



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Written Answers

Antisemitism

Tulip Siddiq (Labour) [16932] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to tackle anti-Semitism.

Lee Rowley: Anti-Semitism 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.

That is why on 28 February 2024, the Prime Minister announced that the Community Security Trust will receive further funding of £54 million for 2025-2028, as part of the Jewish Community Protective Security Grant. This is in addition to the commitment made as part of the Autumn Statement for £18 million in 2024/25.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16932>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/record-funding-will-protect-jewish-communities-from-harm>

Information about the Jewish Community Protective Security Grant can be read at

<https://cst.org.uk/security/government-grant>

The Autumn Statement can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-statement-2023/autumn-statement-2023-html>

Israel: Hamas

John Hayes (Conservative) [16589] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has had recent discussions with (a) the Metropolitan Police and (b) other police forces on the cost to the public purse of policing protests relating to the Israel-Hamas conflict since October 2023.

Chris Philp: The Home Secretary and Minister of State for Policing, Crime and Fire speak to chief constables on an ongoing basis on a range of subjects. As set out in the Home Affairs Select Committee's recent report, NPCC and MPS leaders indicate that the costs of the policing Israel-Hamas-related protests was at least £25million between 7 October and 17 December. However, this figure includes the costs of community patrols, engagement and investigations that have taken place in efforts to tackle issues related to the ongoing Israel-Hamas-related conflict.

While we expect all police forces to hold reasonable levels of contingency funding for unplanned operations, it is open to Police and Crime Commissioners and their equivalents to request additional funding through the Police Special Grant. Criteria and guidance are published on gov.uk Special grant guidance. It should be noted that the Metropolitan Police has the highest level of officers and funding per capita of all forces in England and Wales and a third more funding than similar areas like Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16589>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43477/documents/216201/default/>

The Criteria and Guidance referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-funding-special-grant-guidance/special-grant-guidance-applicable-from-1-april-2021>

Islamophobia

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [17688] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Answer of 17 January 2024 to Question 10238 on Islamophobia, whether he has taken steps to develop a definition of anti-Muslim hatred.

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/17688>

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/>

Department for Education: Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16850] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, what updates her Department has provided on relevant developments in its area of work to that group since 2019.

Damian Hinds: The Government condemns and strives to tackle all forms of discrimination, prejudice, and harassment, and the department is committed to working with other government departments to achieve this. Ministers and officials have regular discussions with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities over a range of issues. More broadly, I refer the hon. Member to the answer of 2 March 2024, Official Report, PQ 16019 on tackling anti-Muslim hatred. Every school and further education provider should actively promote the shared values, including mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs. The department has published advice on promoting these values and made resources available on challenging anti-Muslim hate on the Educate Against Hate website, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.educateagainsthate.com/>

The department has also published the 'Preventing and Tackling Bullying' guidance, which directs schools to organisations who can provide support with tackling bullying related to race, religion and nationality. This guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying>

The department is providing over £3 million of funding, between 10 August 2021 and 31 March 2024, to five anti-bullying organisations, which includes projects to tackle hate-related bullying on the basis of race and faith.

Ministers and departmental officials continue to work closely with Muslim groups, such as Tell MAMA, as the leading national organisation monitoring and supporting victims of anti-Muslim hatred. The department is committed to understanding this issue and to actively assess incidents affecting the Muslim community. The department welcomes guidance produced by Universities UK, which focuses on tackling anti-Muslim hatred. Further information on tackling anti-Muslim hatred can be found here:

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/tackling-islamophobia-and-anti-muslim>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16850>

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 answer referred to above can be read at

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

Cabinet Office: Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16847] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, what updates his Department has provided on relevant developments in its area of work to that group since 2019.

John Glen: Ministers and officials have regular discussions with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities over a range of issues. More broadly, I refer the hon. Member to the answer of 1 March 2024, Official Report, PQ 16019 on tackling anti-Muslim hatred.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16847>

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 answer referred to above can be read at

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

Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16849] To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, what updates her Department has provided on relevant developments in its area of work to that group since 2019.

Julia Lopez: Ministers and officials have regular discussions with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities over a range of issues. More broadly, I refer the hon. Member to the answer of 1 March 2024, Official Report, PQ 16019 on tackling anti-Muslim hatred.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16849>

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 answer referred to above can be read at

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

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16851] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, what updates his Department has provided on relevant developments in its area of work to that group since 2019.

