



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Written Answers

Community Policing: Training

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [16002] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of mandating additional training for police officers on community tensions following the events since 7 October 2023 in Israel and Gaza.

Chris Philp: We are grateful to police forces across the country for the steps they have taken to manage protests and protect and reassure our communities.

The police are operationally independent. As part of the national policing curriculum set by the College of Policing, all officers receive training on topics including engaging with the community to maximise community cohesion, trust and confidence; protecting the community; and tackling hate crime. This is bolstered by refresher training to maintain and enhance knowledge. The College of Policing also publish operational guidance for the police, known as 'Authorised Professional Practice' (APP), on how to tackle different types of crime and incidents, including hate crime.

As a result of the conflict, all forces now have established tension monitoring processes, working in partnership with community safety and voluntary partners to enable action to be taken to diffuse community tensions at the earliest possible stage. The National Police Chiefs' Council has also provided awareness briefings to forces relating to the conflict which have been developed following consultation

with key community stakeholders including Community Security Trust and Tell MAMA.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16002>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Antisemitism and Islamophobia

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [16001] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he is taking to tackle the rise in islamophobia and antisemitism following the events since 7 October 2023 in Israel and Gaza.

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [16003] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he is taking to support victims of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism following the events since 7 October 2023 in Israel and Gaza.

Felicity Buchan: I refer the Hon Member to my oral answer of 4 March 2024 (Official Report, HC Volume 746, Column 628).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16001>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16003>

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#contribution-9417679F-9ED8-4A8C-A3A9-C1FC34E65F4F>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Islamophobia

Anneliese Dodds (Labour Co-op) [16511] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of adopting the APPG on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour Co-op) [16512] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether it remains his policy to adopt a definition of Islamophobia.

Lee Rowley: I refer the Hon Member to my answer to Questions UIN 10238 on 23 January 2024.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16511>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16512>

Lee Rowley: *Anti-Muslim hatred is abhorrent and has no place in our society. No one should ever be a victim of hatred because of their religion or belief and the Government continues to work with police and community partners to monitor and combat it. We have funded Tell MAMA, a service that supports victims of anti-Muslim hatred, with over £6 million since their inception in 2012.*

In light of the rise in anti-Muslim hate incidents being reported, the Government has increased Tell MAMA's funding to £1 million this year. This funding will provide additional resource to the service they are providing to support victims of anti-Muslim hatred.

The department has given careful consideration to the use of language and definitions. The definition of Islamophobia as proposed by the APPG is not in line with the Equality Act 2010, which defines race in terms of colour, nationality and

national or ethnic origins. The term anti-Muslim hatred is a more precise term which better reflects UK hate crime legislation.

The department is seeking the views and perspectives of domestic and international leaders and experts in this field to explore how religious hatred is experienced by British communities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10238>

Information about the APPG definition referred to above can be read at
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Islamophobia

Anneliese Dodds (Labour Co-op) [16554] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he is taking to help tackle anti-Muslim hatred.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour Co-op) [16555] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, how many meetings he has held on anti-Muslim hatred since his appointment.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour Co-op) [16556] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what community organisations he has had discussions with on the issue of anti-Muslim hatred since his appointment.

Lee Rowley: I refer the Hon Member to my answer to the Questions UIN 16017 and Question UIN 16019 on 1 March 2024.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16554>
and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16555>
and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16556>

Lee Rowley: *This Government is committed to tackling the scourge discrimination in all forms, including anti-Muslim discrimination head-on through a coordinated cross-departmental effort. From ensuring the safety of worshippers to community engagement and supporting the victims, swift action has been taken to address anti-Muslim discrimination and institute safeguards. For example, Tell MAMA has been provided with nearly £5 million between 2016 and 2023 to monitor and combat anti-Muslim hatred.*

We are taking a broad approach to religious discrimination which will develop on the work of the previous Working Groups; seeking the views and perspectives of British and international experts in this field to explore how religious discrimination is experienced by British communities, and how it affects different faiths and individuals. This engagement will explore the breadth and depth of religious hatred and will consider the question of terminology and definitions for hatred across and within religious communities, including anti-Muslim discrimination. In line with the practice of successive administrations, details of internal discussions are not normally disclosed.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16019>

and

Lee Rowley: *We continue to work closely with community groups, charities and schools to inform our position on tackling racially and religiously motivated discrimination as a whole – including anti-Muslim discrimination.*

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16017>

Scottish Parliament Written Answer

BRCA Testing: Jewish People

Stuart McMillan (SNP) [S6W-25707] To ask the Scottish Government whether it will offer free BRCA gene testing to anyone living in Scotland aged 18 or over with one or more Jewish grandparents, of any type of Jewish origin, in a similar way to NHS England's Jewish BRCA Testing Programme, in light of the reported finding that having a BRCA gene fault is associated with an increased risk of developing certain types of cancer, particularly breast, ovarian, prostate and pancreatic cancer.

Neil Gray: As set out in answer to question S6W-25450 on 27 February 2024, 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-25707>

The answer referred to above can be read at

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

Welsh Senedd Oral Answers

Gaza: Community Cohesion

Altaf Hussain (Conservative): ... Minister, sadly, recent events around the world are having a dramatic impact on community cohesion here in Wales. Although there is nothing we can do to force both sides in the Gaza conflict to stop the horrendous killing, apart from praying for peace, we can act to prevent the killing in the middle east from destroying interfaith relations here at home. Minister, what actions are the Welsh Government taking to ensure events happening elsewhere do not impact religious tolerance and freedom in Wales? How are you working with community and faith leaders across the nation to promote and protect community cohesion?

Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip (Jane Hutt): ... I as Minister for Social Justice, and the finance Minister, the education Minister, we are meeting with our communities who are most affected by the events in the middle east. Of course, we are meeting with our Muslim communities, meeting with our Jewish communities—meeting with them and also visiting their places of worship, and understanding what this has meant for them, but also recognising what it has meant for them in terms of the impact that it has on their lives and globally as well. Can I say, our community cohesion teams are crucially important to this, working with our interfaith council, who have been meeting, and also our faith communities forum?

Altaf Hussain: Thank you, Minister. It behoves us all to be more tolerant of those with different beliefs to us. At the same time, we should also be free to criticise religions. We have no blasphemy laws in this country, yet those who rightly call out bigoted Islamist views are condemned as Islamophobic. We only have to look at the Shawcross review of Prevent to see how efforts to avoid racism and Islamophobia have allowed a rise in non-violent Islamist extremists. We can be critical of these people and their views without being Islamophobic, just as we can criticise the state of Israel without being antisemitic.

Yet, in recent weeks it seems that intolerance has gained the upper hand, and the only winners are the extremists, both religious and from the far right. Hamas supporters speaking at Palestine solidarity campaign fundraisers about a genocide, or ultra-orthodox Jews calling for the expulsion of Arabs from the holy land do little to relieve tensions. Minister, what more can the Welsh Government do to ensure that Welsh communities do not give in to hate and division, and that we can call for peace, peacefully?

Jane Hutt: Thank you for that follow-up question. Let me make it very clear that the Welsh Government speaks out and stands out against Islamophobia and antisemitism. I think that it is really important that, in fact, in this Senedd, there was a really important event, when we were recognising the day of action against Islamophobia. I hope that that was very much recognised as a cross-party event as well.

As we meet with our Muslim colleagues and friends, particularly in the Muslim welfare council, to understand the impact that Islamophobia has on their lives, and equally understanding the impact of antisemitism—. I have to say, Altaf, that I hope that you would, with me, and certainly I know so many in this Chamber, condemn the Islamophobic language that has been spoken by some of the Conservative spokespeople now. Lee Anderson—no longer; suspended. But those words and those attacks on Sadiq Khan—I hope you will join me in condemning those as well.

Altaf Hussain: Thank you, Minister. Sadly, many of the demonstrations have been far from peaceful. We just have to look at the treatment of Jo Stevens MP. She said at the weekend that, following the attack on her office, she has had to change her behaviour when she leaves her house. This follows the earlier, appalling treatment of our own colleague Natasha Asghar. This is totally unacceptable. Why should a Member of Parliament, any Parliament, be forced to change their behaviour as a result of violent protesters? I'm afraid that this could have a chilling effect on our democracy, if left to be unchecked. Minister, what discussions have you had with police forces in Wales about the actions they are taking to protect our democracy from violent extremists? Thank you.

Jane Hutt: Clearly, we condemn all attacks on elected representatives, but also recognise, and I'm sure many of us across this Chamber particularly recognise, the position of Natasha Asghar, but other elected Members also facing that kind of abuse, and also, in many cases, and I think this is happened even for myself, when there's peaceful protest then that is part of democracy. I welcome that there will be peaceful protest where people have very strong views and feelings about situations that they're caught up in. We condemn attacks, and I particularly recognise the points that you've made about our elected representatives. But you'll be glad to hear that tomorrow we have a meeting, which I'm chairing, of the policing partnership board, and we are going to be discussing particularly the issue of parliamentary security, which we have discussed in this Chamber and outside the Chamber, and the parliamentary security of our elected representatives. ...

I know the coming weekend there's going to be a Stand Up To Racism rally, march and procession through Cardiff, the streets of our capital. I'm always very proud to join those events, because one of the most important chants that we make on those events is, 'Refugees are welcome here.' I think that's a really important point to make in terms of our nation of sanctuary.

To read the full transcript see

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/13742#C573417>

The Shawcross Review, referred to above, can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63e26968d3bf7f17385a3421/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf

Northern Ireland Assembly Written Answer

Places of Worship: Accessibility

Cheryl Brownlee (DUP) [AQW 7552/22-27] To ask the Minister for Communities what support his Department provides to improve accessibility in places of worship for those with a disability.

Minister for Communities: My Department has no direct policy responsibility for improving accessibility in places of worship for those with a disability.

Places of worship are required by law to comply with all relevant legislation to provide equality of opportunity and protection from discrimination for people with disabilities. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 imposes a duty on employers and service providers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to help them overcome barriers that they may face in accessing and using goods and services.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=390637>

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Israel

See also Commons written answers 16001 and 16003 “Antisemitism and Islamophobia”, and 16002 “Community Policing: Training”, and Senedd oral answers “Community Cohesion: Gaza” that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Lords Debate

Foreign Affairs

col 1439 **The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon):** ... What is clear is that we face a world that is increasingly unstable and insecure, and we are facing, frankly, a daunting set of challenges with direct implications for our country. I assure noble Lords that we are working with old friends and new partners to address these challenges, bringing together our best efforts across diplomacy and development to protect our security and shape an open and stable international world order.

col 1440 This approach has defined our approach to issues across the Middle East, in particular to the Israel-Gaza crisis, where we are driving progress towards a sustainable peace, a peace that lasts, and a solution that delivers justice, security and stability for Israelis and Palestinians. Let me be clear: Israel was shaken to its core by those horrendous terror attacks perpetrated by Hamas. Today, we see Palestinian civilians in Gaza who are facing a devastating humanitarian catastrophe. We need to act, and we are doing just that. That is why we have said that the fighting needs to stop now. ... The most effective way, as we have said consistently, is to agree an immediate humanitarian pause, a stop in fighting. That will lay the ground and the space to create a sustainable ceasefire. It would allow for the safe release of hostages and a significant increase, which is vitally

needed, in aid going into Gaza. ...

We have been clear that there are five vital elements for a lasting peace. These include, first, the release of all hostages, which should also allow for unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza; secondly, the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by international support—meaning support for reconstruction to rebuild schools and hospitals, and allowing for basic amenities to start again; and, thirdly, removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel.

