



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answers

Islamophobia

Peter Grant (SNP) [901765] What steps [the Minister] is taking to tackle Islamophobia.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): We have been clear that anti-Muslim hatred has absolutely no place in our communities. I feel that strongly, as I represent one of the most diverse constituencies in the country. We have provided over £6 million to the anti-Muslim hatred monitoring and support service Tell MAMA, and just shy of £13 million to schemes protecting mosques and faith schools. Funding for both measures had been uplifted in response to increased reporting since October.

Peter Grant: An extreme right-wing Conservative MP was allowed to go on an extreme right-wing Conservative-funding TV station and make a series of vile Islamophobic remarks. The MP was not suspended for Islamophobia; he was suspended for refusing to obey an order from his party leader. Does the Minister understand why it is that, not only among Muslim communities but across a much wider range of believers and non-believers, people are becoming increasingly concerned that, in the eyes of this Government, Islamophobia is seen as somehow less abhorrent than other forms of racism?

Felicity Buchan: The Government were absolutely clear that those were not appropriate comments. That is completely clear. Any form of religious hatred is not

acceptable in our society.

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): The recent rise in anti-Muslim hate incidents and crimes is really worrying. Will the Government do everything they can to improve education so as to improve multi-faith understanding and tackle this scourge?

Felicity Buchan: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. Education is critical, and we need to bring our communities together. Last weekend, I was delighted to attend an inter-faith event in my constituency that included Holland Park synagogue, where it was hosted, and al-Manaar mosque. That inter-faith work and communities working together is critical. ...

Liz Twist (Labour): For almost two years this Tory Government have failed to appoint an independent adviser on Islamophobia. The former adviser has criticised the Government for their failure to engage, and revealed that he could not even get them to provide terms of reference for his role. Does the Minister agree that this Government lack the political will to tackle this pernicious hatred, or even to call it out?

Felicity Buchan: I strongly disagree. We plan to appoint a new independent adviser on anti-Muslim hatred, and we will update the House shortly. ...

Anum Qaisar (SNP): Like so many, I am fearful of the inability to call out Islamophobia becoming a scaremongering tactic to stoke fear and division and garner support for the extreme far right. It makes life difficult or even dangerous for Muslims. Across all four nations, more can and should be done on a cross-party basis to tackle that hatred. That starts with being able to call out Islamophobia when it occurs. Could the Minister clarify the line between being wrong and being Islamophobic?

Felicity Buchan: There is no question but that those comments were wrong. I face the Mayor of London in opposition all the time, and I could criticise him for many things—housing, policing, fire or transport—but I would never accuse him of being in any way under the influence of Islamists.

Anum Qaisar: That response will give people little comfort. Let me paint a picture for the Minister of what life is like for many Muslims growing up and living across these four nations. A month after the 9/11 attacks in 2001, my local mosque in Carfin was petrol bombed. The two men were sentenced to one year and nine months respectively. If asked, most Muslims will have their own stories. Muslims are not asking for special treatment. They work, pay taxes, send their kids to the same schools and support the same football teams. The Government have had ample opportunity over the past few weeks to commit to tackling this stain on society, but there has been no substantial change in policy. Next Friday 15 March marks the UN's International Day to Combat Islamophobia. Will the Government use that opportunity to commit to adopting the definition of the all-party parliamentary group?

Felicity Buchan: I want to make it clear that this Government will not tolerate religious hatred towards Muslims or any other faith group. That is a red line. This Government are aware, very sadly, of incidents of anti-Muslim hatred, which is why we put in place an extra £4.9 million of protective security funding for Muslim mosques, faith schools and communities. We are 100% behind our Muslim communities.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-04/debates/25338D67-1AE6-4DDA-99CE-1D08B53EF20D/Islamophobia>

House of Commons Written Answers

Protest: Greater London

John Hayes (Conservative) [15408] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department has provided guidance to the Metropolitan Police on tackling anti-Semitic (a) chants and (b) slogans during protests.

Chris Philp: This Government is clear that antisemitism is completely unacceptable, and we have a robust legislative framework to respond to hate crimes which target race and religion. The Government expects police to enforce the law where appropriate to protect communities and maintain public order and public safety.

Whilst the police are operationally independent and work in line with the College of Policing's operational guidance to respond to hate crime, we expect the police to fully investigate all hate crimes and work with the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure perpetrators are brought to justice. Whether specific chants or slogans constitute an offence depends on the specific context surrounding the incident and decisions on arrests are a matter for the police.