Andrew Mitchell: Ministers and officials have regular discussions with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities over a range of issues. More broadly, I refer the hon. Member to the answer of 1 March 2024, Official Report, PQ 16019 on tackling anti-Muslim hatred.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16851>

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 answer referred to above can be read at

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

Ministry of Justice: Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16853] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, what updates his Department has provided on relevant developments in its area of work to that group since 2019.

Mike Freer: Ministers and officials have regular discussions with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities over a range of issues. More broadly, I refer the hon. Member to the answer of 01 March 2024, Official Report, PQ 16019 on tackling anti-Muslim hatred.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16853>

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 answer referred to above can be read at

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

Department for Transport; Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16854] To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, what updates his Department has provided on relevant developments in its area of work to that group since 2019.

Anthony Browne: Ministers and officials have regular discussions with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities over a range of issues. More broadly, I refer the hon. Member to the answer of 1 March 2024, Official Report, PQ 16019 on tackling anti-Muslim hatred.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16854>

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 answer referred to above can be read at

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

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Israel

See also Commons written answer 16589 “Israel: Hamas” that is included in the Home Affairs section above, and

Commons written answer 17644 “UN Security Council: Reform” that is included in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Humanitarian Situation in Gaza

Beth Winter (Labour) [901930] What steps [the Minister] is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Paul Blomfield (Labour) [901944] What steps [the Minister] is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Alex Sobel (Labour Co-op) [901947] If he will resume funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): We are doing all we can to increase aid into Gaza. With our allies, we will take decisions on the future of UNRWA funding after scrutinising Catherine Colonna’s interim report on UNRWA neutrality.

Beth Winter: We have heard this morning some shocking reports about Palestinian medical staff in Gaza being blindfolded, detained, forced to strip and repeatedly beaten by Israeli troops, after a raid on Nasser Hospital last month. There is footage from Khan Yunis showing men stripped and kneeling, and patients with their hands bound being wheeled in beds. Do the UK Government believe that the Israeli Government are responsible for the conduct of their forces, and that this clearly appears to be torture and is in breach of international law, including the universal declaration of human rights and article 18 of the Geneva convention? What are the UK Government going to do about this?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady is right to say that Israel must comply with the

Geneva convention. We have seen these reports. A full explanation and investigation is required, and that is what the British Government are pressing for. I point out to her that, when it comes to targeting operations, lawyers are embedded in the Israeli and Israel Defence Forces command, just as happens in Britain, which should ensure the acceptance and honouring of international humanitarian law. But I agree that a full explanation is required.

Paul Blomfield: For months we have seen the horrifying images of children in Gaza mutilated or killed by bombing, and now we see them starving. Aid by air and sea is welcome, but it is insufficient and it is a diversion from Israel's responsibility. Yesterday, 12 Israeli human rights organisations called out their own Government for failing to comply with the International Court of Justice ruling to facilitate access for humanitarian aid. Does the Minister agree that the Israeli Government should be told by the UK and our allies to unlock aid and end the killing, or face real consequences?

Andrew Mitchell: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have both pressed Prime Minister Netanyahu, and indeed President Herzog, to ensure that more aid can get into Gaza. As the hon. Gentleman will also know, it is the policy of the British Government to do everything we can to achieve a pause so that we can get the hostages out and get more aid in, and move towards a sustainable ceasefire. We are doing everything we can to try to achieve that.

Alex Sobel: What we are seeing in Gaza is a starvation-level event. The United States has taken the desperate measure of air drops and flotillas, which do not direct aid like land-based aid. The only organisation big enough to fully distribute aid in order to avoid starvation is UNRWA. Canada reviewed the interim report of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and has resumed funding. Sweden has received bilateral assurances on the same actions that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is supposedly looking for from UNRWA and has resumed funding. It is scandalous that the UK Government's position is still for a suspension of funds, despite the interim report and without evidence of wrongdoing being provided by Israeli in the first place. The British public do not want to be responsible for starvation in Gaza. When will the Minister resume the funding?