We also want to see an end to extremist settler violence, which we have seen perpetrated in the West Bank, and Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza. Importantly, we want a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution, with two states—Israel and Palestine—living in security and peace. ...

I assure all noble Lords that we make the point that civilians must be protected and have made it clear that all parties must act within international humanitarian law. Israel must focus its operations on military targets and avoid civilians being killed. A military ground offensive into Rafah is, frankly, a chilling prospect and we are urging Israel to stop and think seriously about the impacts of such an offensive.

col 1441 Meanwhile, we are doing all we can to alleviate the suffering. We have trebled our aid commitment this financial year and are pressing to get more crossings into Gaza open. We have reminded Israel of its obligation to ensure that significantly more humanitarian aid enters Gaza. In this respect, we are focusing on five key humanitarian needs: an immediate deconfliction mechanism to enable safe distribution of aid through that extended humanitarian pause; increased capacity inside Gaza, enabling the humanitarian system and private sector to scale up the provision of goods; increased access for aid through land and sea routes; an expansion of humanitarian assistance to Gaza, including fuel, shelter and public health items, as well as items critical for infrastructure repair; and, of course, the provision of electricity, water and telecommunications. ...

I turn briefly to Iran. We believe that Hamas alone was responsible for the horrific terror attacks on Israel last October, but Iran also bears responsibility for the actions of such groups, which it has long supported politically, militarily and financially. This includes Hamas, the Lebanese Hezbollah, militia groups in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen. ...

col 1445 **Baroness Smitch of Basildon (Labour):** ... The attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7 October unleashed catastrophic devastation, and ... that fighting must stop now. A sustainable and sustained humanitarian ceasefire observed by both sides, underpinned by the release of all hostages and the ramping up of aid, is essential. Alongside that, diplomatic engagement is paramount. ... An offensive in Rafah would create an even greater humanitarian catastrophe, and such action during the holy month of Ramadan would further inflame regional tensions. ...

col 1446 The eventual aim of a two-state solution must be kept alive, despite the huge challenges—a safe and secure Israel, but also a viable Palestinian state without Hamas. ...

... aid getting into Gaza is not enough, and that 500 to 600 trucks are needed daily. Is there any evidence yet of a significant improvement, or the likelihood of one, in the days to come? ...

col 1449 **Baroness Smith of Newnham (Liberal Democrat):** ... We are facing a world where so many of these issues have links with Russia or Iran; Hamas, the Houthis and Hezbollah are all supported by Iran. What conversations are His Majesty's Government able to have to try to reduce the danger from Iran? ...

col 1450 **Lord Ricketts (Crossbench):** ... Five months after the awful Hamas attack, we must not lose our sense of horror at the incessant images from Gaza that we see every day. The suffering of the Israeli hostages is unimaginable. It is extraordinary that, despite all UK and US efforts, Gazans on the verge of starvation are reduced to mobbing a food

convoy, with the stampede killing many people after Israeli forces opened fire. It is equally extraordinary that the US is reduced to air-dropping some pallets of aid into northern Gaza because it cannot persuade the Israelis to let in enough by land. I have never known as wide a gulf as exists now between a US President and an Israeli Prime Minister. It seems that the talks in Egypt about cessation of hostilities and hostage exchange have now broken down. Faults are no doubt on both sides, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Netanyahu's determination to prolong the war is linked in some way to his own political survival.

Stopping this fighting is desperately urgent, to get hostages out and humanitarian aid in, but also to create an opportunity to move towards a better post-conflict future for Israel and Gaza. I welcome the Foreign Secretary's championing of the two-state solution. For all the difficulties, it is the only viable alternative to a forever war between Israel and the Palestinians. I also think he was right to open up some negotiating space around the point at which a Palestinian state could be recognised. ...

From that point of view, it is encouraging to see that the Gulf Arab states are now much more engaged in thinking about the future of the Palestinian people than was the case in the past. They will have to have a central role in the running of Gaza in the future, alongside a new Palestinian leadership. Part of that package should be a peace deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia, which would enable Israel at last to integrate into the dynamic region of which it is a part. A lasting ceasefire would also do a great deal to stop Iran destabilising the region. It should de-escalate tensions across the border with Lebanon, and remove the Houthis' pretext for taking international shipping hostage in the Red Sea. ...

col 1452 **The Archbishop of Canterbury:** ... We see with Gaza and the horrendous events I saw within a very few days of 7 October ... the terrible human impact and the almost impossible task of bringing peace in the midst of the sound of the guns. ...

1453 Will the Government enhance the work of the peacemakers in the Foreign Office? Will they encourage working with the third sector and local groups? ...

col 1454 **Baroness Goldie (Conservative):** ... I turn to the United Nations. Created in 1945 following the collapse of the League of Nations, the UN was very different—but then so was the global environment of nearly 80 years ago. It was built around the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia and the then Republic of China—the five permanent members of the Security Council—and many positive developments have ensued. ...

The real engine of the United Nations remains the Security Council. Paradoxically, two of the main perpetrators of global threat and instability, Russia and China, are still two of the permanent members. They regularly veto Security Council proposals. That is a self-perpetuating stasis right at the heart of the United Nations and it is not workable. Is the United Nations still relevant? Unhesitatingly, I say yes. Is it still fit for purpose? Reluctantly, I say, without reform, no. ...

Baroness Ashton of Upholland (Non-affiliated): ... when I was in office at the EU, I visited the Middle East more than anywhere else. In Sderot in Israel, I was presented with a sculpture of a rose, fashioned from one of the hundreds of Hamas rockets fired regularly at the town, and visited the places where children played underground to keep them safe. Sderot was targeted on 7 October by Hamas terrorists.

On my visits to Gaza, I would often visit a school for deaf children offering education and vocational training to those with an additional disadvantage in a place where children had few opportunities. It now lies in ruins. ...

col 1455 Meantime, the region risks falling into greater chaos. I am only too aware of the influence and control that Iran exercises in the region. ... We need longer-term thinking here. Twenty years from now, will we have curtailed and contained Iran's influence? What will be the role of the key Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, in bringing stability and prosperity to their neighbourhood? ...

col 1460 **Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat):** ... Does [the Foreign Secretary] agree with Oliver McTernan, director of Forward Thinking and a long-standing negotiator in the region, when he says “despite the terrible events of October 7th and the subsequent Israeli assault on Gaza, we still remain convinced that the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is not an intractable problem ... It remains essentially a human problem that can be resolved by ... political will”?

In some ways that is self-evident and in some ways a pipe dream, but such a resolution seemed impossible in earlier years in relation to Northern Ireland, and yet it was possible. ... Does the noble Lord agree that what is happening now has to be a turning point for both Israel and the Palestinians? ...

There were so many warnings over the years that here was a tinder box; the area is alight now. Over 30,000 people have been killed, with the largest proportion being women and children. Many others are unaccounted for. The UN speaks of law and order breaking down in Gaza, famine, women and girls at huge risk, and of Rafah being the largest refugee camp in the world, yet nowhere is safe. The Israeli hostages and their families continue to suffer. Attacks have increased in the West Bank, where support for Hamas has increased—the reverse of the Israeli Government’s avowed intention.

col 1461 The Foreign Secretary himself has called for an investigation into what happened with the deaths associated with the aid convoy, where 80% of those in hospital, according to the UN, had gunshot wounds. The humanitarian situation is catastrophic, and tensions are escalating globally, as well as in our own communities. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that a ceasefire is desperately needed, as the US vice-president, the UN, the WHO and so many others are calling for? ...

col 1462 **Baroness Morris of Bolton (Conservative):** ... What has happened over the last 151 days, first in Israel and then in Gaza, is nothing short of tragedy. The unconscionable acts of Hamas on 7 October were abhorrent and the train of events that they have unleashed is heartbreaking. The devastation in Gaza is unimaginable, and yet the hostages have not been released and one in 20 Palestinians, mainly women and children, have been killed or injured. In the north of Gaza, which has consistently been denied food, and with few aid trucks able to get through, one in six children under the age of two are now seriously malnourished. This has not been caused by crop failures or drought; as the UN said, this is entirely manmade and, as such, could be immediately reversed. ...

Where trucks cannot go, we have dropped aid from the air in co-operation with our good friends the Jordanians, and this is more than welcome. But aid dropped from the sky does not always reach those who need it most. What we need is fully trained workers on the ground to help to distribute the aid and to treat the children, but they cannot gain access with the ongoing bombardment.

col 1463 As of yesterday, 16 children had died of starvation, dehydration and malnutrition. Today, that number will have grown. Children should not be used as a weapon of war. ... the fighting must stop, and it has to stop now. In a powerful and passionate speech which says everything, and which was delivered at the Cairo summit for peace on 21 October last year, His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan said: “This conflict did not start two weeks ago, and it will not stop if we continue down this blood-soaked path. We know all too well that it will only lead to more of the same—a zero-sum game of death and destruction, of hatred and hopelessness played on repeat”.

The only hope of preventing the seeds of future hatred growing is a two-state solution. ... Of course, we are able to make the first step towards a two-state solution, and that is recognition of Palestine. I welcome my noble friend’s statement on this. ...

col 1466 **Lord Hain (Labour):** ... Israel is not going to destroy Hamas, as its leaders promise—not even by destroying Gaza. Although Israel has seriously damaged Hamas militarily, it is a movement and an ideology that, in many respects, Israel helped promote. Its right-wing Governments thwarted serious negotiations with Yasser Arafat’s more

moderate Fatah after Bill Clinton's Camp David summit in 2000. They also oppressed Gaza residents, imposing a state of siege. Surely, after Israeli bombing kills their relatives and destroys their schools and communities, Gaza teenagers will resist even more, and be recruited even more easily by Hamas and jihadism. As Britain's troubled history in Northern Ireland vividly demonstrates, if politics does not work, violence and extremism always fill the vacuum. ...

The notion, also peddled by leaders of the global North, that only negotiations with a discredited West Bank Palestinian leadership can be countenanced will not work. Nor will Netanyahu's recently reported plan for Gaza to be run by Israeli-approved administrators without links to either the Palestinian Authority or Hamas. There is a salutary history of trying and failing to promote favoured candidates on peoples who are demanding self-determination to choose their own. Like it or not, Hamas will have to be included in some way, as indeed they are now in the Egypt-based negotiations.

In the end, the solution has to be political. Palestinians of whatever political stripe cannot defeat Israel militarily; nor can Israel defeat Palestinians militarily. ...

col 1467 Yet Israel's right-wing leaders have been hell-bent on turning Palestinian territories into occupied dependencies. The West Bank—small islands of which are nominally administered by Fatah but in practice controlled by Israel—now contains half a million Israeli settlers, and east Jerusalem nearly a quarter of a million. UK Ministers wring their hands, pointing out that such settlements are illegal—but do nothing.

Where has all this got Israel? It is not more but less secure, as the 7 October pogrom palpably demonstrated. Yet the flat rejection of a two-state solution by Netanyahu means permanent Israeli domination, with escalating violence and regional instability. I suggest to the Foreign Secretary that, beyond the current talks, he supports a regional summit involving Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and, yes, Iran too, along with Jordan, Qatar and the UAE. There will be no stability in the region unless all parties are included.

Many in the global South are contemptuous of what they see as profound double standards by global North leaders, including the UK, who quite rightly want backing for Ukrainian self-determination but are complicit in the denial of Palestinian self-determination and culpable in the Gaza horror. ...

col 1468 **Lord Polak (Conservative):** ... Some three months ago, my noble friend the Foreign Secretary said: "If we leave Hamas in charge of even a part of Gaza, there will never be a two-state solution because you can't expect Israel to live next to a group of people that want to do October 7 all over again".

col 1469 I would be grateful if he can confirm that this continues to be his position and that of His Majesty's Government. ... I would like him, if possible, to comment on the deeply worrying FCDO seminar that took place last Wednesday, 28 February—"Israel/Gaza: What Next for Hamas?"—with 100 people, including speakers who were clearly at odds with government policy.