The College of Policing is responsible for providing guidance to police and are operationally independent from Government. The College of Policing have provided guidance and communications with frontline officers to ensure all officers have the latest information, advice and support they should be providing to communities.

On 28 February 2024, the Government published the Defending Democracy Policing Protocol after consulting with senior policing leaders. The protocol includes seven commitments aimed at addressing the growing trend of intimidatory behaviour and attempts to manipulate the democratic process. The full protocol can be accessed here: [Defending democracy policing protocol](#).

I also recently made a statement to the House of Commons on antisemitism in the UK. A copy of this on Hansard is available here: [Antisemitism in the UK](#).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-23/15408>

Palace of Westminster: Protest

John Hayes (Conservative) [15407] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he plans to hold discussions with the Metropolitan Police on the projection of slogans relating to the Israel-Hamas conflict onto Elizabeth Tower on 21 February 2024.

Chris Philp: I would refer you to my response in the House of Commons to the Rt Hon Michael Ellis on 26 February 2024.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-23/15407>

I am sure that all Members were horrified when those political statements, one of which, by implication, called for the destruction of Israel, were beamed on to the Big Ben tower. It was totally unacceptable, and, incidentally, it was also a breach of planning law. I do expect the police to take action; my right hon. and learned Friend, a former Attorney General, has set out a number of grounds on which it could have been taken, and he can rest assured that I have forcefully communicated that to the commissioner already.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-02-26/debates/DD293C74-52C1-4ADD-B61A-57425BF625F6/TopicalQuestions#contribution-7728EFCA-B8CD-4A7C-B5D5-F35F11624CBA>

House of Lords Written Answer

Inter Faith Network: Finance

Baroness Sherlock (Labour) [HL2604] To ask His Majesty's Government, following the letter of 19 January from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to the Inter Faith Network (IFN) about the possible withdrawal of the offer of funding for the financial year 2023–24, what representations they have received from the IFN in response to the Minister's letter; what reply they have made, if any, to these representations; and when a final decision will be taken on funding for IFN's work during

the current financial year.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: On 19 January, the Secretary of State wrote to the Inter Faith Network (IFN) informing them that he was minded to withdraw the offer of funding for 2023/24. This is in view of a member of the Muslim Council of Britain being appointed to the IFN's Board of Trustees.

Representations made by the IFN were considered by the Secretary of State. This included the role of their trustees and the process of appointing trustees to their board, and what the effect of withdrawing government funding might be.

The Secretary of State concluded that these points were outweighed by the need to maintain the government's long-standing stance on engagement with the MCB, and the reputational risk involved.

This Government is supportive of efforts by faith groups and others to bring together people of different faiths and beliefs.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-20/hl2604>

The letter referred to above is not currently available online.

Charity Commission

Guidance: Accepting, refusing and returning donations to your charity

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accepting-refusing-and-returning-donations-to-your-charity>

Northern Ireland Assembly Written Answer

Religious Education Advisory Committee

Nic Mathison (Alliance) [AQW 6694/22-27] To ask the Minister of Education for an update on the work of the Religious Education Advisory Committee.

The Minister of Education: The Religious Education Advisory Committee was established in 2006 to develop guidance and materials for schools to support the introduction of the Religious Education Core Syllabus. By 2019 it was considered that the work of the Committee had been completed and it was stood down.

In 2022, the Committee was reconvened. Between October 2022 and March 2023, the reconvened Committee, chaired by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), met on four occasions to develop a draft Terms of Reference and discuss the membership, remit and scope of the group. This includes discussion around to what extent CCEA has the authority to extend the membership or present proposals to do so.

At present the Committee is not meeting pending the outcome of the Appeal in Judicial Review Case 87 (A minor) which was heard on 25 and 26 October 2023.

I am, however, advised that individual members or groups within the Committee are taking forward some work around the role of Religious Education in the curriculum. Specifically, they are considering an agreed definition of what Religious Education is and assessing its contribution to the curriculum including to cross-curricular skills and thinking skills and personal capabilities.

The work of the Committee will recommence once the outcome of the Appeal is known.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=389005>

The judgement in the case referred to above (currently awaiting the outcome of an Appeal) can be read at

<https://www.bailii.org/nie/cases/NIHC/QB/2022/53.html>

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Holocaust

House of Lords Library

Letter from Baroness Scott of Bybrook to Peers regarding issues raised during a debate to mark Holocaust Memorial Day: exhibition relating to Kindertransport, retaining focus of Holocaust Memorial Day on the Holocaust itself, Holocaust education, and tackling antisemitism in educational settings

<https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2024-0232/AllPeers.pdf>

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Entry Clearances: Gaza

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour) [16180] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what provision his Department has made for collecting biometric data from relatives of British nationals fleeing Gaza in the absence of functioning visa applications centres in Gaza.