Andrew Mitchell: As I have told the House before, no British funding is due until April and enough funds have now come forward to ensure that adequate supplies are available. We are awaiting the report of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and the interim report from Catherine Colonna, the former French Foreign Minister. The view we take is that when we have seen those, we very much hope we will have the reassurance to recommence funding. That is also the position of the US, Germany, Australia, Italy, Finland, the Netherlands and Switzerland. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be comforted by the fact that we are very much trying to resolve this matter as speedily as we can. ...

Alicia Kearns (Conservative): The Foreign Affairs Committee recently returned from al-Arish, which is the staging point for aid into Gaza. It was very difficult to see thousands of trucks on that border. The Government have been clear that Israel has a legal obligation to ensure that aid reaches civilians. The last legal assessment took place at the end of last year. Can my right hon. Friend tell the House, in legal terms, whether Israel is demonstrating a commitment to international humanitarian law? If he will not tell us in the House, will he please write to me?

Andrew Mitchell: I thank my hon. Friend for her visit with the Select Committee and for her comments. We are quite clear that Israel has the capacity and ability to abide by international humanitarian law. We review it on a regular basis, but as of today that remains the position.

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): The UN mission team that recently visited Israel concluded that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that conflict-related sexual

violence occurred in multiple locations during the 7 October attacks”.

In the light of that appalling and shocking conclusion, will the Government redouble their efforts to get the hostages home, because they might be suffering a similar fate to those victims on 7 October?

Andrew Mitchell: I agree with my right hon. Friend. She will know that the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and Lord Ahmad have all met the families of the hostages. I had the privilege of meeting some of the families last week, the second occasion I have done so within the precincts of this House. She is right. We are doing everything we can to increase the flow of aid and get the hostages home. We will continue to do so.

Miriam Cates (Conservative): One of the most troubling aspects of the 7 October massacre was the fact that many ordinary Gazans—reports indicate hundreds, or even thousands—followed the Hamas terrorists into Israel and participated in the atrocities. Reports suggest that civilians kidnapped Israelis and sold them to Gaza-based terrorist groups, and committed further unspeakable acts of violence, including sexual violence. Is my right hon. Friend aware of those reports, and does he share my concerns about Hamas’s ongoing indoctrination of ordinary Gazan citizens?

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I am aware of those reports. The fact remains that the appalling events of 7 October were, as I have said in the House before, the worst atrocity and the worst killing of Jewish people since the holocaust and the second world war. We continue to want total accountability for the terrible events that took place on that day.

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat): Accepting what the Minister says about there being no money due to go to UNRWA until April, can I say to him, however, that for us to continue not to fund UNRWA sends a truly dreadful signal to other countries on the world stage? Canada and Sweden have resumed their funding. Surely we should be attending to this now as a matter of some urgency?

Andrew Mitchell: I listed the countries that take the same view as us. The right hon. Gentleman is right that there is a division, but Britain is not due to provide any funding until we reach the next financial year in April. We will, of course, seek to do everything we can to resolve the matter by the time that funding is due.

Michael Ellis (Conservative): Can the deputy Foreign Secretary confirm that Israel is co-operating with an increasing number of lorries entering Gaza carrying essential humanitarian aid? I have been looking up the figures: 16,405 aid lorries, 203,300 tonnes of food and 26,160 tonnes of water. Is it not correct that the Israelis have said there is no limit on the amount of aid that can come in, but that there is a delay once it has passed Israeli checks and before it gets into Gaza proper?

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. and learned Friend is right to say that there has been an increase in the number of trucks getting in. In February there were, on average, only 97. In March that figure is 162. So there has been an improvement, but the House will recognise that there is nothing like enough getting through. The easiest way to do so is by truck and road. It is because that is so difficult that we have had to find other mechanisms, such as the maritime and air routes. ...

Lisa Nandy (Labour): May I return the Minister to the serious allegations made today, following a BBC investigation, that medics in Gaza were detained, stripped and beaten while trying to perform their life-saving humanitarian duties? All of us in the House have repeatedly called on all parties to abide by international law, but the Government have so far declined to say that the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice should be implemented in full. Will he now tell us that they should be, and that the UK will support the International Criminal Court investigation, led by Andrew Cayley, to ensure not only that all allegations against all parties are investigated, but that there is accountability for those who break the law?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady is quite right: there needs to be a full and thorough

investigation and accountability in respect of what was reported today by the BBC, and I can assure her that the Foreign Office is pressing for full transparency and accountability on that matter. ...