Of the five points that are paramount in achieving regional peace, I will highlight three. First, no ceasefire can be achieved until all hostages are released. ... We recoil in horror at the witnesses' testimony about those held hostage, especially the plight of the young women of the tunnels, who are subject to unspeakable horrors as sex slaves—they must all come home. ...

Less than one month before 7 October, on 14 September, I initiated a debate on the third anniversary of the Abraham accords. I asked His Majesty's Government what role they were playing in the accords: "What proactive steps are we taking"?—[[Official Report, 14/9/23; col. GC 215.](#)] What conversations are we having with Arab states? ...

col 1472 **The Lord Bishop of Leeds:** ... national security is achievable only if and when our neighbours are also sure of their security, which is why the absence of a Palestinian state remains a bleeding wound. Equally, any achievable peace in the Middle East depends on Israel also being secure. This must be resolved diplomatically and politically, not militarily or by terrorism. The current conflict will sow the seeds of the next

five generations of violence and vengeance. ...

Baroness Deech (Crossbench): ... if Hamas released the hostages and came out from hiding in the tunnels, the immediate crisis would end. The world is concentrating on Gaza, and the need for humanitarian aid is the basis for the urgent calls from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for more funding. But the solution to the Israel-Palestine issue is not being progressed.

UNRWA is the problem, not the solution. It has not resettled a single person since 1948, whereas the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, with fewer personnel and far less funding, has resettled 50 million people. UNRWA's mission is not to help people but to perpetuate a political conflict—that is, to keep the so-called refugees in a state of misery until they can return to Israeli territory. That would mean the destruction of Israel and the obliteration of its 7 million Jews. On Holocaust Remembrance Day, we say “never again”. The Hamas invasion of 7 October was, to Hamas, a foretaste of its declared aim to remove those 7 million.

col 1473 The only way to resettle refugees and bring peace is to treat Palestinians like all the other refugees in the world. As with millions of others post war, there was upheaval and new national boundaries. They cannot return any more than Jews can return to their former homes in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. The host countries where the refugees are resident must take over their care, resettlement and full civil liberties, just as every other civilised country does eventually with displaced persons.

UNRWA should be abolished, leaving aid for the many other organisations operating in Gaza. Unfortunately, the iniquitous effects that UNRWA has created will last. That is the poisoning of the mind of future generations in the way that it has taught Palestinian children to hate, to believe lies about Israel and to believe that they can return there through violence. It has given make-believe employment to thousands of Palestinians. It continues the myth that there are millions of Palestinian refugees, when in fact they are not Palestinian and not refugees. It is a bottomless pit into which countries pour money—not only with no return, but money that has been used to murder and take hostage and starve ordinary Palestinians of the necessities of life.

It is noteworthy that the rich Arab countries that surround Israel do not reach out to support their Palestinian neighbours. The major donors are the US, followed by Germany and then the UK. Where have the millions—indeed, billions—of dollars gone? They have gone directly to Hamas to build tunnels, secure armaments and keep Hamas leaders in luxury. The ordinary poverty-stricken Palestinian has seen none of it, and the state donors are curiously reluctant to follow through to see where their dollars are going. By funding UNRWA, the international community has freed Hamas to spend on terror rather than health and education. UNRWA has no financial control and no audit; it suffers from mismanagement, sexual misconduct and nepotism. Support for UNRWA contradicts the UK's policy of a peaceful two-state solution.

UNRWA employees were undoubtedly involved in the horrific attacks on Israel on 7 October; some were members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad. At least another 1,000 UNRWA employees have ties with Hamas. Even more of them have praised the 7 October attacks, expressed anti-Semitism and praised terrorism.

What should be done? The UN refugee agency should take over the settlement of Palestinians in the countries where they live, and the right of return should be abandoned. The millions who live in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and elsewhere should have citizenship and full rights in those countries, as would be the case for refugees in any other country of refuge. They are not refugees in any case, being neither born in nor driven out of the land of their birth.

Will the Minister accept that the continued existence of UNRWA fuels terrorism, twists the minds of future generations and perpetuates the refugee illusion, rather than putting an end to it? The end of UNRWA would be the beginning of peace.

col 1474 **Lord Robathan (Conservative):** ... I cannot think of anybody who is not very

concerned, to put it mildly, about the death of many civilians in Gaza, but Hamas could end this war tomorrow if it gave up the hostages and stopped attacking Israel. Perhaps we could then allow for a more peaceful, long-term solution to emerge, probably based on a two-state solution in which Hamas disappears, along with the illegal settlements in the West Bank and some of the ultra-Orthodox pressure on the Government. Perhaps we would get more reasonable—or moderate, shall we say—Governments in both Palestine and Israel. ...

col 1485 Lord Desai (Crossbench): ... the noble Lord, Lord Cameron ... has landed almost immediately on arrival into a problem created by another Prime Minister who became Foreign Secretary: Lord Balfour. The Israel-Palestine problem, or the Israel-Hamas problem, did not start in October 2023; it started in November 1917, and we still have it. Some here may remember Arthur Koestler, who was a communist and then became an ex-communist and was one of the few people who worked on a kibbutz in the 1920s. He said that: "One nation solemnly promised to a second nation the country of a third".

That was very much the message. Before Palestine had fallen from the Ottoman Empire, it was signed over to welcome Jews from all over Europe and America to come and make a nation.

It is a fact ... that at no stage did we say that the Palestinians had any claim on the territory where they had been living for several centuries. That is the dilemma: two communities of very ancient origin can claim, truthfully and simultaneously, that it is their country and no one else's. It has taken 100 years to prove who is right, and neither group is. We have to solve this problem because for a long time, not just since October 2023, there has been a lot of killing and damage done to both communities, carried out with a passion that is quite surprising. ... The children of Abraham have quarrelled with each other now for about 2,000 years. After all, anti-Semitism was not invented recently; it was invented by the Christians, and the rest we know.

The events of 7 October, which were on a scale that we had not experienced for a long time, partly showed that Hamas was better prepared than it had been until recently. Given the retaliation by Israel in Gaza and elsewhere, is a two-state solution at all feasible to anticipate when passions are so heightened and so much killing has gone on? Twelve hundred people were captured or killed by Hamas in October while 30,000 Palestinian men, women and children have been killed. That is 25 Palestinians for each Israeli. Things are getting completely out of control. ... is it at all likely that a peaceful solution can be implemented and that these two communities will be able to live with each other for even a day longer if a ceasefire happens?

col 1486 ... two outcomes are possible. One is that the territory can belong to only one country, and we have to find another solution for the refugees and people living on the Palestinian side. I am presuming that the Palestinians will lose; I do not desire that, but it is currently the situation. Where would the Palestinians go? There are millions of them to resettle. If they cannot resettle in Palestine, where will they go? ...

We need to think about how to stop the Israel-Palestine war right now, as soon as possible, and then about how to rehouse the refugees scattered throughout Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and all those places, as well as people who are being thrown out of Gaza, the West Bank and everywhere else. We face the prospect of two different settlements because it is not possible to think that the two groups could live in a single area. ... Across the Caspian Sea, there are many Islamic states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and so on. A tremendous amount of money ought to be raised to resettle the Palestinian refugees in that region. ...

Baroness Altmann (Conservative): ... I shall focus on two important allies, Ukraine and Israel, which are battling forces intent on undermining the democracy and protections on which our way of life depends. ...

Today marks 150 days that the Palestinians have been holding the Israeli hostages, with

no Red Cross access despite promises of such during the last humanitarian pause and no willingness even to confirm who is alive. This is the other major threat to our national security and our democratic norms, as is demonstrated by the reaction to the murderous, barbarous Hamas attacks on Israel. Islamist fanatics and threats have been excused or appeased. The western pull-out from Afghanistan may have emboldened the Taliban ideologues seeking to establish a caliphate. Iran and its satellites in Syria, Yemen and Gaza are determined to spread their hate across the western world and undermine our security. Turning a blind eye to Iran's preaching of medieval jihad as it has slowly taken over these countries—now extending to Gaza, as we see—is a threat to us all.

col 1487 UNRWA has held a mandate for education and social care for the Palestinian people. However, it has actually engaged in an extreme form of child abuse. ...

In UNRWA schools, there is glorification of jihad. The teaching materials encourage violence and martyrdom, and the content promotes anti-Semitism and the demonisation and delegitimisation of Israel, making the Jewish state full of subhumans. It is part of the problem, and UNRWA should be replaced. Glorifying martyrdom as an essential part of the Islamic faith should not be accepted or tolerated. Hamas and the Palestinian Authority's stated aims are the eradication of the Jewish state.

Recognition of a two-state solution while such indoctrination persists and Palestinian leaders refuse to accept Israel's very existence would be a reward for murder, terror, rape and hostage-taking and an indication, I fear, of western weakness in the face of threats that require strong, determined support for those who believe in our own values. Support for Hamas and the Palestinian terrorists, calls for a ceasefire and chants of "from the river to the sea" amount to support for terrorism and ideological hatred. They amount to anti-Semitism.

In particular, I am exercised by the sexual violence that is being excused. There is no excuse for rape, wanton assault and torture of Israeli women and children. Rape is not resistance. Hamas filmed and glorified its pogrom and violation of Jewish women, yet western supporters here and in other countries ignore this. Sisters Uncut claimed that reports of Hamas sex attacks amounted to Islamophobia and racist weaponisation of sexual violence. Women's groups that rail against such attacks on all other women have stayed silent. It seems it is #MeToo unless you are a Jew. ...

Lord Mitchell (Labour): ... 6 October saw Israel approaching the zenith of its dreams. Following the initial success of the Abraham accords, full diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia were tantalisingly close. After 76 years of rejection by the Arab world, Israel was poised to achieve what she wanted most of all—international acceptance. Cruelly, 7 October changed all that.

At the beginning of January, I went to the Gaza border with the noble Lord, Lord Polak. I saw the mangled bicycles and the smashed barbecues; I saw the bullet holes and the bloodstains on the walls; I read the names and saw the photos of those who were butchered. The people of Israel were traumatised; I was traumatised. They still are; I still am. As I stood there, I looked to my left, and no more than a kilometre away I could see the Gaza border. I could hear the pounding of the shells; I could see the smoke hovering over the buildings, and I could smell the explosives hanging in the air. I felt rage that such barbarity was committed against innocent Israeli civilians, but I also felt horror that such pain and death were being inflicted on the people of Gaza. It is hard to reconcile such inner conflict.

col 1488 Five months into this war, the hostages have still not been fully released, and Hamas is still functioning. Gaza has been flattened, and its people are starving and desperate. Some 1,700 Israelis are dead, many wounded. Tens of thousands of Palestinians—men, women and, most of all, children—are also dead and wounded. If we condemn one party, we must condemn the other, and I do.

Fifty years ago, the great Israeli statesman, Abba Eban, made the famous quote that the Palestinians "never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity".

Sadly, the same can be said of Benjamin Netanyahu today. His “day after” plan was presented last week; it offers the Palestinians nothing more than continual subjugation. The great tragedy of the situation is the craven, ineffective leadership of both the Palestinians and the Israelis. Mahmoud Abbas is old and immovable. I have never heard a brave or constructive word pass his lips; he does the Palestinians no favours. Benjamin Netanyahu is just as immovable. His mantra has always been: not an inch. He portrays himself as Mr Security, and he will never give the Palestinians the state they deserve. For him, it is always about the next election. He has allied himself with an ultra-right-wing clique. Ironically, they too believe in “from the river to the sea”, but in their case meaning the total annexation of the West Bank and Gaza. Both countries need new leaders who have new visions.