Tom Pursglove: The Visa Application Centre in Gaza has been closed since 7 October 2023 due to the conflict in the region and to ensure the safety of staff and customers. UKVI will continue to monitor the situation and work closely with the commercial partner, TLS, to re-open the centre when it becomes safe to do so.

Those who wish to make a UK visa application will need to enrol their biometrics at an alternative Visa Application Centre in OPT (Ramallah or Jerusalem) or a nearby country. Customers can visit <https://pos.tlscontact.com/> for an up to date list of Visa Application Centres in the region.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16180>

UNRWA: Finance

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [16185] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 27 February 2023 to Question 15371 on UNRWA: Finance, whether his Department held discussions with UNRWA on the allegations before funding was suspended.

Andrew Mitchell: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, called the Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, on 26 January to report the allegations and to outline the actions UNRWA had taken.

As we have set out, we are pressing the UN Office of Internal Oversight and Catherine Colonna, who is leading the independent Review Group appointed by the UN Secretary-General, to produce a rapid interim report into these appalling allegations. 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/2024-02-28/16185>

The answer referred to above can be read at

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

Israel: Hamas

Jim Shannon (DUP) [15069] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has made an assessment of the scale of destruction of religious heritage as a result of the Israel-Hamas war.

Andrew Mitchell: We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets. We want to see Israel using all possible measures to protect the sanctity of holy sites. The UK is a strong supporter of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and calls for places of worship to be respected.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-21/15069>

House of Lords Written Answer

Gaza: Ceasefires

Lord Roberts of Llandudno (Liberal Democrat) [HL2570] To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel to discontinue their military action in Palestine, and what steps they are taking to assist Palestinian civilians.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: 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.

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have reiterated these messages in their contacts with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior Israeli political leaders, as well as leaders in Qatar, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon in recent weeks.

Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We have trebled our aid commitment for this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings.

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 to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza.

The Foreign Secretary has appointed a Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Mark Bryson-Richardson. He is based in the region and is working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/hl2570>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Five elements to achieve a sustainable ceasefire and lasting peace: UK statement at the UN General Assembly

President, the civilian suffering in Gaza cannot continue.

Hunger has reached devastating levels.

Disease is on the rise.

People are crammed into ever smaller slivers of land, with nowhere left to go.

Last week, the UK and Jordan air-dropped four tonnes of life-saving aid to the Tal Al-Hawa hospital in northern Gaza.

We also announced an additional \$5.4 million in aid to ensure UNFPA can continue to provide life-saving support to more than 100,000 vulnerable women and girls in Gaza.

As my Prime Minister has told Prime Minister Netanyahu and regional leaders, we are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah.

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

The deaths of people in Gaza waiting for an aid convoy last week were horrific.

There must be an urgent investigation and accountability.

This must not happen again.

And we cannot separate what happened from the inadequate aid supplies.

In February, only half the number of trucks crossed into Gaza that crossed in January.

This is simply unconscionable.

President, Israel has an obligation to ensure that significantly more humanitarian aid reaches the people of Gaza.

We have identified a series of bottlenecks that need addressing: Israel must urgently open more crossings into Gaza; eliminate bureaucratic obstacles; enable aid operations in Gaza; and ensure there is a robust de-confliction mechanism in place to protect ordinary Palestinians, NGOs, medical staff and others providing aid.

This latest tragedy serves only to underscore the importance of securing an immediate end in fighting, leading to a permanent and sustainable ceasefire.

The negotiations led by Egypt, Qatar and the US are the only way to get lifesaving aid in at the scale needed and to free the hostages currently held by Hamas.

Such a deal would offer the basis from which to achieve a sustainable ceasefire and lasting peace.

The elements essential to achieving this are: first, the release of all hostages.

Second, the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package.

Third, removing Hamas's capability to launch attacks against Israel.

Fourth, Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza.

Fifth, and finally, a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution, with a clear commitment to grant Palestine recognition, including at the United Nations.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/five-elements-to-achieve-a-sustainable-ceasefire-and-lasting-peace-uk-statement-at-the-un-general-assembly>

Scottish Parliament Written Answers

UNRWA

Douglas Lumsden (Conservative) [S6W-25279] To ask the Scottish Government what assurances it has received regarding whether any public funding that it has provided to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency has contributed to funding any proscribed terrorist groups.