Lisa Nandy: But surely the Minister can see the problem. Unless the ICJ's provisional ruling is implemented and the ICC is allowed to go about its work, those words are simply meaningless; and unless the international community makes it crystal clear that rules will be upheld by all parties and those who do not uphold them will be held accountable, more people will die. Peace is built on the bedrock of international law. May I ask the Minister again to make it clear to the House that the Government will support the ICC's investigation of Hamas as well as its investigation of Israel and will press for the full implementation of the ICJ's provisional ruling, and that international law will be upheld not when it is convenient but always, as the precondition for peace?

Andrew Mitchell: Let me be very clear about this: we did not believe, and do not believe, that the ICJ referral is helpful to attempts to secure dialogue. We respect the role and independence of the ICJ and will consider any advisory opinion, but we did not think it helpful, without the consent of both parties, for the Court to deliver an advisory opinion on what is essentially a bilateral dispute.

However, we keep all these matters under review and, as I have said, our current position is that we believe Israel has both the capacity and the intent to abide by international humanitarian law. ...

Brendan O'Hara (SNP): The Minister will have seen the shocking images of parachutes dropping aid into Gaza at the same moment as a barrage of Israeli missiles struck. There is, of course, every chance that the aid and the missiles originated from the same source, and I wonder at the level of cognitive dissonance required to supply aid to innocent civilians while at the same time providing the means by which Israel can continue to kill them indiscriminately. When will this Government recognise the moral absurdity of selling weapons to Israel while attempting to salve their conscience by airdropping aid to those civilians who are fortunate enough to have survived the bombardment?

Andrew Mitchell: As I think I have mentioned to the hon. Gentleman before, in this country we have the toughest arms control mechanisms anywhere, but we accept that Israel has a right of self-defence, and this has to be seen through that prism as well as the prism through which he sees it. But I can tell him that we continually keep these matters under review—that is not only international humanitarian law, but the arms export regime—and we will continue to do so.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/160FF623-F2D7-458B-9287-ECFCA97C5F65/HumanitarianSituationInGaza>

The BBC report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68513408>

The letter from twelve Israeli Human Rights organisations referred to above can be read at

<https://hamoked.org/document.php?dID=Updates2395>

The International Court of Justice ruling (Order) referred to above can be read at

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

The UN report about conflict-related sexual violence referred to above can be read at

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

Israel and Palestine: Two-state Solution

Ruth Jones (Labour) [901932] What steps [the Minister's] Department is taking to support a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): We must generate momentum towards a permanent peace,

with an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire.

Ruth Jones: I thank the Minister for his comments. Everyone in the House wants to see a negotiated diplomatic agreement to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on two states, but does he agree that the first step towards achieving that is an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the release of all hostages?

Andrew Mitchell: The problem with calling for an immediate ceasefire is that neither side wants to have one, and therefore, in my view, it would be an unhelpful intervention. That is why the British Government, and other Governments too, have called for a pause to get the hostages out and get aid in, which can then be built on and lead to a sustainable ceasefire, and that is what we are seeking to do.

Greg Smith (Conservative): The ideal of a two-state solution is one that unites this House. However, there are practical barriers, not least the fact that Hamas are surging in the polls—what polls there are—across the Palestinian Authority, and the Palestinian Authority continue to have hateful preaching in the school curriculum that is breeding the sort of hate that leads to evil organisations such as Hamas having a grip on Gaza, and it continues to pay salaries to convicted terrorists' families. If we are to get a two-state solution, that needs to stop, does it not?

Andrew Mitchell: In respect of the textbook allegations that my hon. Friend made, I have received those allegations. Last week I had a meeting with the head of UNRWA, Mr Lazzarini, in which I presented him with the evidence and asked for a full account. In respect of the two-state solution, let me be clear that within both the Israeli Government and civil society throughout Israel, there are pragmatic voices that believe in self-determination for Palestine as the only way forward. It is very important that we try to build on that vision, which is why the Foreign Secretary is so committed to trying to bring people together so that when the political track can open, it has real substance to it.