Noble Lords may say that all this has been tried before and it has failed. That is true, but the Oslo accords and the negotiations in 2000 came very close. What is different now? First, the parties are exhausted. Secondly, there are now other powers that can guarantee a peace: the US, of course, and Europe too, but also Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Egypt and Jordan. ... They could provide the massive funding that could rebuild Gaza and give hope to Palestinians, both in Gaza and in the West Bank. They could also give Israel guarantees by way of a military alliance, and they could ensure that the Palestinian state remains demilitarised for the foreseeable future. ...

col 1489 **Baroness Fall (Conservative):** ... I commend the Foreign Secretary on the steadfast support for Israel following the terrible atrocities of 7 October, but also on being the first to call for a sustainable ceasefire, urging caution and prioritising humanitarianism. In this, we have acted as a trusted friend to Israel: one who can always be counted on but who also does not fear to flag concerns. ...

I also urge the Foreign Secretary to continue work with the Americans to have the hostages released and to bring radical improvement to the humanitarian situation. A two-state solution should be kept firmly on the table, as a long-held British foreign policy objective and, surely, the best hope for securing long-term peace and security for Israel in the region. ...

col 1491 **Lord Farmer (Conservative):** ... Christian persecution is now even worse and still the worst of any religion in the world. One in seven Christians—365 million—face high to extreme levels of persecution for their faith and 80% of all acts of religious persecution are against Christians, which is a staggering proportion. Nearly 5,000 Christians were killed for their faith last year, compared with nearly 3,000 in 2019 when the Truro review was published, and twice as many Christians were forced to flee their homes in 2023 as in 2022.

col 1492 Any concerted effort to secure freedom of religion or belief barely scratches the surface if Christians are ignored. ... the persecution of Christians is “a bellwether for repression” more generally. ...

col 1493 Without Christianity, where would there be tolerance, respect for others’ views and the impulse to move beyond narrow personal, or indeed national, self-interest?

Lord Alderdice (Liberal Democrat): ... we all agree that the Hamas attacks of 7 October were utterly appalling and unforgivable, but that the problems between Israel and the Palestinians did not start in 2023. The military actions taken by Israel after the immediate response are not defending Israel but harming Israel. ... the actions of the IDF, with the deaths of thousands on thousands of women, children and babies, sick people in hospitals and elderly people, starving and terrified as they are caged in and unable to escape the horrors, have undermined the moral standing of Israel. ...

col 1494 If and when this war ends, there will need to be someone to ensure the security of Gaza and, despite what the Israeli Prime Minister says, that is not a role that can be undertaken by Israel. I rather doubt that our own country or our US ally can undertake it either. Are His Majesty’s Government taking seriously, as I believe they should, the offer

from President Erdoğan of Turkey for his country to play a significant role ...

col 1495 **Baroness Eaton (Conservative):** ... The cold-blooded murder of the largest number of Jews in one day since the Holocaust was always going to elicit a severe response from the Israeli Government, and rightly so. No democracy, even our own in the United Kingdom, could turn the other cheek to such atrocities without seeking to prevent those who committed the crimes from ever doing so again. This is all the more so given the despicable taking of large numbers of hostages by Hamas and others in Gaza, 130 of whom remain unaccounted for nearly five months into this conflict. We all grieve and react with total distress to the horror of the tragic deaths of children, women and all those citizens killed in Gaza; but far from being a genocide, or the greatest crime in history, the care that the Israel Defense Forces have largely taken during this operation to minimise civilian casualties will likely be studied for years by free-world military planners facing similar campaigns.

As with Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, the Hamas war of aggression against Israel initially elicited firm free-world support. Free-world leaders, this country's included, understood entirely that Israel could not allow Hamas aggression to go unpunished and that the hostages needed freeing. In just a few short months, that solidarity of purpose has been undermined as, country by country, elements of the free world have peeled off from the idea of defending democracy. Instead, we have seen vapid and inane requests for an Israeli ceasefire now, sometimes even with no conditions on Hamas's continued rule in Gaza, or the release of hostages, attached. ...

It might be tempting to give up on supporting Ukraine because we are growing weary of doing so, or to force Israel to compromise because we are tired of fending off the aggression of the street mobs here in the UK that did so much damage to the reputation of the other place a couple of weeks ago. But neither approach is in our national interest. If Ukraine is driven to the negotiating table through weakness this year, Mr Putin's decision to wage war will have been vindicated with additional territory, and if Israel gives in to the international pressure before it has succeeded in delivering a final death blow to Hamas, terrorism will be seen to have triumphed through the improbable act of survival, even after committing the most heinous of crimes. ...

col 1496 **Baroness Mobarik (Conservative):** The Middle East is a part of the world that the UK understands, and, in turn, the UK is held in affection there. It is with concern, therefore, that I hear from long-standing friends there that those feelings are changing. We are seen as either bystanders or complicit in the current conflict in Gaza. ...

The dream of the Palestinian people is the same as for all people: freedom; security; food and shelter; and some degree of hope for a better future through education and employment. I condemn the Hamas terrorist atrocities of 7 October in the strongest possible terms, but the indiscriminate killing of so many innocent Palestinian civilians is causing such outrage, anger and sorrow across the region and throughout the world that Britain's ongoing support for Israel's war in Gaza is damaging our equally important relationships with other allies in the region. It is as if the Palestinian people have been dehumanised to such a degree that some people in this place, and in the other place, do not even recognise the enormity of the injustice being committed against the Palestinian people, so many of whom are children, bombed and starved for crimes they did not commit. International humanitarian law does not permit collective punishment, but that is what is happening in Gaza. It is wrong, and it must stop.

We proclaim the rights of the child, but when it comes to the rights of Palestinian children, our lack of action during these past five months makes a mockery of that declaration. How many potential artists and scientists have been simply eliminated? ... Our credibility, our legitimacy and our role as a country central to the contemporary global world order are because of our adherence to and support for the rule of domestic and international law, and justice and fairness. The British people are fair and expect their representatives in

Parliament to be fair and just on their behalf. Even if we were simply to consider our own interests in much of the Middle East, we have to show ourselves as fair brokers. ...

The United Kingdom has a legal, moral and historical obligation to make every endeavour to help both sides make peace a reality, but the process for a lasting peace cannot be ambiguous; there are no partial solutions. Our support for international efforts towards, on both sides, a full, immediate and permanent ceasefire—not just for the six weeks stipulated by the United States—is essential, as is the safe delivery of aid without obstruction. Can the Foreign Secretary say why medical equipment, such as ventilators and anaesthesia machines, is being refused entry by Israel?

col 1497 Also needed is the immediate exchange of Israeli hostages and non-Hamas Palestinian detainees, and the forcible displacement of people to stop. There are now 1.5 million in refugee camps in Rafah. We need the reconstruction of Gaza to start and, ultimately, those displaced to be able to go back to where they once lived. Furthermore, the illegal occupation by Israel of the West Bank in east Jerusalem must end. Hundreds have been killed there since January last year.

As for Gaza, in 2010, the House of Commons *Hansard* shows that my noble friend, then the Prime Minister, said that “we are not going to sort out the problem of the middle east peace process while there is, effectively, a giant open prison in Gaza”.—[[Official Report, Commons, 28/6/10; col. 583.](#)]

Yet Israel has recently stated it wants to remain in overall security control of Gaza and select the Palestinian technocrats that it chooses to run it. Can the Foreign Secretary say whether he believes that that would be in any way acceptable or have legitimacy in the eyes of Palestinians? Most would argue that having two independent separate states is the only solution. It is a right of the people of Israel to have peace and security, as, too, it is for the people of Palestine, in two separate independent states that recognise each other's right to exist.

col 1498 **The Lord Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich:** ... There is now a risk that the changing nature of war and warfare is shifting our understanding of when military force should be resorted to and the restraints that should check its use. The concerns that lie behind just warfare still apply. What is proportionate response and engagement, and how do we protect non-combatants? What is pre-emptive and what is preventive action, and how will military engagement contribute to a just and lasting peace? ...

col 1499 ... even when the use of armed force is considered justifiable, the overarching aim of just war is a just and durable peace. It means that just war advocates are concerned with limiting the occurrence of war and, when it does occur, ensuring that its conduct is as humane as possible. Does the Foreign Secretary believe that our current understanding of the ethics of war are sufficient to deal with the changing nature of adversaries and the complex ways in which wars are now fought? Will he commit to exercising UK leadership with the UN and other institutions, albeit undergoing reform, as we have heard appealed for, to ensure that the conventions and treaties that govern our actions in war remain fit for purpose—the purpose of lasting, just peace? ...

Debate adjourned

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-05/debates/F011584E-89D8-4431-BA5A-44F54D3C3F3B/ForeignAffairs>

Debate continued:

col 1511 **Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat):** ... as the death toll in Gaza now tops 30,000, we reflect on the catastrophe that continues to unfold since the horrific Hamas attack on 7 October. I too pay tribute to the Ministers for their work and commitment to achieving a resolution, but the impact of their efforts may be less as a result of the unconditional support that they have given to Israel since the events of 7 October.

In Gaza, the death and destruction continue and have not resulted in the freeing of the

hostages. At least 30,200 people have been killed in Gaza, including more than 12,300 children and 8,400 women. More than 71,300 have been injured, including at least 8,600 children and 6,300 women, with more than 8,000 missing.

In the Occupied West Bank, more than 500 Palestinians have been killed, including more than 108 children, with more than 4,600 injured. ... a quarter of people are at risk of imminent famine and one in six children in the north is acutely malnourished. Gaza's children are being starved at the fastest rate the world has ever seen. ... The executive director of UNICEF said last week: "Horror news out of Gaza that at least ten children have reportedly died of malnutrition and dehydration so far, while many more are on the brink ... 1 in 6 children under the age of two in north Gaza are acutely malnourished ... Over 500,000 Palestinians in Gaza are at starvation levels".

col 1512 Does the Foreign Secretary agree that starvation as a weapon of war is a war crime?

Infectious diseases are also spreading rapidly, and there is little access to medical care. No hospitals are fully functioning across the territory. At least 90% of children under five are affected by one or more infectious disease. ...

The UK Government have so far refused to halt arms exports to Israel, despite the risk that these weapons pose to civilians. ... the Dutch Court of Appeal order on 11 February required the Netherlands to halt its export of F35 fighter-jet parts to Israel, because of the clear risk that they might be used in the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza. The UK's own arms criteria establish the very same obligation, yet the UK produces 15% of the parts of all F35s being used in Gaza.

The UK did suspend arms licences to Israel during the bombardment in Gaza in 2014, despite the very much lower numbers of deaths and injuries, when the Foreign Secretary was then Prime Minister. In the light of the potential complicity of the UK in war crimes, will he halt arms exports to Israel as he did in 2014? Is he aware that hand-wringing pleas for restraint while still supplying weapons seems rather hypocritical ...

Israel is now pushing ahead with an additional 3,300 illegal settlements in the West Bank. Will the Foreign Secretary let us know the Government's view of this and of further expansion of settlements, potentially into Gaza? Will they ensure the rights of the Palestinian people to return to their land, as is their right under international law?