Kaukab Stewart: We are deeply concerned by the allegations arising in January 2024 that UNRWA staff may have been involved in the October 7 attacks on Israel. Ahead of Scottish Government awarding funding to UNRWA in November 2023, UNRWA provided a copy of the regulatory framework which governs financial management and staff conduct within the organisation. That regulatory framework was scrutinised by Scottish Government officials as part of our due

diligence process ahead of awarding funding.

Immediately after these allegations emerged, Scottish Government officials contacted UNRWA with specific reference to the serious allegations that had been made public to seek assurance on finance, and to enquire about the investigation as a matter of urgency. In particular, Scottish Government officials asked UNRWA for an update on what Scottish Government's contribution to the UNRWA appeal had been spent on and assurance that it had not contributed to funding any proscribed terrorist groups. UNRWA responded to that Scottish Government enquiry, confirming that the Scottish funding within the UNRWA appeal had been used to contribute towards supporting lifesaving activities targeting vulnerable groups (children, women, and elderly) with protection and emergency hygiene needs.

As part of the agreement governing the contribution to this appeal, UNRWA is required to provide Scottish Government with the UNRWA Annual Operational Report for the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023 no later than 31st July 2024.

In February, Scottish Government officials received an update from UNRWA that the UN Secretary-General, in consultation with the UNRWA Commissioner-General, commissioned an independent review to assess if the Agency is doing everything it can to ensure neutrality and to respond to allegations of serious breaches. A final report is expected in April and will be made publicly available.

UNRWA released a press statement on 26 February 2024 stating that it is not aware of and has received no specific allegations regarding any systemic diversion of aid in Gaza by Hamas or other armed groups.

UNRWA is the largest humanitarian actor in Gaza and the primary source of life-saving aid for 2.3 million people. In pausing support for UNRWA, the lives of millions are being put at risk. The UK Government and the international community must work with the UN to find mechanisms to sustain and increase the levels of life-saving aid getting into Gaza.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-25279>

The press statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.unrwa.org/unrwa-claims-versus-facts-february-2024>

Prestwick Airport: Israeli Military Planes

Carol Mochan (SNP) [S6W-25435] To ask the Scottish Government, in light of reports that Israeli military planes have used Glasgow Prestwick Airport during the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine, whether it received any prior notification that this would happen.

Mairi McAllan: Glasgow Prestwick Airport operates on a commercial basis and at arm's length from the Scottish Government.

Operational decisions regarding the day-to-day running of the airport, are a matter for the management of Glasgow Prestwick Airport. Scottish Government did not receive any prior notification.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-25435>

Northern Ireland Assembly Oral Answers

Gaza: Israeli State Actions

T3. Gerald Carroll (People Before Profits Alliance) [AQT 63/22-27] asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their office will commit to not meeting and

engaging with Israeli state representatives on account of Israel's actions in Gaza, where some 30,000 people have been slaughtered, with children killed and maimed on a mass scale and people forced to eat animal feed under the hail of American-sent weaponry.

Emma Little-Pengelly: The Member will be aware that I am answering questions from a departmental perspective for the office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Executive Office. There will, of course, be party political views on that matter.

Gerald Carroll: That is a disappointing answer, Minister. Your previous international relations strategy was supposedly committed to peace-building. You cannot be committed to peace-building if you are engaging with a nuclear-armed state that is slaughtering people in Gaza on a mass scale. You have missed an opportunity to say that the House will not endorse the actions of the Israeli state. I call upon you and the First Minister to refuse to engage with that apartheid state.

Emma Little-Pengelly: I know that many people throughout Northern Ireland will want to see a resolution to the current situation in the Middle East, the hostages released and movements towards peace in that region.

The Northern Ireland Assembly does not provide direct links to Topical Questions, but the above exchange can be read three questions below a question on "Maze: Long Kesh: Development" at

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2024-03-04&docID=390974#AQO%2098/22-27>

Northern Ireland Assembly Written Answers

Ministerial Visits: Funding

Jim Allister (Traditional Unionist Voice) [AQW 6080/22-27] To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the First Minister's visit to the Palestinian Mission to the UK on 8 February 2024 was publicly funded.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: It was not.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=387803>

Invest NI: Israeli Defence Forces

Patsy McGlone (SDLP) [AQW 6845/22-27] To ask the Minister for the Economy whether Invest NI is providing any support to companies involved in the manufacture of armaments for use by the Israeli Defence Forces.