Yasmin Qureshi (Labour): Does the Minister agree that a two-state solution has become more difficult because of the construction of over 700,000 illegal homes in the west bank, which continues with the backing of the IDF and the Israeli Government? Even now, we see images of people being turfed out of their homes and others taking over, and illegal settlement homes are being sold to people in the USA.

Andrew Mitchell: There are things that we want the Israeli Government to do in that respect. We want them to release frozen funds, halt settlement expansion and hold to account those responsible for settler violence, which is why Britain has sanctioned four extremist Israeli settlers. Let me be clear: as I understand it, the Israeli Government are not against Palestinian statehood but are against unilateral recognition without bilateral negotiations. That was the burden of a vote in the Knesset on 18 February this year.

Paul Scully (Conservative): The wider discussion of a two-state solution outside this place is being misrepresented. Restaurants are being boycotted for selling Coca-Cola, because people think the company supports Israel. The Coca-Cola factory in the west bank is actually owned by a Palestinian franchisee, so we need to educate people. To get back to the discussion of a two-state solution, we clearly need a ceasefire and the hostages to be released by Hamas. Will my right hon. Friend detail what discussions he is having in that regard?

Andrew Mitchell: Those discussions are going on all the time with our friends and allies, with the regional powers, at the United Nations and, indeed, directly with Israel. As I said, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary talk regularly to Prime Minister Netanyahu, and we will continue to do so. My hon. Friend eloquently set out the reason for the Government's policy of trying to create a pause to get the hostages out and aid in, and we will continue to pursue that objective. ...

Wayne David (Labour): The situation in Gaza is truly appalling, but the situation in the west bank is also a cause for huge concern. Since the horrific 7 October attacks, over 400

Palestinians have been killed and thousands have been detained. Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), last week Israel advanced plans for 3,400 new homes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As a two-state solution is the only path to a lasting peace, does the Minister agree that a firm position on these issues must be taken now by the United Kingdom and the international community?

Andrew Mitchell: I hope that I have set out my broad agreement with what the hon. Gentleman says. Britain wants to see steps taken against illegal settlements and settlers who have committed crimes—we want to see them arrested, tried and punished for those crimes. We want to see the Palestinian Authority reinvigorated, with new leadership and a strong approach to taking up the roles that it will need to fulfil when the sky clears and there is a moment for the political track to begin.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/9091B07D-D4DA-4FCA-8580-275A4C6796B8/IsraelAndPalestineTwo-StateSolution>

Gaza: Sustainable Ceasefire

Desmond Swayne (Conservative) [901933] What assessment [the Minister] has made of the steps needed to secure a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza.

David Duguid (Conservative) [901945] What assessment [the Minister] has made of the steps needed to secure a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza. (901945)

Gavin Newlands (SNP) [901951] What discussions [the Minister] has had with his US counterpart on a potential UN Security Council resolution on a ceasefire in Gaza. (901951)

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): We need a humanitarian pause to get aid in and hostages out, leading to a sustainable, permanent ceasefire. We are pressing for this with Israel, regional leaders and our wider international partners, including the United States.

Desmond Swayne: Given the importance of their role, the Palestinian Authority will require thoroughgoing reform, won't they?

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. Friend is right, and that is why both the Foreign Secretary and the noble Lord Ahmad have been in discussions with the Palestinian Authority and the wider regional community—to try to ensure that when the moment comes, as I set out in my response to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David), the Palestinian Authority are able to seize it.

David Duguid: Does my right hon. Friend agree that an unsustainable ceasefire that rapidly collapses would only make it more difficult to build the confidence required for peace, and that if there was a humanitarian pause now, we could get more aid in and hostages out, and it could help to bring about the conditions required for a sustainable ceasefire?

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend has put his finger on a critical point. We do not believe that calling for a general and immediate ceasefire and hoping that it would somehow become permanent will work. A ceasefire will not last if the hostages are still being held. We cannot just will it if neither side wants it, and the conditions need to be in place for it not to collapse within days.

Gavin Newlands: Some of these answers—“We have the toughest arms licence regime”, “We have urged Israel to follow international law”—are the same meaningless, supine nonsense week after week, month after month from this Government. I have said many times that it sickens me that although this Government—and indeed the Labour Front Benchers—called out Putin's war crimes in Ukraine at light speed, they prevaricate on doing the same when it comes to the Israeli bombardment and siege of Gaza. It sickens me that this Government have abstained on UN Security Council ceasefire resolutions. Will the Minister guarantee that the UK will work with partners to draft a resolution that reflects the will of this House, and finally vote for a ceasefire to end the suffering of so many in Gaza?