The Foreign Secretary has spoken about the two-state solution. If he truly believes in this, then time is very short, and action must be taken now by making Hamas and Israel accountable, releasing the hostages and showing to all parties a commitment to a different vision of peace and justice with security for Israel and Palestine, starting with the recognition of the Palestinian state.

col 1513 Lord Roberts of Belgravia (Conservative): ... which country or group of countries would genuinely guarantee Israeli security against a future Palestinian state if it turned out to be revanchist? There are 15 demilitarised states in the world, none of which is in a conflict zone. No countries intervened when Hamas violently overthrew Fatah in Gaza in 2007. Who will step in when the so-called police force of a future Palestinian state starts to acquire heavy weaponry, armour or attack drones? The chronically anti-Israel United Nations? The G7? The Arab League? Britain and America have the dubious fact of having guaranteed Ukraine in 1994 after it got rid of its nuclear weapons. Surely Israelis are right to fear that any security guarantees will not be worth the paper on which they are written, at least while Palestinians still harbour these ludicrous dreams of expelling the Jews from the river to the sea.

col 1514 Lord Sahota (Labour): ... What happened on Israel's soil on 7 October was horrendous. My heart goes out to all the victims of Hamas, a terrorist organisation. The State of Israel has the right to protect its borders and its citizens, but what it is doing in Gaza now to men, women and children is beyond description and disproportionate. ...

... after the First World War the British Government had a mandate from the League of Nations to sort out the question of Palestine and leave peacefully with both communities,

Jews and Arabs, living in harmony, side by side. We failed on that count and left in a hurry. Even now, the British Government bear a moral obligation ... towards the Palestine conflict, stemming from their historical involvement following the 1947 withdrawal. We left behind a complex and unresolved situation that resulted in decades of conflict and bloodshed on both sides, and immense suffering for the Palestinians. Millions of them became stateless refugees in neighbouring countries. As a former colonial power, Britain has a moral responsibility to advocate for a just resolution by acknowledging the consequences of its past actions and engaging diplomatically as the main power, and by providing further humanitarian aid and supporting a peaceful solution. ...

col 1516 Lord Oates (Liberal Democrat): ... Sadly, Gaza is not the only place where conflict is fuelling malnutrition. In Yemen, in DRC, in Ethiopia, in Sudan and South Sudan and in Ukraine, conflict has exacerbated a global hunger crisis already driven by climate-related extreme weather events. ...

col 1518 Baroness Helic (Conservative): ... In a 1987 interview with the *Jewish Chronicle*, against the backdrop of the first intifada, Margaret Thatcher, a great friend of Israel, repeatedly urged restraint, stressing that it was “vital not to use excessive force”. In response to a question about settlements, she set out what should be an abiding principle: “what you do not like yourself you must not do to others”.

Regrettably, in the current conflict Israel’s right to self-defence has morphed into a disproportionate military response, tantamount to the collective punishment of a civilian population. Civilians are being killed and starved as their homes, schools and hospitals are destroyed and their children maimed.

Where we have rightly condemned Russia’s use of siege tactics and its attacks on hospitals and civilian targets, and where we have rightly condemned the terror attack against Israel, the taking of hostages and the sexual violence that was committed, we, along with the US and some other democracies, have also provided diplomatic and moral cover for the carnage in Gaza. These apparent double standards have been noted by British people and in countries around the world. Such inconsistency runs counter to our long-term interests, which should be the shaping force for our foreign policy. ...

The Government have done an admirable job of explaining our policy on Ukraine and carrying forward public support for our goals. The same cannot be said of our response to the war in Gaza. How did we end up alienated from the electorate, who are shocked by the civilian toll and many of whom are protesting because they believe that their voices cannot be, and are not, heard in Parliament? ...

col 1519 Lord Hannay of Chiswick (Crossbench): ... No one can have followed events since 7 October without feeling deep anguish—anguish for Israelis whose compatriots were killed in the terrorist attack and some of whom are still being held hostage, and anguish for the many thousands of Palestinian civilians who have subsequently lost their lives. But we really should stop tearing ourselves apart over whether we back an immediate or a sustainable ceasefire, neither of which we are in a position to deliver.

Instead, we should concentrate on how to prevent such appalling events happening again. In that context, I applaud the shift in policy over Palestinian statehood that was hinted at by the Foreign Secretary, and the move away from the long since bankrupt policy of offering statehood only at the end of a process over which Israel would have a veto at every stage. Would that be to offer Hamas victory? Certainly not, because Hamas does not even contemplate a two-state solution and because any such approach would necessarily involve all concerned—Israel’s Arab neighbours and Israel itself—recognising each other and committing themselves to respecting each other’s sovereignty. ...

col 1520 I conclude with a plea that we do not give in to counsels of despair or to siren songs to appease actions that we know are wrong and which we have all committed ourselves to resisting. ... I would express the wish, and I will do so myself, that we dedicate our debate today to two outstanding men who gave their lives to making the world a better

place: Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, who knew that Israel would never be secure or prosperous without a two-state solution, and Alexei Navalny, who championed a Russia with which we could have lived in peaceful coexistence, and whose parting advice to all of us was, “Do not give up”.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green): ... It is tempting to focus ... on the situation in Palestine now: the hideous human suffering in the Gaza Strip; the terrible circumstances of the Israeli hostages; and the invention of a new acronym —WCNSF—meaning “wounded child, no surviving family”. UNICEF estimates that there are now 17,000 children in Gaza who are unaccompanied or separated from any relatives. That is about 1% of the entire population. Yet still we sell arms to the Israeli Government. ...

col 1523 **Lord Anderson of Swansea (Labour):** ... After the atrocities of 7 October, there was enormous international sympathy for Israel, but Netanyahu has frittered much of that away through his intransigence, the creation of a humanitarian catastrophe and the pictures of starving children; President Biden had warned against a response of fury. There is at least a possibility of some good emerging if a grand deal were agreed, including a two-state solution. ...

col 1526 **Viscount Waverley (Crossbench):** ...The situation in the Levant is so distressing. Everyone knows the ramifications, not only for the conflicting sides, but for the world. ... Is either side ready to discuss life in the region, or do they want to continue to prove themselves right and to die for it?

Claims on the rights to the land and who was there first—with control or containment of the settlers—is a quandary as complex as the horrific events of 7 October. Debating circular claims on the cluster of problems with the many participants who are physically in combat, or actively driving it from behind, is not going to lead to any sustainable solution. The only question is whether the sides can face reality and discuss the present and future, while putting aside grievances from the past.

Can a wedge be inserted between Iran and active players in the region, or will we continue to allow skilled puppet masters to continue unabated? A peace treaty will be signed one day; there is no choice. We—all those with a vested interest in a resolution—must not stay on the sidelines. However, we must not take sides, but instead push the sides to face reality and negotiate on its terms. ...

col 1529 **Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws (Labour):** ... Soon after the war [in Ukraine] started, I was appointed to a legal task force to advise on war crimes. ... it has become clear that there are areas of law where we could make some beneficial changes. For example, what would the authorities do if a Russian general who had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine showed up at a London airport? We asked whether he would be arrested and put on trial. Unfortunately, the answer is no. Of course, we recognise the principle of universal jurisdiction and have interpreted it into British law. However, that allows us and our courts to put on trial people for only a handful of offences—genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity—the kinds of offences that shock the consciousness and the conscience of humankind, no matter where they occur. The problem is that our law confines this to citizens and residents of the United Kingdom. The only people who can be prosecuted are those with this status. Interestingly, the United States’ law was formed in exactly the same way but, last year, it amended its legislation ... so that presence was enough. The Americans do not have the problem of not being able to arrest Russian generals or Iranian mullahs who are currently out of our reach. This is a piece of low-hanging fruit. ...

col 1530 I would like to see the strengthening of the atrocity crimes unit in the Foreign Office, because it needs greater resources, and it should monitor indicators of genocide. ... The unit should look at whether there is a trajectory towards genocide, which should be monitored in a sophisticated way, and resources are needed for that. ...

We always talk about the importance of peacemaking. ... but we must have women at the

tables, and I am worried that women will not be at the tables in the Middle East. With his great advocacy skills, please will the Foreign Secretary ensure that we have women at the tables? ...

col 1532 Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative): ... First, let us remind ourselves why we have this horrific situation in Gaza. As today's United Nations report by Pramila Patten finally admitted and confirmed, it is because a horde of people, including UNRWA employees ... committed the most deplorable and evil of crimes against civilians. They were targeting civilians, who suffered not as innocent bystanders but as victims. They raped young girls so violently that they broke their pelvises. They tied and burned whole families together, ensuring that family members witnessed the death of their siblings, parents and children, and committed such evil atrocities as putting babies in ovens. ...

Hamas has vowed to repeat this again and again. It still holds innocent hostages in what must be unimaginably horrendous conditions. So we need a constant reminder as to why we cannot have an unconditional ceasefire in isolation. Given this report, will my noble friend now push the United Nations to confirm Hamas as a terrorist organisation? ...

What option is there now other than to take every step to ensure that this does not happen again? If UK citizens, members of any of our families in this Chamber, were abducted on our soil, I would want to be sure that my Government pursued the perpetrators to the ends of the earth, even if on the way there were civilian losses that, while deeply regrettable, are, as my noble friend Lord Roberts of Belgravia, the distinguished military expert historian, and many others have pointed out, much lower than one might expect in this type of challenging and terrible urban warfare.

To suggest that the IDF is carrying out a genocide is hugely insulting to the genuine victims of a genocide and to the IDF, which has been commended by our own military as the most humane army on the planet. It consists largely of civilian conscripts and has taken more steps than any other army in the history of human armed conflict to try to reduce harm to innocent civilians.

col 1533 ... I will focus on one of [the Foreign Secretary's] objectives that I believe needs some clarification: his horizon of an irreversible pathway to a state of Palestine. ... I believe that the citizens of Palestine deserve a free state of their own, but it needs some clarity. ... For example, to ensure that a free Palestine is freed from Hamas, will that state be a democracy or an autocracy? Will it be demilitarised? Will Jewish people be allowed to visit, work, study and pray, as Arabs from the West Bank are and should be? Will inspections be allowed to ensure that there are no tunnels? Will there be no treaty allowing funding or other arrangements with Iran? Will a border be created, such as the one in Cyprus, with international protections? In this new state, will the rights of gays, women, minorities and those with other religious practices be protected in the way that they are in Israel? ...

Lord Marlesford (Conservative): ... In his Downing Street address on extremism last week, the Prime Minister gave us a much-needed warning. I believe that the greatest threat to world peace and security today is the resurrection of fascism. The Prime Minister did not say "fascism", but he described it very well: it seeks "to advance a divisive, hateful ideological agenda", combined with "Threats of violence and intimidation" to win power. We all know that this is followed with increasingly cruel and brutal repression to obtain power.

There are two obvious areas where all this is happening. The first and most obvious is Putin's far-right rule in Russia ... The second, and in some ways more formidably, is political Islam, whose distorted jihadist ideology was created by hijacking the religion of Islam, as peacefully practised by hundreds of millions throughout the world.

Israel cannot fully escape criticism. There are echoes that can be seen by some as fascistic. Netanyahu is certainly risking turning what could have been an ethical military victory into a major global defeat. However, as the Prime Minister put it: "Islamist extremists and the far right feed off and embolden each other".

col 1534 Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat): ... Sudan is the world's worst

humanitarian crisis, but it is the least reported and has had the worst global response. Gaza has understandably dominated much of this debate ... I visited the Gaza border two weekends ago through the UK-based Jewish charity, Yachad. I also visited Ramallah, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. ... of the reported 30,000 Palestinians killed, it is estimated that 70% are women and children. We know in all conflicts that women and children are disproportionately impacted. ...