Minister for the Economy: Invest NI is not providing any support to companies involved in the manufacture of armaments for use by the Israeli Defence Forces.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=389231>

United Nations

Amid 'Catastrophic, Unconscionable, Shameful' Situation in Gaza, General Assembly President Underlines Need for Immediate Ceasefire

Lamenting the Security Council's inability to call for a ceasefire while the entire world demands one, speakers in the General Assembly today drew attention to the mounting death toll and famine in Gaza, while Israel condemned the United Nations for collaborating with terrorists.

In April 2022, the Assembly adopted a resolution on "Standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council" (document A/RES/76/262), which has come to be described as the "veto initiative". Today's meeting was triggered by the use of veto by the United States on 20 February to reject the adoption of a Council

resolution calling for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

While acknowledging the value of the veto initiative, **Dennis Francis (Trinidad and Tobago), President of the General Assembly**, expressed regret that it has to be invoked at all, with respect to the current deepening humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. "This week marks a grim milestone: 150 days of violence," he pointed out, stressing that the situation in Gaza is "catastrophic, unconscionable and shameful".

Highlighting the reported killing and injury of hundreds of people last week during disbursement of aid supplies, he said that thousands of children are watching their childhoods evaporate into the horrors of war while scrounging for food. ... Calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, he said all parties must respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and all hostages must be immediately and unconditionally released.

"Have you seen the images of Palestinian children?" **the Observer for the State of Palestine** asked, as he held up a picture of a severely malnourished Gazan child who died today. Palestinian children are dying in darkness and destitution, he said, adding that Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war. The dehumanization Palestinians have endured makes it easier for them to be killed, he said. In contrast with the solidarity of billions around the world, some have a much higher threshold of tolerance for Palestinian deaths than Israeli deaths. ...

Israel has given the Palestinian people three options: ethnic cleansing, apartheid or genocide, he said. All three are possible in Palestine because of the certainty of the perpetrators that they will never be held accountable. Israel has been killing, maiming and displacing Palestinians for years until the horrors culminated with the massacres in Gaza, he said, noting that Israeli leaders speak openly of the crimes they are committing and those they intend to commit and boast about torpedoing the peace process. ...

"Israel should be sanctioned," not rewarded, he underscored, expressing gratitude to people around the world who have mobilized in support of Palestine, including the hundreds of thousands who are protesting in the streets of New York City and Washington, D.C. Also saluting the workers who are refusing to load ships carrying weapons that will go to Israel to kill Palestinian children, as well as the entities refusing to trade goods from Israeli settlements, he expressed gratitude to everyone who is unleashing the movement to hold Israel accountable. ...

However, **the representative of Israel** expressed regret that, yet again, the Assembly has convened not to condemn Hamas but to focus on the situation in Gaza, "as if October 7 never happened, as if there are not 134 innocent hostages that are being held and tortured in Gaza right now". Condemning the United Nations silence in the face of Hamas's sexual violence, he asked: "We have heard the empty words of UN officials calling for the release of the hostages but have we seen any of them take action?"

Playing a video featuring women describing sexual violence at the hands of Hamas attackers, he said calling for a ceasefire means "abandoning these women to sexual abusing Hamas monsters". ... Dozens of employees of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) took part in the October 7 massacre while many more praised the savage attack, he said, adding: "In Gaza, the UN is a terror organization." ...

Adding that 12 per cent of the Agency's workers are members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, he said that UNRWA ensures that Palestinian refugees will forever remain refugees as will their children, grandchildren and every following generation "until one day they can all storm into Israel to claim it for themselves". The Agency's schools are breeding grounds for incitement, he said, adding that international financing is grooming Palestinian children into terrorists. The Agency will never again operate in Gaza as it had prior to 7 October, he said, adding that "its role in Gaza is finished and it must be replaced". ...

... **the representative of the United States** noted that over the past month his delegation has said clearly that the resolution before the Security Council would not achieve the goal

of a sustainable peace — and may in fact run counter to it. ... His country, he added, has circulated a draft resolution that calls for a temporary ceasefire together with the release of all hostages — bringing a halt to the widespread suffering of so many Palestinian children women and men “who are caught in this crossfire of Hamas’ making” — and getting aid into the hands of Palestinian civilians. ...

The representative of Australia, also speaking for Canada and New Zealand ... [noting that] members of his group unequivocally condemned the 7 October Hamas attacks and called for the immediate release of all hostages ... stressed that Palestinians cannot be made to pay the price of defeating Hamas. The proposed ground offensive into Rafah would be catastrophic, he said, reiterating “our message to Israel to not go down this path”. ...