Andrew Mitchell: On the hon. Gentleman's final point, which I think was the question, the answer is yes, but in respect of everything else he said, the answer is no.

Seema Malhotra (Labour Co-op): Women in Gaza are giving birth without even having a chair to sit down on. They are having caesareans without medication. The Minister will know that many aid agencies have repeatedly called out the horrific suffering of the Palestinian people and Israel's unacceptable restriction on aid flows. We have been talking about the urgency of an immediate humanitarian ceasefire; how urgently are the Government actually pushing for this with both sides and with partners in the middle east—not just for the urgency of the ceasefire, but for a plan for what comes next?

Andrew Mitchell: I can reassure the hon. Lady that on both of those two points—pressing for a pause and pressing all the regional powers on what comes next—the Government are actively and continually engaged. On her first point about the terrible plight of women in Gaza, that is why the British Government gave nearly £5 million just a week or so ago specifically to try to alleviate the desperate circumstances in Gaza that so many women find themselves in. ...

Alyn Smith (SNP): The best way to deal with a sustainable ceasefire is obviously to deal with the ongoing humanitarian crisis, and that is best done by UNRWA, not through individual bilateral actions. The Minister mentions states that have suspended their funding, and the situation is evolving really fast. The EU has just announced €50 million for UNRWA, and two further tranches of €16 million, subject to the satisfactory completion of an audit. I take the point that no funding is due from the UK to UNRWA until April, but what further reassurance does the UK need to ensure the funding will be in place, because UNRWA is the best organisation to disburse it and the UK risks being very much on the wrong side of these developments?

Andrew Mitchell: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point. It is true that Canada, Sweden, Spain and the EU, with conditions, expect to be able to resume funding, but as I mentioned earlier, America, Germany, Australia, Italy, Finland, the Netherlands and Switzerland take the same view as us. To the substantive points he makes, we are in discussions with the leader of UNRWA, Mr Lazzarini, and we are awaiting the report from the former French Foreign Minister and the report from the UN. We hope that as a result of those reports, sufficient change will be secured, so that we can continue to fund UNRWA, but the hon. Gentleman should be in no doubt that we have fully funded UNRWA into the next financial year.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/901F3B2D-2590-4FC3-8D98-9495B3187040/GazaSustainableCeasefire>

Israeli Occupation of the West Bank

Peter Grant (SNP) [901937] What recent assessment [the Minister] has made of the implications for his policies of the Israeli occupation of the west bank.

Alan Brown (SNP) [901954] What recent assessment [the Minister] has made of the implications for his policies of the Israeli occupation of the west bank.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): Israel must not undermine prospects for peace and security in the west bank. As the occupying power, Israel must protect the civilian population.

Peter Grant: The Minister forgot to mention that this is one of the rare occasions on which the United Kingdom Government have a long-standing position that Israel is acting unlawfully in the west bank. Some 700,000 separate criminal acts of unlawful occupation have been endorsed and instructed by Benjamin Netanyahu. Because that illegal occupation has gone unpunished, we now see extremists, with the tacit acquiescence and sometimes direct support of the Israeli Defence Force, committing acts of cold-blooded murder against innocent civilians. If they do not stand up to criminals, those crimes will get worse. The Minister mentioned that two individuals have been sanctioned for their crimes

in the west bank. Why have the President or the Prime Minister of Israel, who ordered that unlawful occupation, not also been sanctioned?

Andrew Mitchell: The Government pursue the objectives I have set out clearly to the House in a way most likely to bring success. The five core asks that are so relevant to many of these questions are: the release of all hostages; formation of a new Palestinian Government for the west bank and Gaza; removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; and, with our allies, the provision of serious practical and technical support for the Palestinian Authority. That is the approach that is most likely to command support and not, I fear, the line that the hon. Gentleman took.