In 1979, in the first speech by ... Lord Carrington as Foreign Secretary ... he discussed the Middle East and said that “the Palestinian problem lies at the very heart of the issue. The objective here must be full and genuine autonomy for these areas as a step towards determining their final status. Nothing would do more to help these negotiations, to build trust in the area, and to win the consent of the Palestinians than for Israel to cease the expansion of its settlements in the occupied territories”.—[[Official Report, 22/5/1979; col. 240.](#)]

col 1535 That was the year of Security Council Resolution 446, which sought to prohibit illegal settlements. That year, they numbered not more than 15,000; 45 years on and the resolution not being adhered to, that figure is now 750,000.

We already know that settler violence in the West Bank in 2023 was the worst on record, so I welcome warmly the Government’s designation of the two settlers under the global human rights sanctions regime. ... They acted with impunity, with material and economic support from government entities and Ministers, and these Benches call for the designation under the human rights regime of Ministers Smotrich and Ben-Gvir as facilitators of the violence.

When I met the IDF spokesman, I asked for an estimate of how much they had depleted the capability of Hamas after four months of fighting. He told me that of the 30,000 estimated Hamas fighters, the IDF had killed 10,000. ... It is now obvious that there will be no sustainable military solution, and to secure neighbour security for Israelis and Palestinians we needed the bilateral ceasefire in November ... with a hostage release programme and the commencement of a political track including the recognition of the state of Palestine. ...

col 1537 Rachel Goldberg, mother of Hersh, a hostage held by Hamas, told me of her empathy with Gazan mothers who have lost their children or are unsure where their children currently are. She told me, “There is no competition of pain and tears; there is just a lot of pain and tears”. The son of parents killed in a peace kibbutz told me how all his mother’s work and warnings had been overlooked in recent years. He said, “I can forgive the past. I can even forgive the present and those who commit the crimes, but I won’t forgive the failure to change the future”. ...

... the US and UK must now change policy and call formally for an immediate bilateral ceasefire. If we are to have a process after the day after, we need a day before. If we are to fight for the rules-based international order, there must be order, and we must adhere to the rules.

col 1539 Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): ... I turn to the issue that we have focused on the most, which is the Middle East. ... both sides should stop fighting now and that all hostages should be released. ... we need to work with our international partners to ... move towards recognising a Palestinian state, rather than waiting for the end of the process. ...

The ICJ said that Israel must take measures to ensure humanitarian access to Gaza. Does the Foreign Secretary believe that a full-scale Rafah offensive would be consistent with that ICJ ruling? ...

One of the issues ... relates to humanitarian workers whose visas have expired or been withdrawn. Many of them are facing deportation at a time when Palestinian people need them most. I hope the Foreign Secretary can reassure us today that the Government will make the strongest representations to ensure that those visas are extended and renewed. The Government’s last Statement on the Middle East referred to the increase in aid, air

drops and trucks going through. But as the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, said at the time, it is not enough. At the weekend, President Biden announced that the US Air Force began further air drops over Gaza on Saturday afternoon in a joint operation with the Jordanians. ... Can we work with allies to ensure that further air drops take place? ... Can we also talk about opening the port of Ashdod in Israel, 40 kilometres from the border with northern Gaza? ...

col 1540 **The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton):** ... I cannot recall such a dangerous time in international affairs during my political career. ... The noble Lord, Lord Marlesford, was right to draw attention, as the Prime Minister did on Friday, to the combined threat of the far right and Islamist extremism. We must respond to all these threats with strength and unity, and always be clear about where British interests lie. ...

col 1541 I have shown solidarity with Israel, seeing the death and destruction wrought at Kibbutz Be'eri on 7 October, while also speaking out for a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza ... We have trebled our aid to Gaza and appointed a representative for humanitarian affairs to work intensively in the region to address the blockages to aid reaching Gaza. Much more needs to be done ...

col 1542 We are facing a situation of dreadful suffering in Gaza; there can be no doubt about that. I spoke some weeks ago about the danger of this tipping into famine and the danger of illness tipping into disease, and we are now at that point. People are dying of hunger; people are dying of otherwise preventable diseases.

The situation is very bad, and we have been pushing for aid to get in. There is a whole set of things that we have asked the Israelis to do. But I have to report to your Lordships' House that the amount of aid that got in in February was about half of what got in in January. The patience needs to run very thin and a whole series of warnings needs to be given, starting, I hope, with a meeting I have with Minister Gantz ...

col 1543 We have set out very clearly five asks that need to be put in place, including the humanitarian pause and the capacity inside Gaza ... We need increased access through both land and maritime routes, including Ashdod port ...

Too many items are sent away because they are supposedly dual-use goods. Some of these things are absolutely necessary for medical and other procedures. We also need to see a resumption of electricity and water to north and south Gaza. Let me say again at this Dispatch Box that Israel is the occupying power. It is responsible and that has consequences, including in how we look at whether Israel is compliant with international humanitarian law. I think that is the most important thing on the issue of Gaza. ...

... the situation is terrible, but if we can turn a pause for this hostage deal into a sustainable ceasefire and build momentum, so that we do not go back to fighting, there is a chance. ... there is some exhaustion on both sides. ...

... are we torturing ourselves with this debate between pause and ceasefire? The reason that I think saying a pause is right—the pause should happen now; I want it to happen tonight or tomorrow, to stop this killing—is that you have a pause and then put in place the conditions that make a ceasefire more likely to be permanent. You have to get the Hamas leadership out of Gaza. You have to get rid of the terrorist infrastructure. You have to have a new Palestinian Government. You have to have a horizon towards Palestinian statehood. These things are necessary in order to have a chance of a genuine peace process and outcome. ...

A two-state solution will not work if Hamas is still running Gaza and if there are no guarantees about how secure Israel would be living alongside a Palestinian state, so we must get that right.

Let me reconfirm that Britain is committed to a two-state solution ... Part of a two-state solution is, clearly, the recognition of Palestine as a state. I do not think that should happen at the start of the process, because it takes all the pressure off the Palestinians to reform, but it should not have to wait until the end. ... we should not give Israel a veto power ...

recognition can become a part of the unstoppable momentum that we need to see towards a two-state solution. ...

col 1544 Hamas is a terrorist organisation and let me say clearly that its apologists should not be invited into the FCDO for a seminar. ...

I understand the concern about the fact that people who work for [UNRWA] were involved in 7 October; that is shocking and it has to be properly investigated. There must be proper undertakings and reforms to that organisation so that it cannot happen again, and it can be put beyond doubt. However, I say to the House that if we also want aid delivered, UNRWA is the only body with a distribution network, so we must have a dose of realism about what we can achieve and how quickly we can achieve it. But the promotion of extremism needs to be properly dealt with. ...

col 1548 The challenges we face are considerable. ...

In a dangerous world, we must not shy away from the need to stand by our allies, strengthen our partnerships and make sure our voice is heard. ... That is what I have been doing since becoming Foreign Secretary, in standing up for some simple principles: the right of countries to have their borders respected, the importance of democracy and the importance of freedom. We should demonstrate strength and we should show humanity. That is what the Government and I will continue to do in the months ahead.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-05/debates/118562C7-2918-4CEB-94AF-9A30F8F31558/ForeignAffairs>

The Margaret Thatcher interview in the Jewish Chronicle referred to above by Baroness Helic can be read at

<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107002>

Pramila Patten's report, referred to above by Lord Leigh of Hurley, can be read at

<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/report/mission-report-official-visit-of-the-office-of-the-srsq-svc-to-israel-and-the-occupied-west-bank-29-january-14-february-2024/20240304-Israel-oWB-CRSV-report.pdf>

The Prime Minister's address on extremism, referred to above by Lord Marlesford, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-on-extremism-1-march-2024>

UN Security Council Resolution 446 referred to above by Lord Purvis of Tweed, can be read at

<http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/446>

The statement referred to above by Lord Collins of Highbury can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-27/debates/B9FB3FDF-7623-4773-AA7E-096D7B4283A9/IsraelAndGaza#contribution-181EBBC5-3C68-4F8C-BD3F-69D0F2D98090>

House of Commons Written Answers

Middle East: International Law

Zarah Sultana (Labour) [16550] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 January 2024 to Question 9950 on Yemen: Military Intervention and to the Answer of 20 February 2024 to Question 13836 on Gaza: Israel, for what reason his Department maintains a tracker database of alleged instances of breaches or violations of international humanitarian law by Saudi Arabia in Yemen but does not maintain a comparable database of alleged instances of breaches or violations of International Humanitarian Law by Israel in Gaza.

James Heapey: The Ministry of Defence's "tracker" listing alleged International Humanitarian Law (IHL) violations during the Saudi Led Coalition's Air Campaign in Yemen, does not cover the actions of the Israeli Defence Force in Gaza.

The UK Government continues to assess Israel's commitment and capability to

comply with International Humanitarian Law. Those assessments are supported by a detailed evidence base, including analysis of the conflict, reporting from NGOs, international bodies and partner countries, statements and reports by the Israeli Government and military representatives and Israel's track record of compliance.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16550>

The answers referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-16/9950>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-08/13836>

Israel: Arms Trade

Dan Carden (Labour) [16536] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 26 February 2024 to Question 15734 on Israel: Arms Trade, how many arms export licences have been assessed since 7 October 2023.

Andrew Mitchell: The Department for Business and Trade will publish licensing statistics, including for Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in line with its usual process.

The Government takes its defence export responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world. All applications for export licences are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. All licences are kept under careful and continual review as standard and we are able to suspend, refuse or revoke licences as circumstances require. We can and do respond quickly and flexibly to changing international circumstances. The Government continues to monitor closely the situation in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16536>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-26/15734>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Palestinians: Refugees

Caroline Lucas (Green) [15866] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department is taking to provide safe and legal entry routes for people in Gaza seeking to join family members in the UK.

Tom Pursglove: The UK Government is monitoring the situation in Israel and Gaza closely to ensure that it is able to respond appropriately.

British citizens and those with settled status in the UK, together with their foreign national dependants, may come to the UK provided that they have valid travel documents and existing permission to enter or remain in the UK; or are non-visa nationals. They must also pass appropriate security checks.

The Government allows individuals with protection status in the UK to sponsor their partner or children to stay with, or join, them here through our refugee family reunion policy, provided they formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country of origin to seek protection.

There are additional safe and legal routes for people to come to the UK should they wish to join family members here, work, or study. They would need to meet the requirements of the relevant Immigration Rule under which they were applying to qualify for a visa.

The Home Office has not considered establishing a separate resettlement route for Palestinians to come to the UK. Since 2015, over half a million people have been

offered safe and legal routes into the UK. Our approach is considered in the round, rather than on a crisis-by-crisis basis.

UK Visas and Immigration is working closely with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in supporting family members of British nationals evacuated from Gaza who require a visa, signposting the necessary steps and expediting appointments at the Visa Application Centre.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/15866>

Visas: Gaza

Caroline Lucas (Green) [15865] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the barriers to people in Gaza who are seeking to join their family members in the UK reaching their closest visa application centre in Egypt.

Tom Pursglove: Immediate family members of British citizens, individuals with protection status, and those settled in the UK, who wish to come and live in the UK and do not have a current UK visa, can apply under one of the existing Family visa routes.

The Home Office is working closely with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in supporting family members of British nationals evacuated from Gaza who require a visa, signposting the necessary steps and expediting appointments at the Visa Application Centre (VAC). VACs in the region, such as Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, are open and offering a full service.

In the vast majority of circumstances, the UK requires biometrics to be taken as part of an application; this is vital so we can conduct checks on the person's identity and suitability to come to the UK. Biometrics, in the form of fingerprints and facial images, underpin the current UK immigration system to support identity assurance and suitability checks on foreign nationals who are subject to immigration control. Applicants who are at risk of embarking on an unsafe journey must provide evidence they need to make an urgent journey to a VAC that would be particularly unsafe for them, and they cannot delay their journey until later or use alternative routes.