The use of the veto, **said the representative of Qatar** ... cost the Council an opportunity to strengthen international peace and security. Instead, it sent messages of double standards in international relations. Expressing alarm regarding “the worst humanitarian disaster in modern human history”, she strongly condemned Israeli threats to launch a ground military operation in Rafah, as well as measures for forced displacement of civilians. ...

The representative of Yemen, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, called on all countries to resist Israel’s genocidal agenda and attempts to terminate UNRWA. All donor countries who suspended their funding must reconsider and take swift measures to secure sustainable funding for the Agency. More than 2 million people are completely reliant on its services. Further, he stressed that current events in Gaza are a testament to the importance of granting the State of Palestine full membership at the UN. ...

The representative of the European Union ... said the European Commission will provide an additional €68 million to support the Palestinian people and will disperse €50 million to UNRWA this week. Calling on UNRWA to continue addressing allegations that “a few of its staff members were involved in the brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks of 7 October”, he also called on Hamas to immediately release all hostages without any precondition. He strongly condemned the terrorist attacks by Hamas across Israel on 7 October, which included sexual and gender-based violence. While Israel has the right to defend itself, it must do so in line with international law, he said.

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12585.doc.htm>

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 26 April 2022: Standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council (A/RES/76/262)

<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/76/262>

North Gaza aid mission reveals more infants may die from hunger

“WHO and partners managed to access (Al) Shifa (hospital) in the north and deliver fuel, some lifesaving supplies for 150 patients and treatment of 50 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition and also bring it vaccines,” said Dr. Rik Peepkorn, UN World Health Organization (WHO) Representative for the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

For the first time since 7 October the WHO mission also reached Kamal Adwan hospital further north.

The facility’s paediatric unit was where 10 children reportedly died from hunger and dehydration in recent days and it was “overwhelmed with patients”, Dr. Peepkorn said.

The situation in Al-Awda Hospital was “particularly appalling”, he continued, in an urgent appeal for sustained humanitarian access. “The deconfliction mechanism needs to continue working so aid can reach those in need,” the WHO medic insisted, referencing the protocol whereby combatants are pre-notified of aid locations. ...

“Before the recent months’ hostilities, wasting in the Gaza Strip was rare with just 0.8 per cent of children under five years of age acutely malnourished,” he explained. “The (current) rate of 15.6 percent of wasting among children under two in northern Gaza suggests a serious and rapid decline. Such a decline in a population’s nutritional status in three months is unprecedented globally.”

The WHO official noted with concern that 90 per cent of children under two years old and 95 per cent of pregnant and breastfeeding women “face severe food poverty – meaning they have consumed two or less food groups in the previous day – and the food they do have access to is of the lowest nutritional value”. ...

“When children are starting - as the doctors are telling our colleagues - to die from starvation that should be a warning like no other; if not now, when is the time to pull the stops, break the glass, flood Gaza with the aid that it needs.” ...

In a related development, the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Tuesday heard that up to 80 per cent of housing in parts of northern Gaza has now been damaged or destroyed since Israeli bombardment began in response to Hamas-led terror attacks on 7 October in Israel.

“All that makes housing ‘adequate’ – access to services, jobs or culture - schools, religious places, universities, hospitals – have all been levelled,” said Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing. “This scale and intensity of destruction is far worse than in Aleppo, Mariupol or even Dresden and Rotterdam during World War Two.” ...

“Israel has been intentionally starving the Palestinian people in Gaza since 8 October... Israel must end its campaign of starvation and targeting of civilians,” the rights experts said. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147227>

UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

Following visit to Israel and the occupied West Bank, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, finds sexual violence occurred on 7 October, and against hostages and calls for a fully-fledged investigation

At the invitation of the Government, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Pramila Patten led an official visit to Israel, supported by a team of technical experts, from 29 January to 14 February 2024. The objective of the visit was to gather, analyze and verify allegations of conflict-related sexual violence reportedly committed during the brutal, Hamas-led terror attacks of 7 October 2023 and in its aftermath ...

SRSG Patten and team (the mission team) also visited the occupied West Bank to engage with the Palestinian Authority, civil society organizations, released detainees and other relevant actors. Considering the ongoing hostilities, the mission team did not request to visit the Gaza Strip ...

The visit was neither intended nor mandated to be investigative in nature ...

