



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

col/ 965 Lucy Powell (Labour Co-op): This week, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology made a grovelling apology and retracted baseless allegations she made against a member of her own advisory body on her personal Twitter account—allegations that were based on a dodgy dossier produced by a Conservative think-tank. Remarkably, the damages paid out came from taxpayers' money from her Department. This is a new low for ministerial standards, so perhaps the Leader of the House can clarify a few things. Was the £15,000 paid in damages the total cost borne by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology? Apparently, the Secretary of State was given appropriate advice, but did she follow it, or were her accusations against the advice she received? If they were, surely she should personally pay the costs.

Will the Leader of the House urgently ensure that the Secretary of State is accountable to Parliament? The Government cannot have it both ways: if the money was paid by taxpayers because it related to the Secretary of State's ministerial responsibilities, she must come to Parliament as a Minister and account for that. Other Ministers were told that their Twitter accounts were matters for them personally. Does the Secretary of State still have the confidence of the Leader of the House? ...

col/ 967 Penny Mordaunt: ... The hon. Lady can no doubt obtain from the

Department details of some of the issues that she raised. However, I remind the House, because the hon. Lady was really probing the character of the Secretary of State, that when the latter was entitled to a redundancy payment of £16,000 for having been a Secretary of State, she did not take it, but handed it back to the Department, because that was the right thing to do. That speaks volumes about my right hon. Friend's character, and how much she values the fact that we are talking about taxpayers' money. ...

col 968 Richard Thomson (SNP): ... the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology has cost the taxpayer £15,000 after falsely accusing an academic of supporting Hamas. Could we have a debate on the limits of privilege, specifically whether it is now the Government's policy that Ministers can say whatever they like outside Parliament and be financially indemnified from the consequences by the taxpayer? Does she consider it the taxpayer's job to underwrite financially the Conservative party's culture wars whenever its members overstep the mark?

Penny Mordaunt: ... It is rather cheeky of the hon. Gentleman to lecture us about use of public funds; I refer him to what I said earlier about the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-07/debates/CF8020F9-C42E-4AFA-A059-92D1BC3F4C35/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-37D265D8-2FD7-4D99-BCE9-E87003E97415>

Information about the case referred to above can be read at

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-68486206>

House of Commons Written Answers

Muslim Council of Britain

Stephen Timms (Labour) [16571] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Answer of 29 February 2024 to Question 15545 on Muslim Council of Britain, when a MCB leader most recently took a position that contradicts the UK's fundamental values.

Lee Rowley: I refer the Rt Hon Member to the answer I gave to Question UIN 15545 on 29 February 2024.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16571>

The Government, under successive administrations, has a long-standing policy of non-engagement with the Muslim Council of Britain. Previous MCB leaders have taken positions that contradict our fundamental values and these have not been explicitly retracted.

The Government is committed to engaging with a broad range of leaders and organisations across many different communities and civil society groups. Engagement with communities can strengthen our democracy, our policymaking and our society.

However, as highlighted in the Independent Review of Prevent, where best practice is not followed engagement can create risks. It may inadvertently provide a platform or legitimacy for groups or individuals who oppose our shared democratic values and institutions, and allow them to gain greater influence, including in the eyes of those communities to whom they aim to promote their narratives.

In its response to the Independent Review of Prevent, the Government committed to ensuring it neither funds, works or consults with extremism-linked groups or individuals. DLUHC is working closely with the Home Office and key cross-government partners, including the Commission for Countering Extremism, to implement this recommendation.

The answer referred to in the above question can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-26/15545>

The following ten questions all received the same answer

Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16840] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what recommendations the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group has made since 2019; and what progress he has made on implementing those recommendations.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16841] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, how many reports he has received from the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group since 2019.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16842] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which Minister in his Department is responsible for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16855] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group has taken to engage with Muslim communities since 2019.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16856] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, what key priorities the Government has identified in collaboration with the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group; what support other Departments have provided to ensure that recommendations are taken fully to implementation stage; and whether that group has identified any difficulty in delivery of the recommendations since 2019.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16857] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, what trends in anti-Muslim sentiment and hatred that group has (a) reviewed and (b) identified since 2019; and what appropriate actions it has suggested for (i) the Government and (ii) communities as a result of that review.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16859] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, who the (a) independent members of that group and (b) representatives from each of the Departments listed in that document are.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16883] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether the Anti-Muslim Working Group exists as of 4 March; and when that group last met.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16843] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what updates his Department has provided about relevant developments in its area of work to the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group since 2019.

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16858] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, what steps his Department has taken to meet its commitments as secretariat to that group.

Lee Rowley: The Government is clear that all forms of racial and religious discrimination are unacceptable, and they have no place in our communities. We continue to take a broad approach to religious hatred which will develop on the work of the previous Antisemitism and Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Groups.

As my Hon Friend the Member for Kensington outlined in the House, we plan to appoint a new independent adviser on anti-Muslim hatred, and we will update the House shortly.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16840>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16841>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16842>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16855>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16856>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16857>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16859>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16883>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16843>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16858>

The draft terms of reference referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/724354/AMHWG_Draft_TOR.pdf

The statement to the House referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-03-04/debates/25338D67-1AE6-4DDA-99CE-1D08B53EF20D/Islamophobia#contribution-2272FAED-A4E8-4583-92AA-1909B7FA88A1>

Commission for Countering Extremism

Understanding and Responding to Blasphemy Extremism in the UK

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65e9ba875b65240011f21b9a/Understanding+and+Responding+to+Blasphemy+Extremism+in+the+UK.pdf>

Charity Commission

Regulator launches investigation into Al-Manar Centre Trust over serious concerns about video post

The Charity regulator for England and Wales has opened an inquiry into the Al-Manar Centre Trust following serious concerns about a video post on the charity's Facebook page.

The [Al-Manar Centre Trust](#) was established in 2009 to advance and support Islamic education, strengthen community relationships and religious harmony in Cardiff, and to educate the public about the Islamic faith.

The video was posted on the charity's Facebook account in November 2023 and has raised concerns around the charity's social media controls. The video, which was not created by the charity but posted on one of its social media channels, could suggest support for Hamas, a proscribed terrorist organisation. ...

Following the Commission's intervention, the charity's trustees have removed the video

and taken steps to improve their social media protocols.

The inquiry will examine the trustees' administration, management, and governance of the charity. As part of inquiry's scope, the regulator will fully investigate the events leading to the posting of the video.