When considering a pre-determination or an excusal of the requirement for an applicant to enrol their biometrics request under the Unsafe Journey's policy, decision-makers must refer to the Biometric Enrolment and the Unsafe Journey's guidance.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/15865>

Israel: Palestinians

Dan Carden (Labour) [16545] To ask the Attorney General, what discussions she had with her (a) Israeli and (b) Palestinian counterparts on compliance with international humanitarian law during her visit to the Middle East in February 2024.

Victoria Prentis: I visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories between 14 and 16 February 2024. In Israel, I met with the Israeli Attorney General, lawyers for the Israeli Defence Force, and the President of the Supreme Court. In the West Bank, I met with the Palestinian Attorney General and the Prime Minister.

I held frank discussions in which I emphasised the importance of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) being respected, civilians protected, and detainees being held in compliance with the Geneva Conventions.

The UK Government continues to call for IHL to be respected and for civilians to be protected.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16545>

Occupied Territories: Human Rights

Dan Carden (Labour) [15735] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and

Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the report by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights entitled Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice, published on 23 February 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government is clear that all parties must act within International Humanitarian Law.

We have repeatedly condemned the 7 October attack against Israel by Hamas, a heinous act of terrorism. We have been clear that they must release all hostages, that their capacity to launch attacks against Israel must be removed, and that they must no longer be in charge of Gaza. These are some of the vital elements for a lasting peace.

We also want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. As the occupying power in Gaza, Israel also has to ensure that humanitarian aid-including food, water and shelter-is available to people in Gaza. Israel must also take meaningful steps to hold those responsible for extremist settler violence to account. We regularly review advice about Israel's capability and commitment to IHL, and act in accordance with that advice.

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/2024-02-26/15735>

The report referred to above can be read at

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

Occupied Territories: Politics and Government

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [16005] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to help ensure political stability in the Occupied Palestinian Territories following the resignation of Mohammad Shtayyeh.

Andrew Mitchell: The Palestinian Authority (PA) has an important long-term role to play. We must work with our allies to provide serious, practical and enduring support needed to bolster the PA. We already provide technical and practical support and are ready to do more. The PA must also take much needed steps on reform, including setting out a pathway to democratic progress.

Just as the PA must act, so must Israel. This means releasing frozen funds, halting settlement expansion and holding to account those responsible for extremist settler violence.

We are looking at what more we can do, including providing economic support to the PA. We have already moved to ban those responsible for violence in the West Bank from the UK.

We have taken further steps to hold those to account who undermine the steps to peace in the West Bank. Earlier this month, the Foreign Secretary announced new sanctions designations against four extremist Israeli settlers who have violently attacked Palestinians in the West Bank.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16005>

Gaza: Israel

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [16004] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has held with his Israeli counterpart on the Israeli's Government's plan for evacuating Gaza civilians from 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, and the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have reiterated these messages in our contacts with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior Israeli political leaders.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16004>

Occupied Territories: Aid Workers

Claire Hanna (SDLP) [16417] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will have discussions with his Israeli counterparts on ensuring that foreign humanitarian aid workers are granted visas to carry out humanitarian aid work in Gaza and the West Bank.

Andrew Mitchell: Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis.

We need a humanitarian pause now to allow humanitarian actors and Gazans to operate and move safely and enable hostages to be released.

Among other things, we need Israel to ensure effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys, humanitarian operations and IDP returns, and facilitate access.

We also need Israel to ensure the UN has the people, vehicles, equipment and fuel to distribute aid safely across Gaza. This includes issuing visas.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16417>

Gaza: Mortality Rates

Dan Carden (Labour) [15733] 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 report by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and the Johns Hopkins University entitled Crisis in Gaza: Scenario-Based Health Impact Projections, published on 19 February 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: As the Foreign Secretary has said, Palestinians civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Too many civilians have been killed and we want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

The immediate priority must be a humanitarian pause in the fighting, which is the best route to get aid in and hostages out. We want that pause to lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to destruction, fighting and further loss of life. That remains the focus of all our diplomatic effort.

There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza and our focus must be on practical solutions that save lives. We trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings. On 21 February, the UK and Jordan air-dropped life-saving aid to the Tal Al-Hawa hospital in northern Gaza. Four tonnes of vital supplies were provided, including medicines, fuel and food for hospital patients and staff.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-26/15733>

The report referred to above can be read at

https://gaza-projections.org/gaza_projections_report.pdf

Gaza: Roads

Dan Carden (Labour) [15156] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the reported construction of a corridor bisecting Gaza by Israel; and whether he has discussed that matter with his (a) Israeli and (b) Palestinian counterparts.

Andrew Mitchell: We continue to monitor the situation closely in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We are clear that a viable two state solution is the best means to achieve lasting peace and stability for both Israelis and Palestinians. The Prime Minister pressed this point in his call with Prime Minister Netanyahu 15 February.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-21/15156>

House of Lords Written Answers

The following three questions all received the same answer

Gaza: British Nationals Abroad

Baroness Warsi (Conservative) [HL2586] To ask His Majesty's Government how many British citizens are currently in Gaza; and what steps they are taking to assist (1) British citizens, and (2) immediate family members of British citizens, who are trapped in Gaza.

Baroness Warsi (Conservative) [HL2587] To ask His Majesty's Government how many British-Palestinian nationals have been included in their evacuation list from Gaza; and how many have been successfully repatriated to the United Kingdom.

Baroness Warsi (Conservative) [HL2588] To ask His Majesty's Government how many (1) British-Palestinian citizens, and (2) Palestinians with a right to remain in the United Kingdom, are currently trapped in Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have helped to support over 315 British nationals, their dependants and relevant visa holders to leave Gaza so far. A small number remain. There may be others who have not sought our help and we understand that others have left without our assistance.

We have been working with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities to try and ensure remaining British nationals and other eligible persons, as set out in our Travel Advice, who seek our support to leave Gaza are cleared to cross as soon as possible.

The UK government has also been working with partners across the region to secure the release of hostages, including British nationals and their families.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/hl2586>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/hl2587>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/hl2588>

The travel advice referred to above can be read at

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

South Africa: Foreign Relations

Lord Pannick (Crossbench) [HL2618] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the United Kingdom's relationship with South Africa, in light of the increasingly close links which that country has formed with Russia and with Iran.

Lord Benyon: We encourage South Africa to use their available channels, including the BRICS and their G20 Presidency preparations, to urge Russia to end its unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine and to make clear to Iran that Hamas has no role in a long-term political solution which delivers security for both Palestine

and Israel.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-20/hl2618>

South Africa: Hamas

Baroness Whitaker (Labour) [HL2619] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of South Africa's relationship with the proscribed terrorist organisation Hamas, and the statements of support for Hamas by former ANC minister Ronnie Kasrils.

Lord Benyon: We are clear with South Africa that Hamas are a proscribed terrorist organisation by the UK. Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas in line with International Humanitarian Law, as we have said from the outset. The vital elements for a lasting peace 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/2024-02-20/hl2619>

Humanitarian Aid

Baroness Helic (Conservative) [HL2652] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of communications blackouts on humanitarian operations, including in (1) Sudan, and (2) Gaza.

Lord Benyon: The UK strongly condemns the blackouts in Sudan and calls for an immediate resumption of telecommunications and internet connectivity. The blackouts make it even more difficult for the world to see what is happening in Sudan. They also exacerbate the humanitarian crisis, as millions of people rely on online payments for food and other essentials. We are also deeply concerned about the severely damaged telecommunications and internet networks in Gaza, which are causing repeated near total communications blackouts. This is limiting the ability of Palestinians in Gaza to communicate and greatly hampers the humanitarian response. Officials are in regular contact with Paltel, the leading telecommunications company in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). We recognise the strenuous efforts of Paltel's staff in Gaza to make repairs and maintain services, at great risk to themselves.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-21/hl2652>

Scottish Parliament Debates

International Women's Day

15:34 The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Kaukab Stewart): ... We meet at a time of increasing global conflict, as our concerns continue to grow about the impact on all civilians who are affected by violence. We know that conflict disproportionately affects women. We see that in devastating reports from non-governmental organisations in Gaza that show that there has been an increase in the number of miscarriages and premature births. Pregnant women are having caesarean sections without anaesthetic, and others are being forced to use scraps of tents in place of period products. ...

15:46 Meghan Gallacher (Conservative): ... I think that we will all remember 7 October 2023 as the day on which Hamas weaponised sexual violence. We saw videos of naked and bloodied women defiled by Hamas on the day of the attack; it emerged on social media for the whole world to see and watch on in horror.

We have heard witnesses sharing their trauma of seeing women raped before they were

dead, with some raped while they were injured and some while they were already dead, when terrorists raped their lifeless bodies. We also saw the video of a pregnant woman who had her womb ripped open while she was still alive and saw her unborn baby stabbed before being murdered herself. Gang rape, mutilation and execution—that is what happened to innocent women who were enjoying a rave that was designed to promote peace.

Now, we have to watch on while the women and children of Gaza are trapped in a state of conflict, with shortages of food, shelter and hope. As the minister highlighted, they are in dire situations, praying that the fighting will stop to prevent further innocent people from dying. ...

Each of those women was someone's mother, daughter, niece, cousin or friend, but they were also the women who paid a heavy price in war, and women will continue to do so while those conflicts are on-going. ...

15.53 Carol Mochan (Labour): ... The attacks on 7 October and the reported treatment of Israeli women were deplorable and wholly unacceptable and have rightly been met with widespread condemnation across the world. Following that, we have witnessed all-out war on the Gaza strip and the mass killing of tens of thousands of people, with many more currently starving to death as a result of the bombardment and limited access to aid.

... there are currently around 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza. Of that number, 40 per cent are considered to be at high risk, which is extremely concerning. Humanitarian aid must be allowed in to provide those women with the support that they so desperately need. Just yesterday, MSPs and staff had the opportunity to hear from Medical Aid for Palestinians and Oxfam about their experiences from the ground. Of all the points that were raised, the most harrowing was that women in Gaza are giving birth in unsterile conditions, which is extremely dangerous for the mother and the baby. ...

16.00 Beatrice Wishart (Liberal Democrat): ... In Gaza, women are struggling to survive displacement, bereavement and lack of access to basic necessities. Women are giving birth without access to water, painkillers or anaesthesia for caesarean sections, and they are going without food to give what they can to their children. The stories that we are hearing are heartbreaking and remind us that violent conflict intensifies pre-existing gender inequalities and discrimination. ...

16.23 Paul O'Kane (Labour): Our thoughts turn to the experiences of the women in Israel who were taken hostage by Hamas on 7 October and who have still not returned to their families, and to those in Palestine who, as many members have already referenced, are suffering unimaginable horrors in the most desperate of situations. Tomorrow, on international women's day, we should all redouble our calls for an immediate ceasefire in that war—an end to rocket fire in and out of Gaza, the return of hostages and an end to violence and bloodshed—as we aspire to a two-state solution where no woman has to live in fear. ...

16.36 Maggie Chapman (Green): ... It is right and appropriate that the motion recognises the impact of conflict on women and girls. We are all acutely aware that it does so in the context of not only the invasion of Ukraine, but the bitter genocide in Gaza, the on-going devastation of Yemen, and the often-forgotten refugee and humanitarian crisis in South Sudan. ...

16.43 Ruth Maguire (SNP): ... Speaking about the situation in Gaza for women and children, Save the Children's CEO, Inger Ashing, said that she was "running out of words to describe the horror unfolding".

I was struck by an article by Nesrine Malik entitled "In Gaza, there's a war on women. Will the west really ignore it because 'they're not like us'?" She describes how the healthcare system there has been all but obliterated.