The mission team conducted a total of 33 meetings with Israeli national institutions, including relevant line ministries, as well as the Israeli security forces. It visited the Israeli National Center of Forensic Medicine, the Shura military base, the morgue to which the bodies of victims were transferred, as well as four locations affected by the 7 October attacks, in relation to which reports of sexual violence had emerged. The mission team reviewed over 5,000 photographic images and approximately 50 hours of footage of the attacks, in a concerted effort to identify any potential instances or indications of conflict-related sexual violence. It conducted confidential interviews with a total of 34 interviewees,

including with survivors and witnesses of the 7 October attacks, released hostages, first responders, health and service providers amongst others. While the number of survivors/victims of sexual violence of 7 October remains unknown, the mission team was made aware that a small number of those are reportedly undergoing treatment and continue to experience severe mental distress and trauma. ...

The mission team also met with families and relatives of hostages still held in captivity, members of displaced kibbutzim communities, as well as representatives from Israeli civil society organizations and academia.

The Israeli national authorities faced numerous challenges in the collection of evidence in pursuit of their investigations. Efforts to collect evidence were beset by the limited availability of forensic information, due to the large number of casualties and widely-dispersed crime scenes; a context of active hostilities; the prioritization of search and rescue operations as well as the recovery, identification and burial of the deceased in accordance with religious practices over the collection of forensic evidence; the loss of potentially valuable evidence due to the interventions of some untrained volunteer first responders; the alteration of crime scenes in some cases, as well as the large number of bodies affected by extensive burn damage. ...

Based on the information it gathered, the mission team found clear and convincing information that sexual violence, including rape, sexualized torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment has been committed against hostages and has reasonable grounds to believe that such violence may be ongoing against those still held in captivity. In line with a survivor/victim-centered approach, findings are conveyed in generic terms and details are not revealed.

In the context of the coordinated attack by Hamas and other armed groups against civilian and military targets throughout the Gaza periphery, the mission team found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that conflict-related sexual violence occurred in multiple locations during the 7 October attacks, including rape and gang-rape in at least three locations, namely: the Nova music festival site and its surroundings, Road 232, and Kibbutz Re'im. In most of these incidents, victims first subjected to rape were then killed, and at least two incidents relate to the rape of women's corpses.

The mission team also found a pattern of victims, mostly women, found fully or partially naked, bound, and shot across multiple locations. Although circumstantial, such a pattern may be indicative of some forms of sexual violence, including sexualized torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

In other locations, such as kibbutz Kfar Azza, while circumstantial information may indicate some forms of sexual violence, the mission could not verify reported incidents of rape. In Kibbutz Be'eri, the mission team determined that at least two allegations of sexual violence, which had been widely reported in the media, were unfounded. These included the graphically publicized case of a pregnant woman whose womb had reportedly been torn open, before she was killed, and her fetus stabbed while still inside her. In relation to the Nahal Oz military base, the team was not able to verify a reported case of rape, nor did it find a discernible pattern of genital mutilation in either female or male soldiers, though forensic analysis revealed injuries to multiple body parts, including genitalia. ...

Overall, the mission team is of the view that the true prevalence of sexual violence during the 7 October attacks and their aftermath, may take months or years to emerge and may never be fully known.

The mission team also visited Ramallah in the occupied West Bank to hear the views and concerns of Palestinian officials and civil society representatives in response to allegations of conflict-related sexual violence received by the mandate in the aftermath of the 7 October attacks, allegedly implicating Israeli security forces and settlers. Interlocutors raised concerns about cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of Palestinians in detention, including various forms of sexual violence in the form of invasive body searches, threats of rape, and prolonged forced nudity, as well as sexual harassment and threats of

rape, during house raids and at checkpoints. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/israel-west-bank-mission/>

Mission report Official visit of the Office of the SRSG-SVC to Israel and the occupied West Bank: 29 January – 14 February 2024

https://news.un.org/en/sites/news.un.org/en/files/atoms/files/Mission_report_of_SRSG_SVC_to_Israel-oWB_29Jan_14_feb_2024.pdf

UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN experts condemn ‘flour massacre’, urge Israel to end campaign of starvation in Gaza

UN experts ... condemned the violence unleashed by Israeli forces, which killed at least 112 people gathered to collect flour in Gaza last week, as a “massacre” amid conditions of inevitable starvation and destruction of the local food production system in the besieged Palestinian enclave.

“Israel has been intentionally starving the Palestinian people in Gaza since 8 October. Now it is targeting civilians seeking humanitarian aid and humanitarian convoys,” the UN experts said. “Israel must end its campaign of starvation and targeting of civilians.”