The regulator will also be seeking assurances that improvements made to the charity's social media protocols are being implemented and that these are sufficiently robust to prevent this from happening again. This includes a review to confirm that there is no other inappropriate material on any platform used by the charity. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regulator-launches-investigation-into-al-manar-centre-trust-over-serious-concerns-about-video-post>

Scottish Parliament Motion

Foyso Choudhury (Labour) [S6M-12428] United Nations International Day to Combat Islamophobia on 15 March 2024 – That the Parliament welcomes the United Nations International Day to Combat Islamophobia on 15 March 2024; understands that there has been a recent significant rise in reported Islamophobic attacks across the country, and appreciates the hard work that Police Scotland, local authorities and community organisations are undertaking to tackle this form of hate in society; recognises what it considers to be the immensely challenging circumstances facing Scotland's Muslim community, as, it believes, men and women come under attack from extremist ideologies and experience frequent abuse, as well as discrimination and marginalisation in the media, at school, at work and online; acknowledges all of those who have supported Islamophobia awareness and continue to stand with those affected by any form of hate, and hopes for Scotland to continue to be a place where people are free to practice their faith without fear.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12428>

Scottish Government

First Minister First Minister @HumzaYousaf has sent his best wishes to everyone celebrating the holy month of Ramadan. He thanked the Muslim communities of Scotland for the incredible contribution they make, and said he would hope and pray for peace for all. [plus video]

<https://twitter.com/ScotGovFM/status/1766909442208018588>

Humza Yousaf #Ramadan Mubarak to Muslims in Scotland, the UK and right across the world as the blessed month is upon us. My thoughts are with those who are less fortunate, who will go hungry not due fasting but due to conflict & poverty. This Ramadan I will be praying & hoping for peace.

<https://twitter.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1766918399869788659>

Northern Ireland Assembly Written Answer

Schools: Racist Bullying

Nick Mathison (Alliance) [AQW 7928 22-27] To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of the 2023 Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities recommendation that the NI Executive take measures to tackle racist bullying in schools, including through adding ethnic identifiers on recording of racist bullying incidents.

Minister of Education: The Department has taken a number of measures in recent years to address bullying and the factors that contribute to it.

The Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act), came into effect in 2021. The Act introduced statutory duties which require schools to record incidents or alleged incidents of bullying type behaviour, their motivation and their outcome. Each school's Board of Governors has responsibility to oversee the implementation of the Act in their school. While the motivation recorded for incidents can include race, there is not currently any requirement record under legislation to record ethnic identifiers. The legislation does not include the requirement for schools to share the data that they record with the Department.

The Department established the Addressing Bullying in Schools Implementation Team (ABSIT) in the Education Authority (EA) in 2022. ABSIT provides support for schools, educational settings and young people to help them understand the requirements of the Act and embed cultures that help eradicate bullying. The work of the team also includes providing programmes of direct support for those who experience all types of bullying.

ABSIT assist with complex cases and, where appropriate, will engage with the EA's Intercultural Education Service (IES). IES helps schools and EA services to meet the additional educational needs of asylum-seeking, refugee, Traveller, Roma and other newcomer pupils, many of whom are from ethnic minority communities. IES has also contributed to the to the intercultural content for Initial Teacher Education courses delivered by the Higher Education Institutions in Northern Ireland and co-delivers an intercultural education course in partnership with Queen's University Belfast.

The curriculum in both primary and post-primary school contributes to promoting good relations and is closely aligned with my Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education Policy. Schools and teachers can choose to deliver sensitive and important aspects of the curriculum at a time when they are the subject of national debate and when young people can make explicit connections between what they are learning in school and what is happening in the wider world. This includes issues around racism and other forms of discrimination.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=391668>

TOP

Israel

See also Commons oral answers “Business of the House” that are included in the Home Affairs section above, and

Lords written answer HL2627 “South Africa: Antisemitism” that can be read in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Lords Debate

International Women's Day

col 1748 **Baroness Uddin (Non-affiliated):** ... This coming Saturday, this global movement of 1 million women will rise and coalesce alongside hundreds of thousands of men and women of every background, creed, colour and faith, or none. They will stand in solidarity with all the oppressed, occupied and violated women of our world, and in opposition to the killing of women and children in their thousands. They will call for an immediate halt to the killing fields of Palestine, where 30,000 women, children and their

families have been murdered, tens of thousands buried under tons of rubble, with bombs more horrific than Hiroshima, while 70,000 more have been injured, maimed or burned with phosphorus, or are starving—women and children—without water, basic food or medicine.

We must hold the perpetrators to account. Until that time, together with many hundreds of thousands, I shall march in peace and solidarity, giving voice to those who cannot. In honour of the Palestinian mothers, daughters and granddaughters who have been slaughtered, I will walk in the tradition of my country—this country—and shout out to demand that our Government must stop their support for the Israeli occupying force and its brutal warfare on the Palestinian people. The PM should rest assured that such marches will not stop until that slaughter stops. ...

Given what we are witnessing on our screens, millions of citizens no longer accept or believe that our arrogant Governments' war objectives are to free and liberate nations and their women from the shackles of inhumanity, injustice and dictatorship. We have fallen so short of our own moral compass, becoming oblivious to one dictator who is currently slaughtering a whole people while citing freedom and peace. ...

What can citizens do but march? I pray that these marches will yield peace and justice. The cause of Palestine has been awakened in the hearts of all citizens throughout the nations, among thousands of ordinary men and women who understand the differences between self-defence and genocidal murder, collective punishment, ethnic cleansing and war crimes. We demand justice and peace.

col 1749 I hope that these marchers will continue to oppose the actions of our Government, who are so complicit with Israel's breaking of international laws and breaching the international norms of war. The PM standing and declaring war on protestors may provide temporary cover over his conscience. Allying them with extremist behaviour will do nothing to dissuade me, my neighbours, my children or my grandchildren from marching in the tradition of the Suffragettes, and for all those who march today for freedom and justice, as they have done for hundreds of years. Yes, to call for freedom and justice across all the rivers and the seas, and all the continents, until all women in all nations are free and triumph over occupation, oppression, wars and genocide. ...

col 1750 **Baroness Goudie (Labour):** ... women on both sides of the Israel-Palestine conflict are advocating for peace amid bloodshed. ...

col 1758 **Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent (Labour):** ... We have seen graphic examples of the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, in Israel on 7 October; the horror faced by mothers in the war in Gaza; and the fear faced by yet more mothers and women, terrified at the fate of the hostages taken by Hamas ... As always, it is the women who are desperately seeking to protect and hold their families together in the face of horror. ...