The charity Care International UK states that there are no doctors, midwives or nurses to support women during labour. There is no pain medication, anaesthesia or hygiene

material when women give birth. Babies are born outside, umbilical cords are cut with whatever sharp object there is to hand and tins are filled with hot water to keep newborns warm. Caesarean sections, which are painful in their aftermath even when there are drugs, are being performed without any anaesthesia by surgeons who do not have water to wash their hands, let alone to sterilise them, and there are no antibiotics for any resulting infections. In some cases, according to the Washington Post, C sections were performed on women post-mortem.

If women and children do manage to prevail in those impossible circumstances, they are faced with displacement and hunger while nursing painful tears, wounds and malnourished babies. Pregnant women will have had to have made a 20-mile journey from the north to the south in Gaza, and they will arrive in circumstances that UNICEF describes as breaching famine thresholds. That is particularly concerning when it comes to the fate of tens of thousands of pregnant and breastfeeding women, the majority of whom can consume only one or two types of food. Mothers cannot access sufficient food or clean water to produce milk for their babies.

It is hard to find words to describe that horror. I am at the point where I am not sure how many more pictures of dead babies, women and children I can look at. I wondered if it might be helpful to share some things that people can do and some actions that they can take if they are feeling helpless. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom provides some suggestions for immediate action. Those are to write to the UK Government and demand that it uphold its obligation, under common article 1 to the Geneva conventions, to ensure that all parties to conflict follow international law, which should include calling for a ceasefire. You can lobby your Government for concrete actions such as sanctions to be taken against Israel if it does not comply with the United Nations Security Council resolutions. You can demand that your country cut off diplomatic relations with Israel if it does not immediately end its bombardment and siege of Gaza and start abiding by international law. On an individual front, you can also participate in a sanctions campaign. I urge people to find out about boycott, divestment and sanctions, which are legitimate and peaceful methods for tackling rogue apartheid states that have worked in the past and can work again. ...

16.55 Pauline McNeill (Labour): ... Many members have talked about women bearing the brunt of war. In every conflict, women face sexual violence and daily suffering. ... Sexual violence against Israeli women and against Palestinian women is equally unacceptable.

I cannot speak without addressing—as other members have mentioned—what has happened in the Gaza strip in the past 150 days. Women in Gaza are steps away from famine and complete catastrophe, with no escape. I am grateful to my colleague Carol Mochan, who yesterday confronted us all with the reality of the 50,000 women in Gaza who are pregnant. Many of those women are malnourished and unable to breastfeed, and many of those pregnancies will not reach full term. There is no baby formula, and not enough aid is reaching the Gaza strip in order to give them a chance.

There are also women in the occupied west bank of Palestine who are forced to give birth, or who miscarry, at checkpoints. Some cannot get to their health appointments, and there are mothers who see their sons imprisoned under occupation and shot in the street. A resolution of the Palestinian conflict is long overdue. ... the only way to give all women, and men, in that region peace is by seeking a two-state solution. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15747&i=134402#ScotParlOR>

Scotland's Place in the World

16.07 Ross Greer (Green): ... Our country has always had an internationalist outlook.

That is in part because of centuries of emigration. Scotland has had a disproportionate impact—both good and bad—on the world relative to our size. However, today, our voice on the global stage is severely limited by our being part of the UK, and there is no clearer example of that than in relation to the on-going genocide in Gaza. More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, including at least 13,000 children, and we know that those numbers are a massive undercount.

The public in Scotland and across the UK have been in favour of a ceasefire for months, and I am confident that a majority would support an arms embargo on Israel. However, Westminster has treated public opinion with contempt, to the extent that the UK Government is now considering a ban on MPs and councillors engaging with pro-Palestine—and, for some reason, climate change—protesters. That proposal, by the way, was made by John Woodcock, who is an adviser to the current Conservative Government, but who was previously a Labour MP, and who spent a lot of his time in office palling around with some very unsavoury regimes across the world; he is certainly no defender of human rights.

If Scotland were independent, we could apply such an arms embargo and end the scandal—which Ivan McKee mentioned—of equipment that has been made in factories in Scotland being used to supply an Israeli occupation force that is committing a genocide in Gaza. Rather, we have a UK arms export control regime that is so lax that, when the relevant minister was answering a question in the House of Commons last week, they cited the robust oversight of the arms export controls committee—a body that has not existed for years.

In December, Foreign Office officials expressed concern to the Foreign Secretary that Israel was not acting in line with international law, which is something that we can all see on our TV screens. They presented the Foreign Secretary with options on arms export control licences to Israel, and David Cameron chose to continue those arms licences, which I find very hard to square with Alexander Stewart's claim that the UK Government is making a significant effort to secure a ceasefire. One of the most effective things that the UK Government could do to secure a ceasefire would be to stop providing bombs to the people who are bombing civilians in Gaza.

Craig Hoy (Conservative): Recently, the Parliament held a reception for young Scottish apprentices who are working at the cutting edge of Scottish science and innovation. Mr Greer was implicated in trying to block their access to the building, which caused concern to some of those who attended. He went on to describe those young people, who came to the Parliament to promote engagement, as being “a who's who of Israel's arms dealers”. Will he now apologise for doing so and for the offence that he caused?

Ross Greer: I am grateful for the intervention, because Mr Hoy gives me the opportunity to point out that the Conservative Party hosted a reception in the Parliament for the companies that are currently supplying an occupation force that is committing a genocide. [Interruption.] ...

The shameful event that happened in the Parliament a couple of weeks ago was the presence of companies such as Raytheon, which is Israel's missile supplier. It is the supplier of missiles to an occupation force that is destroying schools, destroying hospitals and executing children on sight. That was the shameful event that happened in the Parliament a couple of weeks ago. ...

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15740&i=134315&c=2566385#ScotParlOR>

Welsh Senedd Written Answer

Answer to Oral Question not reached in Plenary: Gaza: Refugees
Peredur Owen Griffiths (Plaid Cymru) [OQ60793] What preparations is the Government

making to support refugees from the conflict in Gaza?

Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip (Jane Hutt): Wales is committed to being a nation of sanctuary. We have successfully welcomed people seeking sanctuary from across the globe. If a Gaza resettlement scheme was developed, we would ensure Wales played a full part, but the UK Government has no plans for such a scheme.

Last answer at

<https://record.senedd.wales/QNR/13742>

UN Office of the high Commissioner for Human Rights

Gaza: Israel's dehumanisation of displaced persons must end, says UN expert

Five months into the assault on Gaza, Israel has lost all credibility on its claims to protect civilians in the besieged strip, a UN expert said ...

"Israel's evacuation orders have not made the people of Gaza safer; on the contrary, they have been used to [forcibly transfer](#) and confine the civilian population in unliveable conditions," said Paula Gaviria Betancur, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

"I am appalled to hear that Israel intends to extend these orders to Rafah, the only semblance of refuge for nearly 70 per cent of Gaza's surviving population and the only functional entry point for humanitarian aid, should Israel's demands in negotiations not be met by the unilaterally imposed deadline of 10 March," Gaviria Betancur said.

"Although Rafah has already come under periodic attack by Israeli forces, a full-scale ground assault would lead to unimaginable suffering. Any evacuation order imposed on Rafah under the current conditions, with the rest of Gaza lying in ruins, would be in flagrant violation of international humanitarian and human rights law, forcing people to flee to conditions of certain death – deprived of food, water, healthcare, and shelter," the expert said.

Gaviria Betancur noted that few internal displacement crises in recent history could be characterised by such wholesale disregard for the rights of the displaced.

"IDPs in Gaza have been arbitrarily driven from their homes multiple times with no regard for their rights to life, dignity, liberty and security. It is impossible to conceive of any durable solution to their displacement, given Israel's systematic destruction of civilian infrastructure, including homes, hospitals, schools, markets, and places of worship, atop the immense psychological toll the conflict has taken on the people of Gaza," the Special Rapporteur said.

"Preventing arbitrary displacement, and providing protection, assistance, and durable solutions to displaced persons are neither optional nor acts of charity," said the expert.

"They are Israel's obligations as an occupying power under international law."

The Special Rapporteur condemned Israel's continued efforts to obstruct and weaponise humanitarian aid, including through attacks on civilians seeking aid.

"Humanitarian assistance is desperately needed to alleviate the immense suffering of the people of Gaza as well as to prevent further displacement, including potential cross-border displacement. One month ago, the International Court of Justice issued a binding order on Israel to take immediate and effective measures to permit the delivery of basic services and humanitarian aid to Gaza, as part of measures required to prevent the commission of genocide," she recalled.

"Instead, Israel immediately launched a campaign to discredit and defund UNRWA, the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza, based on allegations for which Israel has yet to publicly provide any credible evidence," the expert said.

"Israel has also continued to attack aid convoys and health facilities, impose arbitrary movement restrictions on humanitarian actors, and done little to hold Israeli citizens

accountable for blocking the delivery of humanitarian aid. As a result, starvation and disease are running rampant, and claiming lives alongside Israel's military actions," she said.

"Most disturbingly, Israel appears to have expanded its assault on humanitarian aid to systematically target aid-seekers themselves," said the Special Rapporteur. "Hundreds were reportedly massacred and injured during two [Israeli attacks on civilians queuing for food aid](#) on 29 February and 1 March. This adds to a pattern of deliberately targeting civilians seeking healthcare, like the horrific killing in January of a six-year-old girl by Israeli forces while she was waiting for an ambulance."

"I am horrified by the depravity of killing civilians while they are at their most vulnerable and seeking basic assistance. These constitute atrocity crimes of the highest order."

Since Israel began its military campaign, a staggering five per cent of Gaza's population has been killed or injured, and more than 75 per cent displaced. Gavia Betancur urged the international community to remember the humanity of these victims.

"Palestinian lives are not mere statistics. These are families struggling to make ends meet, loved ones torn apart, children trying to find joy amidst unimaginable trauma, people like anywhere else," she said.

"The international community must abandon the fiction that Israel will respect the principles of international humanitarian and human rights law in its military operations," the expert said.

"An immediate and permanent ceasefire, coupled with meaningful measures to document and [ensure accountability](#) for atrocities as well as secure the fundamental rights of Palestinians in Gaza, is the only path forward for the sake of our shared humanity."

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/gaza-israels-dehumanisation-displaced-persons-must-end-says-un-expert>

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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Other Relevant Information

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN expert launches new tools for law enforcement to foster peaceful protest

States should uphold their human rights obligations and facilitate, not suppress, peaceful protests, a UN expert said today as he presented a set of new practical and technical tools for law enforcement. ...

Clément Voule, UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association ... presented a Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests to assist States in meeting their human rights obligations. ...

The model protocol is complemented by checklists for law enforcement officials, a principles-based guide for the human rights-compliant use of digital technologies in the context of protests, and a handbook to be developed by the end of 2024. ...

Voule stressed that the new tools provide practical guidance on how to ensure that law enforcement decisions, strategies and actions at all stages of protests are based on the principles of non-discrimination, precaution and accountability, and aim to de-escalate and prevent the use of force. ...

"Authorities should ensure that individuals and groups can freely mobilise and come together to make their voices heard, denounce injustices, defend rights, call for peace and

express solidarity with victims to confront the pressing challenges facing the world today, including wars, inequalities and the climate crisis,” the expert said. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-expert-launches-new-tools-law-enforcement-foster-peaceful-protest>

Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests (A/HRC/55/60)

<https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/55/60>

Human rights compliant uses of digital technologies by law enforcement for the facilitation of peaceful protests

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Toolkit-law-enforcement-Component-on-Digital-Technologies.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>

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

**** Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill**

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

Amendment Paper

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54390/documents/4539>

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

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