Israeli troops fired on crowds of Palestinians gathered to collect flour in the south-west of Gaza City on 29 February, killing at least 112 people and injuring some 760.

“The attack came after Israel has denied humanitarian aid into Gaza City and northern Gaza for more than a month,” the experts said.

They noted that the 29 February massacre followed a pattern of Israeli attacks against Palestinian civilians seeking aid, with over 14 recorded incidents of shooting, shelling and targeting groups gathered to receive urgently needed supplies from trucks or airdrops between mid-January and the end of February 2024.

“Israel has also opened fire on humanitarian aid convoys on several occasions, despite the fact that the convoys shared their coordinates with Israel,” the experts said. ...

“Israel systematically denies and restricts the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza by intercepting deliveries at checkpoints, bombing humanitarian convoys and shooting at civilians seeking humanitarian assistance,” they said.

Fifteen children have already died of malnutrition at Kamal Adwan Hospital in Gaza City, and there are fears that the figures could be higher in other hospitals. As the risk of famine continues to rise, all children under five – 335,000 – are at high risk of severe malnutrition, with serious negative impact on their development and their right to health. At least 90 per cent of children under five are affected by one or more infectious diseases, and 70 per cent have diarrhoea. In January, one in six infants (children under two) in northern Gaza were found to be acutely malnourished, leading to a condition known as wasting.

“We have said before: we are alarmed to see an entire civilian population suffering such unprecedented starvation, so quickly and completely,” the experts said. “We have been saying for months that widespread famine is imminent in Gaza.” ...

Reports on the recent negotiations between Hamas and Israel on a proposed 40-day ceasefire have revealed that, as part of the terms of the negotiations, Israel has committed to allow the entry of trucks and the delivery of tents, caravans, essential fuel, construction materials and equipment to rehabilitate critical infrastructure such as hospitals and bakeries.

“Humanitarian aid must not be used as a bargaining chip in negotiations,” the experts said. The provision of humanitarian aid is the minimum basic humanitarian obligation that Israel must provide unconditionally, they said. ...

“We reiterate [our earlier call by UN Special Procedures](#) for an arms embargo and

sanctions on Israel, as part of all States' duty to ensure respect for human rights and stop violations of international humanitarian law by Israel," the experts said.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-experts-condemn-flour-massacre-urge-israel-end-campaign-starvation-gaza>

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Other Relevant Information

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Hatred on basis of religion or belief must be addressed holistically: UN expert

Widespread advocacy of hatred based on religion or belief is among the key drivers of polarisation and conflict around the world, and must be addressed comprehensively, a UN expert said today.

"Expressions of hatred based on religion or belief are, in themselves, a serious issue to which States must be sensitive, and respond to in a holistic manner. Such hatred is indicative of a broader social reality – that of disdain and discrimination towards a religion or belief group – which may have deep socio-political and historical roots," said Nazila Ghanea, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. "This broader context must be addressed if advocacy of hatred based on religion or belief is to be meaningfully combatted."

In her report to the 55th Session of the Human Rights Council, Ghanea highlighted the various forms that hatred on the basis of religion or belief can take, how it burdens members of society individually and collectively, and its intersections with other forms of discrimination.

Threats, harassment, conspiracy theories, myths, and accusations of blasphemy and apostasy, both online and offline, are common experiences which can have significant psychological and even physiological impacts on individuals and communities, the expert said.

"Such expressions serve as warning signs of prejudicial attitudes which must be addressed, in advance of any further escalation," Ghanea said.

The expert highlighted the disproportionate attention that is given to 'lone wolf' actors and hate entrepreneurs, at the expense of overlooking the perpetuation and implementation of extensive State policies of intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief. She urged States to review all legislation and policies to ensure that they are free of hate speech, and that complaints mechanisms are in place to ensure that there is no impunity for actors who engage in advocacy of hatred, whether State actors or not. ...

"Attacks on holy books, and religious symbols, can constitute criminal incitement under the threshold test specified by the [Rabat Plan of Action](#) but only once deliberated upon and ascertained in a specific case. Responses must be human rights-compliant and carefully calibrated," she said. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/hatred-basis-religion-or-belief-must-be-addressed-holistically-un-expert>

Report: Hatred on the basis of religion or belief (A/HRC/55/47)

<https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/55/47>

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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_0305.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>

Letter from the Senedd advising that the Legislative Consent Motion has not been approved

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54507/documents/4520>

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 today**

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

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

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

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

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