col 1759 Last year, I read out the names of 32 women who did extraordinary things in life which led to their deaths. Today, I shall build on those names and say the names of those who, devastatingly, have joined their ranks. These women are no longer with us, but we have a responsibility to say their names, to remember them and to be inspired by them. ... Farah Omar, a Lebanese correspondent, was killed in a rocket strike in southern Lebanon, near the Israeli border, while reporting on hostilities in the region. Vivian Silver, a Canadian peace activist who founded Women Wage Peace, was killed on 7 October by Hamas. ...

col 1760 ... **Lord Oates (Liberal Democrat):** ... I fully associate myself with [Baroness Anderson's] comments on the horrors inflicted on women by Hamas and the suffering of women in Gaza and in conflicts around the world. ...

col 1792 **Baroness Thornton (Labour):** ... Rape and violence against women are also used often in the conduct of warfare, a most recent example being 7 October and Hamas ...

col 1798 **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education**

(Baroness Barran): ... I am afraid I absolutely refute the description from the noble Baroness, Lady Uddin, of the UK Government's position on Gaza. The priority must be an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, and then progress to a sustainable and permanent ceasefire. The Government have been quite clear about that. ...

To all the extraordinary women all around the world who are unable to live as we do, we thank you and we stand with you in spirit.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-08/debates/BD7E1C04-79EC-447F-AB2F-382CC161072D/InternationalWomen'SDay>

House of Commons Oral Answers

Free Trade Agreement Negotiations: Israel

Nicola Richards (Conservative) [901849] What recent progress her Department has made on negotiating a free trade agreement with Israel.

Bob Blackman (Conservative) [901868] What recent progress her Department has made on negotiating a free trade agreement with Israel.

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kemi Badenoch): Israel remains a part of the FTA programme, and negotiations continue. I had a productive meeting with Israel's Minister of Economy, Nir Barkat, last week in Abu Dhabi, where we discussed our existing trading relationship as well as how Israel is managing the challenges of working on an FTA while fighting a war.

Nicola Richards: Israel is facing immense challenges in its war with Hamas, but it is known around the world as a start-up nation thanks to its extraordinary tech sector, which Brits benefit from every day. Given the enormous opportunities that a bespoke free trade agreement with Israel offers to the UK, will my right hon. Friend update the House on what steps she is taking to advance negotiations?

Kemi Badenoch: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that we held a virtual negotiating round with Israel in February, focused primarily on services. That is one of the things that we are doing to move the FTA forward, and we will update Parliament shortly in the usual way via a written ministerial statement.

My hon. Friend is right to highlight Israel's world-leading tech sector, which is a reason why we want to modernise and upgrade our relations with Israel. Our current FTA was signed in 1995—it is a roll-over from the one we had with the EU—and technical collaboration, which Israel specialises in, will be made easier through an enhanced FTA. ...

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat): Can the Secretary of State give me some assurance that any free trade agreement with Israel will not allow the importation of goods produced in settlements on the west bank?

Kemi Badenoch: Yes, I can give the right hon. Member that assurance. We are clear under our existing UK-Israel trade and partnership agreement that Israeli goods originating from the State of Israel receive tariff preferences. We also have a separate interim agreement between the UK and the Palestinian Authority. I confirm that that will continue to be the case with an upgraded FTA with Israel. We will not compromise our long-standing positions on the middle east process throughout this negotiation, including with respect to settlements.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-07/debates/6421D075-8CD3-479E-BF4B-AB3EAA5FE18F/FreeTradeAgreementNegotiationsIsrael>

Topical Questions: Business and Trade

Greg Smith (Conservative) [901875] Israel is one of the United Kingdom's most dynamic trading partners, so does my right hon. Friend agree that prioritising a free trade deal with

Israel will complement the good work that the Government are doing to defeat the haters as part of the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill, and send an unmistakable message that the UK stands ready to strengthen our unbreakable friendship with Israel?

Kemi Badenoch: My hon. Friend is right. Israel's current relationship with the UK is worth about £6.4 billion, but our FTA is a roll-over of the one that Israel signed in 1995 with the EU. It does not take into account services, digital, artificial intelligence or genome sequencing. There is a lot that we can do. That is why we are working on this FTA. It is a priority for us. As I said earlier, we face many challenges in carrying on negotiations with a country that is at war, but we are working to overcome them.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-07/debates/FFC0DEFC-5C12-4D02-A3C5-5CCD9FAB66AA/TopicalQuestions#contribution-7126ACE5-D224-4085-AC39-AA247CCEB61E>

Topical Questions: Business and Trade

Jim Shannon (DUP): I am very encouraged by the Secretary of State's comments about the free trade deal with Israel. The UK is a friend of Israel, and Israel is a friend of the UK, so what more can we do to increase trade between us? More importantly—and very regionally—how can the Secretary of State ensure that Northern Ireland is very much part of that trade deal, so that companies in Strangford and across Northern Ireland also feel the benefit?

Kemi Badenoch: The hon. Gentleman will remember that we had the Northern Ireland investment summit, at which we talked about bringing more investment into Northern Ireland. He will know that around 500 Israeli firms operate in the United Kingdom. That investment from overseas is creating thousands of jobs in high-value sectors, and a free trade agreement will help to increase the investment. That will benefit businesses in Northern Ireland, too.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-07/debates/FFC0DEFC-5C12-4D02-A3C5-5CCD9FAB66AA/TopicalQuestions#contribution-A38DFD27-1C61-4484-BBAC-70DE52182695>

Business of the House

Michael Ellis (Conservative): Tomorrow is International Women's Day, and today marks five months since the barbaric Hamas attack on Israel. Of the 134 hostages still cruelly held by Hamas, 19 are women, and of those, five are teenage girls. Will my right hon. Friend join me in marking International Women's Day by supporting the campaign called #BringBackOurGirls? Will she also take this opportunity to send a message to their families, who are enduring unimaginable pain and the living nightmare of these young women being in the hands of vicious rapist terrorists?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for affording the whole House the opportunity to send the message to all the hostage families that they are still very much in our thoughts. Of those women and girls still kept hostage, the youngest is 19 and the oldest is 70. We can only imagine the horrors they are facing. This week the UN published its report on the sexual violence suffered by Israeli women and girls on 7 October. It looked at over 5,000 photographs and over 50 hours of footage of those attacks, and it concluded that there was evidence at the Nova music festival of rape, gang rape and murder. It is the most appalling situation, and I am glad that the UN now has that evidence on record and has produced that report. We cannot let these poor women and girls suffer what they must be suffering a moment longer. We must bring them home, and I am sure that is the sentiment of everyone in the House.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-07/debates/CF8020F9-C42E-4AFA-A059-92D1BC3F4C35/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-E1D67199-DE87-4CFA-9B17-CDF1CBECAD3E>

House of Commons Written Answers

Palestinians: Visas

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [16389] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will take steps to help ensure that Palestinians who are entitled to come to the UK on a visa are able to leave Gaza to acquire the necessary documentation in the event of a pause in fighting.

Andrew Mitchell: We have been facilitating British citizens and their foreign national dependents (spouse, unmarried/civil partner, child under 18) to come to the UK, provided they have valid travel documents and hold a minimum of 6 months right to remain on their UK visa or are non-visa nationals. We have helped 315 British nationals, their dependants and relevant visa holders to leave Gaza so far. We are working with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities to support any remaining eligible people still in Gaza. Individuals who do not meet these criteria should apply for a visa to enable them to enter the UK in the normal way.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16389>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Visas: Palestinians

Stephen Farry (Alliance) [16279] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many visas for Palestinian nationals (a) are being processed, (b) have been approved and (c) have been rejected since 1 October 2023.

Stephen Farry (Alliance) [16538] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people in Gaza are awaiting the results of their applications for a visa as a dependant of someone in the UK on a (a) work and (b) student visa, who applied (i) on and (ii) before 7 October 2023.

Stephen Farry (Alliance) [16539] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications for visas for Palestinian nationals were (a) rejected and (b) approved in (i) October 2023, (ii) November 2023, (iii) December 2023, (iv) January 2024 and (v) February 2024.

Tom Pursglove: The Home Office does not publish data at the level of detail requested, however, we do publish data on entry clearance visas, by nationality, in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on work and sponsored study visas granted are published in table Vis_D02 of the [Entry clearance detailed dataset](#). Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbook. The latest data relate to 2023 Q4.

Every attempt is made to meet the service level agreement standard, but in certain cases additional checks are required which can mean visa requests take longer to process.

The latest data on performance against service standards is published through migration transparency data and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/migration-transparency-data#uk-visas-and-immigration>

The Home Office also publishes information on visa processing times for applications inside and outside the UK at: [Visa processing times](#).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16279>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16538>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16539>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Visas: Gaza

Nadia Whittome (Labour) [16438] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people from Gaza have arrived in the UK following a successful application for a family visa as a (a) spouse, (b) partner, (c) fiancé, (d) child, (e) parent, (f) relative providing care of a British citizen, (g) settled resident and (h) person with protection status since 7 October 2023.

Nadia Whittome (Labour) [16439] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people in Gaza are awaiting results of applications for family visas as a (a) spouse, (b) partner, (c) fiancé, (d) child, (e) parent, (f) relative providing care of a British citizen, (g) settled resident and (h) person with protection status who applied (i) on or (ii) before 7 October 2023.

Tom Pursglove: The number of people in Gaza who are awaiting results of applications for family visas does not form part of any current transparency data or migration statistics and is not published.

Transparency data is however published quarterly on Gov.uk and includes data on the outcomes of visas issued on family routes, although this does not necessarily equate to entering the UK once granted leave.

The latest transparency data can be found at: [Migration transparency data](#) and [Immigration system statistics data tables](#).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16438>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16439>

Refugees: Gaza

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [16266] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will take steps to enable children in Gaza with parents living in the UK to come to 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. UKVI is working closely with the FCDO 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.

British citizens and those with settled status in the UK, together with their foreign national dependants, (spouse, unmarried/civil partner, child under 18), 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16266>

Palestinians: Refugees

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [16824] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to help reunite civilians in Gaza with family studying at UK universities.

Robert Halfon: The best way to provide protection for vulnerable people in Gaza is an end to the fighting as soon as possible. That is why the government is 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. The government is monitoring the situation in Israel and Gaza closely to ensure that we are able to respond appropriately.

Universities offer a range of dedicated support to their international students before they arrive in the UK, on arrival and during their studies. This includes both pastoral care and financial support. If a student is experiencing difficulties, they should contact the university to discuss their circumstances.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16824>

Overseas Students: Palestinians

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [16392] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate she has made of the (a) number of students from (i) the Palestinian territories and (ii) Gaza studying in the UK and (b) the number and proportion of those students that are in the UK on British Council scholarship.

Robert Halfon: The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), now part of JISC, is responsible for collecting and publishing data about UK higher education (HE). The latest statistics refer to the 2021/22 academic year.

Table 28 of HESA's 'Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2021/22' reports the number of non-UK domiciled HE students by country of domicile. This data is accessible at:

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-28>

In the 2021/22 academic year, there were 245 (1) student enrolments (2) at UK HE providers who were domiciled in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (formerly the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip) prior to their studies. The major source of tuition fees of five (3%) of them were recorded as 'Overseas student award from HM government/British Council'.

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5, in line with HESA rounding conventions. More information on rounding and suppression strategy can be found at the following link:

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/students#rounding-and-suppression-strategy>

2. Enrolments refers to students in all years of study.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16392>

Palestinians: Visas

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [16271] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had discussions with international counterparts on a Palestinian visa scheme to support the health needs of civilians.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government's priority is to support healthcare provision within Gaza, where medical needs are greatest. We are focussed on practical solutions that save lives. On 21 February the UK and Jordan delivered 4 tonnes of aid by air to Tal Al-Hawa Hospital in northern Gaza.

The UK is also providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the World Health Organisation, the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation and Egyptian Red Crescent Society to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16271>

Palestinians: Health Services

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [16263] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing injured

Palestinians to be treated at UK hospitals until their health is stabilised.

Tom Pursglove: The UK Government is monitoring the situation in Gaza carefully and keeping this situation under review, recognising that there will be many people facing very challenging circumstances and decisions. The UK Government is also calling for unimpeded humanitarian access in Gaza, so that essential aid can reach civilian populations, including food, water, fuel and medical supplies. It is important that all possible measures are taken to protect civilians and ensure safe humanitarian access. Alongside this, the UK is exploring how best to support the medical needs of those in Gaza, including what options can be provided in the region. The early work we have done shows that there is much we can do in the region, and we are focussed on supporting medical assistance in the region, including through the field hospitals that have been established, helping to send medical teams to referral hospitals in the region. Should specific cases be identified where individuals would be better off taking the long journey to Britain, we do not rule that out and we will continue to look at this.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16263>

Israeli Settlements: Overseas Trade

Alan Brown (SNP) [16732] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 1 March 2024 to Question 15936 on Israeli Settlements, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of banning trade of goods from settlements on the West Bank.

Andrew Mitchell: We advise British businesses to bear in mind the UK Government's view on the illegality of settlements under international law when considering their investments and activities in the region. Our position is that only Israeli goods originating from the State of Israel will be covered by the UK-Israel Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Palestinian goods originating from the West Bank and Gaza will continue to benefit from the terms of the UK-Palestinian Authority FTA. Goods originating from Israeli settlements in the West Bank will be covered by neither FTA.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16732>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/15936>

Israel: Arms Trade

Dan Carden (Labour) [16421] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will respond to the open letter from civil society groups entitled UK Government's Refusal to Suspend Arms Transfers to Israel, published on 28 February 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government operates a robust and thorough assessment of licence applications against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria and we will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with that Criteria including where there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law.

We are monitoring the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories very closely. All our export licences are kept under careful review, and we are able to amend, suspend or revoke extant licences, as well as refuse new licence applications, if they are found to be inconsistent with the Criteria.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16421>

The letter referred to above can be read at

<https://waronwant.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/UK%20Government's%20Refusal%20to%20Suspend%20Arms%20Transfers%20to%20Israel.pdf>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Arms Trade: Israel

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

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

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

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

The press notice referred to above can be read at

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

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Arms Trade: Israel

Caroline Lucas (Green) [15430] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 22 February to Question 13982 on Arms Trade: Israel, whether she has (a) amended, (b) suspended, (c) refused and (d) revoked any licences to export (i) arms and (ii) arms components to Israel since 12 February 2024.

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

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

Information about licences to Israel from 12th February 2024 has not yet been published as official statistics. Information regarding export licence decisions made between 1 January 2024 – 31 March 2024 will be published later this year.

In the event a decision was taken to amend, suspend or revoke any licences, we would contact the affected exporters directly and, where relevant, issue a Notice to Exporters which would be published on GOV.UK.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-23/15430>

The answer referred to above can be read at

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

L3Harris: Export Controls

Caroline Lucas (Green) [16084] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to his oral contribution of 27 February 2024 on Israel and Gaza, Official Report, column 163, if he will provide a response to the queries raised by the hon. Member for Brighton Pavilion in relation to licences for L3Harris.

Andrew Mitchell: We have a robust arms export licensing regime, and all exports are regularly assessed against clear criteria. We regularly publish data on export licensing decisions.

We regularly review Israel's capability and commitment to International

Humanitarian Law. We act in accordance with that.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16084>

The queries and oral contribution referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-27/debates/D05B7810-FB34-40B8-8AA9-28CDC3F36270/IsraelAndGaza#contribution-C0036F8C-0974-4CA8-BF61-619C2BA4639A>

Israel: RAF Akrotiri

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [16901] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether any Israeli Air Force F-35s have landed at RAF Akrotiri since 7 October 2023.

James Heapey: For operational security reasons and as a matter of policy, the Ministry of Defence does not offer comment or information relating to foreign nations' military aircraft movements or operations.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16901>

Israel: Air Force

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [16902] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department (a) has and (b) has had an agreement with the Israeli Air Force to provide technical support for its fleet of F-35s.

James Heapey: There are no technical support agreements between the UK and Israel for F-35.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16902>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Weapons

Greg Smith (Conservative) [16428] 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 recent report from the Israel Defence Force's Colonel Elad Shushan on the presence of weapons at civilian sites.

Tom Randall (Conservative) [16434] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of reports of weapons being found in schools in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: We are aware of reports of Hamas using schools and other infrastructure for their operations. We are strongly condemn Hamas' ongoing use of civilian areas. By embedding themselves in the civilian population and civilian infrastructure, Hamas is putting Palestinian civilians at grave risk. We have been clear that for a lasting peace, removing Hamas' capacity to continue launching attacks against Israel and ensuring Hamas is no longer in charge of Gaza are both vital steps.

However, we also remain deeply concerned about the impact of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operations on the civilian population in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have underlined the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16428>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16434>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-central-gaza-where-gunmen-lurk-underground-a-commander-sees-a-long-slog-ahead/>

Gaza: Internally Displaced People

Dan Carden (Labour) [16188] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and

Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 22 February 2024 to Question 15325 on Gaza: Internally Displaced People, whether he plans to seek guarantees from his Israeli counterparts on the right to return of Palestinians displaced from their homes in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: We have been clear that we need Israel to ensure effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys, humanitarian operations and indeed IDP returns.

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16188>

The answer referred to above can be read at

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

Egypt: Gaza

Nadia Whittome (Labour) [16922] 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 reports of Palestinians being required to pay large sums of money to facilitate their exit from Gaza in to Egypt.

Andrew Mitchell: Egypt is a key regional partner in supporting the Government's response to the crisis. We welcome efforts by Egypt in getting aid into Gaza and British Nationals out. We are aware of these reports and do not recommend individuals seek or obtain permissions to cross the border by these means.

As the British Government has said, 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, and for that pause to lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to further fighting. This remains the focus of all our diplomatic effort.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16922>

Gaza: Water

Ian Byrne (Labour) [16946] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to help make the water pipeline from Israel into northern Gaza operational.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK has raised the issue of access to water in the Occupied Palestinian Territories with the Israeli authorities. The Foreign Secretary has been clear that Israel must take steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza including allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses, opening more routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity. The Prime Minister pressed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation in his call with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 15 February.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16946>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [16261] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) aid workers and (b) medical volunteers have access to Gaza as soon as possible.

Andrew Mitchell: We need Israel to ensure effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys and humanitarian operations and facilitate access, as well as ensure the UN has the people, vehicles, equipment and fuel to distribute aid safely across Gaza. This includes issuing visas.

The Prime Minister noted the importance of protecting civilian infrastructure like

hospitals in his call with Prime Minister Netanyahu during their call 15 February. We have trebled our aid commitment this financial year to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the Egyptian Red Crescent.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16261>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Beth Winter (Labour) [16037] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has made an estimate of the number of tonnes of (a) aid and (b) UK-funded aid entering Gaza each (i) day and (ii) month in the 12 months.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK has delivered 161 tonnes of life saving aid and equipment to Egypt for the Gaza response. This comprised 74 tonnes on board four RAF flights in October and November and 87 tonnes - inclusive of five tonnes of Cypriot aid - on board RFA Lyme Bay in January. In late January the UK and Qatar delivered a joint consignment of 17 tonnes of family sized tents, and in February the UK and Jordan delivered 4 tonnes of aid by air to Tal Al-Hawa Hospital in northern Gaza.

Additionally, the UK is funding a number of trusted partners through their large-scale appeals to procure and deliver aid to Gaza. This includes supporting the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. 750 tonnes of life-saving food aid arrived in the first delivery in December and a second delivery of 315 tonnes was made in January. It must be recognised that the support to large scale appeals prevents us from directly attributing UK funding to specific items, and it remains challenging to track aid deliveries by weight by international partners and aid organisations. Updates on the number of aid trucks entering Gaza are published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) as part of their daily updates on "Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel - reported impact", available on their website

<https://www.ochaopt.org/crisis>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16037>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [16258] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what preparations his Department has made for increasing aid to Gaza after a potential ceasefire.

Andrew Mitchell: There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza. Our focus must be on practical solutions that save lives.

We need Israel to ensure effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys, humanitarian operations and IDP returns, and facilitate access, as well as ensure the UN has the people, vehicles, equipment and fuel to distribute aid safely across Gaza. This includes issuing visas.

We have also called on Israel to extend the opening hours and capacity of the Nitzana screening facility and Kerem Shalom checkpoint so more trucks, aid and fuel can enter Gaza, and to open the Kerem Shalom crossing 7 days a week.

We also want to see Israel remove restrictions to ensure greater consistency on the goods allowed in, and unencumbered access to aid coming from Jordan. In addition, we want Israel to open Ashdod Port as a route for aid to reach Gaza, open the Erez Crossing to allow direct access to the north of Gaza, and restore water, fuel and electricity connections.

The Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is based in the region and is working intensively to address

the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16258>

The following two questions both received the same answer

UNRWA: Finance

Dan Carden (Labour) [16877] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the EU Commission's decision to (a) restore funding for UNRWA and (b) allocate additional emergency support for Palestinians.

Dan Carden (Labour) [16878] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the EU Commission's statement entitled Commission will proceed to paying €50 million to UNRWA and increase emergency support to Palestinians by €68 million in 2024, published on 1 March 2024, what his Department's timescale is to review the decision to suspend funding to UNRWA.

Andrew Mitchell: We are appalled by allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned.

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

Our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the current humanitarian response. We have trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings. We are providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16877>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16878>

West Bank: Palestinians

Ian Byrne (Labour) [16945] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure protection of Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

Andrew Mitchell: We urge Israel to halt settlement expansion immediately. 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.

We must also work with our allies to provide serious, practical and enduring support needed to bolster the Palestinian Authority.

We already provide technical and practical support and are ready to do more. The Palestinian Authority also must take much needed steps on reform, including setting out a pathway to democratic progress.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16945>

Palestinians: Textbooks

Greg Smith (Conservative) [16427] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his Palestinian counterpart on the content of Palestinian Authority textbooks.

Andrew Mitchell: We regularly discuss issues relating to the curriculum and textbooks with counterparts including in the Palestinian Authority (PA). The UK-supported 2021 review of the Palestinian Authority (PA) curriculum found improvements in content, with previously flagged materials removed. We need to see further curriculum reform from the PA, and we continue to raise this with them regularly.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16427>

House of Lords Written Answers

Gaza: Ceasefires

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL2708] To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the government of the United States regarding whether the United Nations may support a temporary ceasefire in Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We engage closely with the US on all aspects of the conflict and we are working closely with our partners, including the US, to deliver an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-22/hl2708>

Palestinians: Women

Baroness Helic (Conservative) [HL2654] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the United Nations press release UN experts appalled by reported human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls, published on 19 February, concerning findings of reported human rights violations to Palestinian women and girls by Israeli security forces from (1) the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, (2) the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, and (3) the Working group on discrimination against women and girls.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK condemns sexual violence unequivocally and without exception. These reports are deeply disturbing. Reports of sexual violence must be fully investigated to ensure justice for survivors and victims.

Through our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict programmes and dedicated funding totalling £60 million, we are leading work internationally to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and strengthen justice and support for all survivors.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-21/hl2654>

The press release referred to above can be read at

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

Gaza: Hospitals

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL2707] To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel concerning the operations by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) at Nasser Hospital on 15 February; and whether they have ascertained in any discussions with that government (1) whether the IDF operation located any hostages held by Hamas or evidence of their presence at the hospital, and (2) how many confirmed Hamas terrorists have been apprehended as a result

of the IDF operation.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK has raised with Israel the need to limit its operations to military targets, protect health facilities and avoid harming civilians, including when the Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu on 15 February. Specifically in relation to the Nasser Hospital operation, we made it clear that Israel must assist with urgent and safe evacuations of patients from Nasser Hospital where needed.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced on 17 February that it had arrested 100 suspects during the Nasser Hospital operation and that they did not find any hostages.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-22/hl2707>

Gaza: Children

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green) [HL2697] To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the remarks by Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton on 13 February (HL Deb col 140), what assessment they have made of the events surrounding the death of Hind Rajab, fellow family members and Red Crescent rescuers; and what steps they plan to take in response.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: This is a horrific incident. It must be fully and transparently investigated by the Israeli authorities. We have consistently stressed the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza and to take all possible measures to limit its operations to military targets, avoid harming civilians and ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities. We continue to engage with the Government of Israel at the most senior levels. The most important step in protecting civilians and particularly children will be securing a sustainable ceasefire. That is why the UK has been consistent in calling for an immediate pause, that then progresses towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-22/hl2697>

The remarks referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-13/debates/43E1465D-10FC-4BE4-A9B3-8AD9E1DB8AD1/ChildrenInGaza#contribution-87F6F55A-1D89-44AD-BC81-618A5F0ECEEf>

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee

Foreign Affairs Committee “deeply concerned” about Egypt-Gaza border crisis

... Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Alicia Kearns MP, said: “We’ve just returned from the aid staging location in Egypt, where thousands of trucks are sat waiting to deliver aid. Egypt is playing an important role in the current crisis as a mediator between Israel and Hamas towards a truce and enabling the delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza. We also held important discussions with counterparts regarding crises such as Sudan, Yemen and beyond. I am deeply concerned about the situation Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee saw at Egypt’s border with Gaza. We saw hundreds upon hundreds of trucks sitting in Al Arish, unable to deliver their goods to those so desperately in need of the lifesaving aid they carry due to insufficient opening hours of the crossing, inconsistent restrictions on what items can enter Gaza, and a lack of de-confliction to protect humanitarian operations. We also saw tonnes of goods that had been rejected. Last month there was almost a week where no trucks entered Gaza with aid and 17,000 children are now unaccompanied due to being separated from their families or being orphaned. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/78/foreign-affairs-committee/news/200335/foreign-affairs-committee-deeply-concerned-about-egyptgaza-border-crisis/>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Activation of a maritime corridor to deliver humanitarian assistance to Gaza: joint statement from the European Commission, the Republic of Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States endorsing the activation of a maritime corridor to deliver humanitarian assistance to Gaza

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is dire, with innocent Palestinian families and children desperate for basic necessities. That is why ... the European Commission, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, the Republic of Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States announce our intent to open a maritime corridor to deliver much-needed additional amounts of humanitarian assistance by sea.