Alan Brown: The Minister said that Israel has a duty to protect civilians, but in the west bank there have been 400 deaths. There are now testimonies from Palestinian civilians, including women and children, who have been subject to kidnap, torture and abuse at the hands of Israeli settlers, yet the UK Government have sanctioned only four illegal settlers. What further action are the UK Government going to take against settlers? Surely it is time to ban the trade of goods from those illegal settlements once and for all.

Andrew Mitchell: I really do not think that that would be a very sensible thing to do. We do not comment across the Floor of the House on who is about to be sanctioned or where the sanctions regime is going, but the hon. Member may rest assured that we keep these matters under very careful review. ...

Catherine West (Labour): As Ramadan begins and Passover and Easter approach, it is vital that all places of worship in Jerusalem be respected. I was extremely concerned by suggestions from Israeli Minister Ben-Gvir that restrictions could be imposed on worshippers at al-Aqsa mosque. I welcome subsequent statements by Israeli authorities that the sanctity of the holiday will be preserved. Authorities must show respect and restraint at this crucial moment. Have the Government made it clear to Israeli counterparts that Minister Ben-Gvir's comments were unacceptable and inflamed tensions, and that the status quo arrangements must be maintained?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Member is entirely right about the importance of religious freedom, particularly in the circumstances that she so clearly set out. She may rest assured that those are points that the British Government make very strongly to Israel. It is helpful that the Opposition and the Government speak with one voice on that very important matter.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/9932134C-F882-4250-A943-5BC4D296AAFE/IsraeliOccupationOfTheWestBank>

Israeli Hostages in Gaza

Nicola Richards (Conservative): [901948] What steps [the Minister's] Department is taking to help secure the release of Israeli hostages in Gaza.

Bob Blackman (Conservative) [901950] What steps [the Minister] is taking to support efforts to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas in Gaza.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): We have been working tirelessly to secure the release of all hostages, including British nationals, since 7 October.

Nicola Richards: Last week, the UN published its first report into the violence against women in Israel on 7 October and against hostages. It concluded that rape, gang rape and genital mutilation were systematically used against Israeli women and girls. The fact that the victims who survived do not trust the UN enough to speak to it about their experience adds another layer of heartbreak to the situation. What will my right hon. Friend the Minister do to urge the UN to make it a priority to rebuild trust and tell the world that #MeToo counts for Jews too?

Andrew Mitchell: The world very much needs the United Nations, and I completely recognise the position that my hon. Friend so eloquently describes. We will do

everything we can as a leading member of the United Nations—one of the P5—to try to improve that relationship. On the appalling events of October 7, which she described, we are doing everything we can to try to help, as I set out earlier.

Bob Blackman: The hostages have been in captivity for more than 100 days. *The New York Times* has reported that of the 134 hostages still in captivity, 50 may have been killed. Given that 10 Israeli citizens have been in captivity in Gaza for more than 10 years, does my right hon. Friend the Minister agree that there must absolutely be a commitment to return the hostages before we can move to a humanitarian ceasefire?

Andrew Mitchell: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely correct. He sets out the position extremely well. It is a top focus of all parts of the British Government to try to get the hostages back, as I set out earlier. The Prime Minister and the International Court of Justice have called for their immediate release. Although I cannot give a running commentary, we are working closely with the US, Qatar and Egypt to secure their release.

Sarah Champion (Labour): In the past five months, Israeli and Palestinian civilians have borne the brunt of this conflict. We are getting only the slightest glimpse of the rape, torture, hostage taking and murder that is going on. Will the Minister tell us what our atrocity prevention team and preventing sexual violence team are doing on the ground to document and stop that?

Andrew Mitchell: We are very clear that we seek to document atrocities so that people can be held to account, no matter how long it takes. I set out earlier the additional funding specifically to help women who have been the subject of appalling sexual violence. I am grateful to the hon. Lady and the International Development Committee for their visit to the region. On the issue that she raises, the British Government's position is that there can be no impunity.

Andrew Gwynne (Labour): The utter tragedy in the middle east is that innocent civilians on both sides are paying the price for failed politics and extremism. To take the Minister back to his answer to the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, if he accepts that Israel has the capacity to meet international law, he is saying, is he not, that Israel is in breach of it?

Andrew Mitchell: No, I am not saying that. I am saying that the current judgment of the British Government is that Israel has both the capacity and the intent to abide within international humanitarian law. It is an issue that we keep under review, as the hon. