israel to resume water and electricity supplies, which is critical for food production and safe drinking water. Commercial activity also needs to restart.

Third, the UN and humanitarian partners need greater protection and access to the tools needed to accomplish their mission. This includes armoured vehicles, communications equipment, personal protective equipment and visas. They need functioning deconfliction mechanisms and safety guarantees for locations and convoys. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uk-calls-for-an-immediate-pause-in-fighting-then-progress-towards-a-sustainable-ceasefire>

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**UN Human Rights Council 55: UK National Statement: UK National Statement, delivered by Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the UK's Minister of State (Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, United Nations and the Commonwealth).**

... Now turning to Israel, 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 our diplomatic efforts.

There must be a reduction in civilian casualties, and we call on all parties to act within international humanitarian law.

We are particularly concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's people are sheltering.

We urge Israel to take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

Meanwhile, we have sanctioned extremist Israeli settlers involved in some of the most egregious abuses of human rights in the West Bank.

The UK remains committed to a two-state solution, guaranteeing security and stability for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

We must generate momentum now towards a permanent peace.

The UK wants to see all countries face appropriate scrutiny of their human rights record, but opposes the disproportionate focus of Item 7, which damages efforts to achieve peace. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-55-uk-national-statement>

## United Nations

**Famine Imminent in Gaza, Humanitarian Officials Tell Security Council, Calling for Immediate Ceasefire**

... **Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs** ... said that currently at least 576,000 people there — one quarter of the population — are “one step away from famine”. One in six children under 2 years old in northern Gaza suffer from acute malnutrition and wasting, and practically the entire population of the Strip is left to rely on woefully inadequate humanitarian food assistance to survive. ... Military operations, insecurity and extensive restrictions on the entry and delivery of essential goods have decimated food production and agriculture, and food-security experts warn of complete agricultural collapse in northern Gaza by May if conditions persist.

“The hostilities and shortages of essential supplies, including electricity, fuel and water, have left food production at a virtual standstill,” he said, noting that the five mills operating in Gaza prior to 7 October ceased operations as far back as November 2023. Further, heavy damage to water infrastructure from fighting and the severing of power and fuel supplies in October have significantly affected access to water that is essential for food production. Fishing — long an important source of nutrition and income in Gaza — has been practically impossible since 7 October when sea access for boats was prohibited.



Additionally, a lack of fodder and water, as well as fighting, has claimed the lives of livestock, removing yet another important source of food and income. ...

He emphasized that hunger and the risk of famine are exacerbated by factors that go beyond just the availability of food. Inadequate water, sanitation and health services create a cycle of vulnerability, where malnourished people — especially among the tens of thousands injured — become more susceptible to disease that further depletes the body's nutritional reserves. "Add chronic overcrowding, exposure to the cold and an absence of adequate shelter to this lack of nutrition, and you have created the conditions for massive disease epidemics," he underscored. ...

... he reported that efforts continue to be hindered by crossing closures, serious movement restrictions, access denials, onerous vetting procedures, incidents involving desperate civilians, protests and a breakdown in law and order, restrictions on communications and protective equipment and supply routes rendered impassable by damaged roads and unexploded ordnance. Further, the suspension of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) challenges the UN's capacity to mount an effective response. ... Calling for a ceasefire, he said: "If nothing is done, we fear widespread famine in Gaza is almost inevitable."

**Maurizio Martina, Deputy Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**, highlighting the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis released in December that detailed the acute food insecurity in Gaza, noted that 378,000 people were estimated to be experiencing "catastrophe" — the most severe phase of acute food insecurity, marked by starvation, critical levels of acute malnutrition and high levels of excess mortality. The risk of famine increases daily ... Since 9 October, Israel's reinforced blockade of the Gaza Strip has included stopping or restricting food, electricity and fuel supplies as well as commercial goods. ...

He added that around 97 per cent of the ground water in Gaza is reportedly unfit for human consumption. Before the current conflict, Gaza's food production allowed self-sufficiency in most fruits and vegetables, but the conflict has severely disrupted this: 339 hectares of greenhouses have been destroyed ... Moreover, the harvest of olives and citrus fruits, which provides an important source of income, has been heavily impacted by the hostilities. ...

**Carl Skau, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)**, said that the Famine Review Committee has warned of a real prospect of famine by May, with 500,000 people at risk. WFP is ready to swiftly expand and scale up its operations if there is a ceasefire agreement. ... WFP's convoys faced significant problems, including delays at checkpoints; gunfire and other violence; and looting of food along the way and at their destination. They were overwhelmed by desperately hungry people. As a result, the organization has been forced to pause deliveries of food to the north. ...

He also underlined the need for a working humanitarian notification system and a stable communications network to keep humanitarian staff safe. "If nothing changes, a famine is imminent in northern Gaza," he warned, stating: "We must all live up to our responsibilities to ensure it does not happen on our watch." ...

**The representative of Switzerland** said that escalating hostilities and resulting food insecurity in Gaza have exacerbated an already-worrying situation of structural poverty resulting from restrictions on movement and humanitarian access imposed as part of the 16-year closure of the Strip. ... he stated that Israel must take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgent aid to Palestinians in Gaza. Additionally, commercial food supplies must be guaranteed so that local markets can be re-established. ...

**The representative of the United States** affirmed that promoting food security is a long-standing American priority, including in Gaza, urging Israel to keep border crossings open for humanitarian aid. Expressing profound concern for the well-being of the more than

1 million Palestinian civilians in Rafah, he stressed that “it is unconscionable that Hamas fighters continue to embed themselves among civilians and civilian infrastructure”. A major ground offensive should not proceed there under current circumstances. ...

**The representative of China** called on Israel to fulfil its obligations as an occupying Power; implement relevant Council resolutions; open all sea, land and air access routes; and ensure the safe, unimpeded entry of humanitarian supplies into Gaza. Further, Israel must guarantee the safety of humanitarian agencies and personnel and facilitate their deliveries in Gaza. He also stated that UNRWA is a “lifeline” for the people there, underscoring its “indispensable and irreplaceable” role. While expressing support for an independent, impartial UN investigation into allegations against certain Agency staff, he called on the international community to continue supporting UNRWA and other humanitarian agencies. ...

**The representative of France** said that the humanitarian situation in Gaza is beyond comprehension, and the human toll is intolerable. ... All actors — including Israel — must comply with international humanitarian law, he said, underscoring the need to deliver humanitarian assistance to the civilian population of Gaza, including in the north. ...

**The representative of the United Kingdom** cited a desperate situation in Gaza that is worsening day-by-day, calling on all parties to the conflict to stop fighting immediately. She further urged Israel to allow more aid into Gaza — with thousands of trucks stuck in Egypt and Jordan, containing food, shelter and other essentials. “We need more crossings opened for longer, including Kerem-Shalom,” she stressed, with unencumbered access for aid from Jordan, the full opening of Ashdod Port, and increased speed and capacity of aid screening operations. ... Calling on Israel to resume water and electricity supplies, she noted that commercial activity must also be restarted. ... [\[click here to read this speech in greater detail\]](#)

**The representative of the Russian Federation**, noting that “every fourth Gazan is a step away from death,” said it is difficult to acknowledge this occurs in 2024 and not the Middle Ages. There is no issue with the availability of assistance to Gaza; however, due to Israel’s stringent measures, only a minimal amount of assistance enters Gaza, and only in the south. ... The only imperative must be to prevent mass starvation in Gaza through an immediate ceasefire, he stressed. ...

**The Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine** called for a humanitarian ceasefire as “an utmost priority” to stop the bloodshed and protect Palestinian civilians in Gaza, citing unprecedented casualties — more than 30,000 dead and 70,000 wounded. Food insecurity in Gaza has reached catastrophic levels, with over half a million people considered to be “one step away from famine”, he said, adding: “What it means for mothers and fathers to hear their babies and children cry of hunger day and night, no milk, no bread, nothing.” Condemning Israel’s calculated, sinister decisions to lay siege to Gaza, he said that “after bombing nearly every bakery and farm, destroying livestock and all means of food production, and its closure of nearly all crossing points, the occupier claims that it is allowing humanitarian aid to enter Gaza.” However, “it is only allowing a drip of aid into Gaza,” only to deflect international opprobrium and with no regard whatsoever for the survival of the population that it has made clear time and again that it wants to get rid of.

Israel — the architect of this human and humanitarian catastrophe — has completely ignored the order of the International Court of Justice and continues with its genocidal crimes, including the crime of starvation as a method of war, he pointed out. ... Israel’s use of starvation as a weapon of war goes hand in hand with its policies aimed at the forced transfer of Palestinians from their land. Its threatened invasion of Rafah heightens real fears in this regard. Additionally, he said that starving UNRWA of funds — based on the alleged, still-unproven acts of a few — means starving desperate Palestine refugees and displaced families in Gaza of the Agency’s life-saving aid.

**The representative of Israel** emphasized that not one person in the Council wishes any

child to go hungry, “and this is precisely Israel’s stance while combating Hamas” — a terror group that adheres to no rules other than their intent to murder and terrorize Jews. Noting that the country is going above and beyond what is expected let alone required to care for civilians, he cited humanitarian aid moving through both the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings, with a delivery channel via Jordan. Since Hamas’ barbaric attack on 7 October, Israel has facilitated the delivery of 254,000 tons of aid, and has been clear that there is no limit to the amount that can be sent. Despite continued attacks by Hamas, 20 Gaza bakeries are fully operational through the entry of large quantities of flour, cooking gas and diesel fuel, producing over 2 million pita breads per day.

He emphasized that claims made by some briefers neglected to fully address the true obstacles to peace and stability, also propagating Hamas lies. Over 500 aid trucks have been waiting on the guardsmen side of Kerem Shalom and Rafah — and while Israel has already approved them, it is “libelously held responsible for a situation that is clearly the UN’s fault”. ... Further, aid diversion and theft and looting by Hamas have never been addressed in the Council, which is also long overdue in condemning “Hamas’ use of human shields and building of tunnels under civilian infrastructure”. “While humanitarian aid continues to enter Gaza, 134 hostages still have not come out” from Hamas’ dark terror tunnels, he stressed — yet they are hardly an afterthought. Israel is still waiting for the UN to dedicate a meeting to the protection of the hostages and will continue to demand their immediate and unconditional release. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15604.doc.htm>

*The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis referred to above can be read at*  
<https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1156749/>

*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>

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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\\_0229.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0155/amend/criminal_rm_rep_0229.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>

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