Cyprus' leadership in establishing the Amalthea Initiative – which outlines a mechanism for securely shipping aid from Cyprus to Gaza via sea – was integral to enabling this joint effort to launch a maritime corridor. Together, our nations intend to build on this model to deliver significant additional aid by sea, working in coordination with UN Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza Sigrid Kaag – who is charged with facilitating, coordinating, monitoring, and verifying the flow of aid into Gaza under UN Security Council Resolution 2720. ...

The United States announced an emergency mission led by the US military to establish a temporary pier in Gaza, in coordination with humanitarian partners and other countries, to enable the delivery of significant quantities of assistance by sea. These efforts will be closely coordinated with the Government of Israel.

The delivery of humanitarian assistance directly to Gaza by sea will be complex, and our nations will continue to assess and adjust our efforts to ensure we deliver aid as effectively as possible. This maritime corridor can – and must – be part of a sustained effort to increase the flow of humanitarian aid and commercial commodities into Gaza through all possible routes. We will continue to work with Israel to expand deliveries by land, insisting that it facilitate more routes and open additional crossings to get more aid to more people. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-activation-of-a-maritime-corridor-to-deliver-humanitarian-assistance-to-gaza>

UNSCR 2720, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Fears over Gaza catastrophe as brutal conflict enters sixth month

Today we are entering the sixth month of a brutal conflict that has destroyed the lives and homes of countless Palestinians, as well as Israelis. We fear that this already catastrophic situation may slide deeper into the abyss as many Palestinians mark the holy month of Ramadan – a period that is meant to honour peace and tolerance – should Israel launch its threatened military offensive into Rafah, where 1.5 million people have been displaced in deplorable sub-human conditions.

Any ground assault on Rafah would incur massive loss of life and would heighten the risk of further atrocity crimes. This must not be allowed to happen. We also fear that further Israeli restrictions on access by Palestinians to East Jerusalem and Al Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan could further inflame tensions.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights repeats that there must be an immediate end to this conflict, and that the killing and destruction must stop.

The hostages, who have now endured over 150 days of suffering and torment, must be

released unconditionally and returned to their distraught families.

Israel, as the occupying power, must – we repeat - fully comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law to provide the increasingly desperate civilian population of Gaza with the necessary food and medical supplies, or, if it is unable to do so, ensure that the population has access to critical life-saving humanitarian assistance commensurate with their needs.

Border crossings and corridors must be fully opened and steps must be taken to ensure the free and secure movement of aid convoys to civilians wherever they are located within the Gaza strip if wider starvation and needless suffering are to be averted.

Since 7 October, parties to this conflict have paid little heed to international law that protects human rights and governs the conduct of hostilities. This has been a stain on the collective conscience of humanity. The laws of war are clear and must be respected at all times and in all circumstances. Those who violate them must be held to account.

The High Commissioner reminds all States parties that under Article 1, common to the four Geneva Conventions, they have the obligation to respect and ensure respect for the rules laid down by those Conventions. This obligation includes not only taking all available steps to ensure full compliance by the parties engaged in hostilities, but also means that States must not, through their own policies or actions, facilitate the commission of violations of humanitarian law.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2024/03/fears-over-gaza-catastrophe-brutal-conflict-enters-sixth-month>

UN experts urge the international community to step up pressure to end crimes, uphold international law and save lives in Gaza

... “Five months after the carefully planned and executed massacre of approximately 1,200 persons in Israel, perpetrated by Hamas and other armed groups on 7 October 2023, and the military response by the Israeli armed forces which followed, international crimes continue to take place on a daily basis in the Gaza strip.

The reported systematic and widespread nature of the crimes committed on 7 October, including alleged sexual violence against women and girls, hostage-taking and other violations of international law, may amount to crimes against humanity. More than one hundred hostages, including children and elderly persons, whose whereabouts and fate remain unknown, are still being held by Hamas and other militant groups.

This may be tantamount to enforced disappearances, which may also amount to torture and ill-treatment of the hostages and their relatives. We call for their immediate and unconditional release.

Israeli armed forces are reported to have repeatedly violated the duties of distinction, proportionality and precaution, as well as the prohibition of indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks under international humanitarian law, and to have failed in their duty to respect, protect and fulfil the right to life of the population of Gaza and the West Bank, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of protected persons, including a large number of children, women and the elderly, which may amount to grave breaches of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Earlier calls by UN Special Procedures for the international community to investigate allegations of violations, help ensure accountability and prevent further violations have not gone unheeded. We welcome the order rendered on 26 January 2024 by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for provisional measures in the case concerning the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel); the investigations carried out so far by United Nations experts, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in

Conflict, and investigations underway by the International Criminal Court.

However, much more needs to be urgently done in order effectively and measurably stop any further carnage in Gaza.

Today, we call on the international community to step up, as a matter of the highest priority, its efforts to ensure full and measurable compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law obligations in Gaza, including the immediate, unconditional and safe release of all hostages and the full implementation of the provisional measures ordered by the ICJ on 26 January.

We urge States to use all available legal means under international law, including the jurisdiction of national courts over international crimes, to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity, reported since 7 October 2023. We stand ready to assist efforts to investigate these crimes.”

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-experts-urge-international-community-step-pressure-end-crimes-uphold>

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>

UN Human Rights Chief deplores new moves to expand Israeli settlements in occupied West Bank

UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk ... deplored Israel’s latest actions regarding the occupied West Bank, saying the drastic acceleration in settlement building is exacerbating long-standing patterns of oppression, violence and discrimination against Palestinians.

“Reports this week that Israel plans to build a further 3,476 settler homes in Maale Adumim, Efrat and Kedar fly in the face of international law,” Türk said.

In a report to the Human Rights Council, Türk said that the establishment and continuing expansion of settlements amount to the transfer by Israel of its own civilian population into the territories that it occupies, which amounts to a war crime under international law. ...

The report finds that the policies of the current Israeli Government appear aligned, to an unprecedented extent, with the goals of the Israeli settler movement to expand long-term control over the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and to steadily integrate this occupied territory into the State of Israel. ...

The establishment and continuing expansion of illegal Israeli settlements are occurring alongside the displacement of Palestinians through Israeli settler and state violence, as well as through forced evictions, non-issuance of building permits, home demolitions and movement restrictions for Palestinians.

“The West Bank is already in crisis. Yet, settler violence and settlement-related violations have reached shocking new levels, and risk eliminating any practical possibility of establishing a viable Palestinian State,” Türk said.

The report highlights the dramatic increase in the intensity, severity and regularity of Israeli settler and state violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, particularly since 7 October, 2023, which is accelerating Palestinians’ displacement from their land. ...

The report says that since 7 October, the UN Human Rights Office has documented dozens of cases of settlers wearing full or partial Israeli army uniforms and carrying army rifles, and harassing and attacking Palestinians. These developments have also further blurred the line between settler violence and state violence, including violence with the declared intent to forcibly transfer Palestinians from their land, it states.

“Israel’s actions against the Palestinian population must cease immediately. The only way forward is to find a viable political solution that finally ends the occupation, establishes an independent Palestinian state and guarantees the realization of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people,” said Türk.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-human-rights-chief-deplores-new-moves-expand-israeli-settlements-occupied>

Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/HRC/55/72)

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc5572-israeli-settlements-occupied-palestinian-territory-including-east>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

South Africa: Antisemitism

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL2627] To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of South Africa regarding the increased levels of antisemitism in that country and their relation to the government of South Africa's recent policies and statements, including their position on the conflict in Gaza.

Lord Benyon: We recognise that there are heightened tensions around the world due to the conflict in Gaza. Antisemitism has no place in our or any society and we strongly condemn it. We note that President Ramaphosa met with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and emphasised his government's denunciation of anti-Semitic behaviour towards Jewish people in South Africa. In February, the Foreign Secretary and Lord Ahmad both engaged with Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor on the conflict in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-20/hl2627>

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Other Relevant Information

United Nations

'Everyone Must Unite to Combat Intolerance, Stereotypes', Secretary-General Says, in Message for Day to Combat Islamophobia

... The International Day to Combat Islamophobia occurs at a time when we see a rising tide of anti-Muslim hate and bigotry in many parts of the world.

Institutional discrimination and other barriers are violating the human rights and dignity of Muslims. Divisive rhetoric and misrepresentation are stigmatizing communities. Online hate speech is fuelling real-life violence.

Much of this disturbing trend is part of a wider pattern of attacks against religious groups and vulnerable populations, also including Jews, minority Christian communities and others.

We must confront and root out bigotry in all its forms. Leaders must condemn inflammatory discourse and safeguard religious freedom. Digital platforms must moderate hateful content and protect users from harassment. And everyone must unite to combat intolerance, stereotypes and bias.

Together, let us commit to promoting mutual respect and understanding, foster social cohesion, and build peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all.

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22148.doc.htm>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Türk calls for measures to address religious hatred

... Expressions of religious hatred against people wearing religious symbols often disproportionately target women and girls. ...

Attacks on places of worship, and manifestations of contempt for books that are revered by believers – such as incidents of burning the Quran – are often fed by a deeper pool of misperceptions and discrimination.

Combatting discrimination and hatred is fundamental to the human rights movement. My Office, and I personally, stand in total opposition to all forms of discrimination, and to the false narratives that underly them. Yet xenophobia and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, gender, ethnicity and migrant status are rising to acutely disturbing levels today.

Since I last [spoke](#) before the Council on these issues, and in line with [resolution 53/1](#), my Office has embarked on work to set out a series of measures that can be adopted by States and other actors to address religious hatred; and the deliberate – and often politically motivated – weaponisation of religion to target the other, in particular minorities. ...

Hate-driven attacks – ranging from hateful speech to symbolic acts of contempt and acts of physical violence – appear to be rising in all regions. Frequently, such hatred and violence are actively promoted by politicians who hope to instrumentalize the public's fear at turmoil around the world by scapegoating a minority group – and it has been observed that these attacks often accompany electoral periods. This is acutely relevant in 2024, which will see more elections take place than any other year in history, and with conflicts rising, particularly in the Middle East.

Harmful stereotypes of minorities, religious or belief communities, migrants, and others are also nourished by conspiracy theories such as the paranoid “great replacement” notions ... Hatred based on religion is pernicious. It instrumentalises faith – which is grounded in bonds of compassion, solidarity and hope – and it harms people at what they may view as the core of their being and identity. ...

I am struck by the fact that most UN Member States are [assessed](#) to be lacking comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. In other words, in most of the world's countries, people may lack readily accessible and effective legal tools to deliver justice when their rights to equality are violated. ...

Justice systems should be seized more systematically of cases of expression of religious hatred – including instances of alleged desecration of sacred books and religious symbols – so that they can determine whether the threshold of advocacy of hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence has been crossed. Last October, for example, a [district court in](#) Sweden found a man guilty of incitement for distributing a video in which he burned a copy of the Qur'an, using background music that was played during the terrorist attack on a mosque in New Zealand.

States also have an obligation to combat discrimination – including on religious grounds – and I also urge such cases to be brought before courts. ...

Programmes of peer-to-peer learning for judges, lawyers and prosecutors have proven very helpful, and I encourage more work at this level. ...

All police forces must also be properly trained to record and take action on incidents of incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, including those based on religious intolerance. ...

At the same time, international human rights law does not protect religious doctrines or positions, as such. As the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) has emphasised, a display of lack of respect for a religion that does not constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence may not be prohibited.

The [Rabat Plan of Action](#), developed by my Office, delivers detailed guidance regarding the distinction between speech or action that incites discrimination, hostility and violence, and speech or action that, while it may be critical or even contemptuous, does not actually incite discrimination, hostility and violence. ...

To build societies in which expressions of hatred have become socially unacceptable requires inclusive faith literacy, and a more holistic view of human rights education. ...

Human rights education can be overt, in schools and public media campaigns, but it can also be more subtle – diffused through inclusive sports teams, local skills training, women's civil society programmes, practical projects jointly led by religious and community leaders and, perhaps especially, an emphasis on the inclusive participation of young people, who will carry the lessons of these shared social connections into the future.

Social media platforms have a clear responsibility to combat online hate speech that may lead to real-world discrimination and violence. The Office strongly advocates responsible and principled regulation in this area, and we are working with a number of companies to step up efforts to meet their human rights responsibilities under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. ...

I urge all States to implement the recommendations highlighted by the Office in multiple [reports](#) to this Council, in order to promote freedom of religion or belief; to act expeditiously on hate crimes; and to protect religious or belief minorities, where necessary, including their places of worship. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/turk-calls-measures-address-religious-hatred>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3567>

**** Criminal Justice Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3511>

Amendment Paper

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0155/amend/criminal_rm_rep_0311.pdf

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

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

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

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

Genocide Determination Bill

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

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

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

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

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

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

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

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

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

Scottish Parliament

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

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

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 8 days**

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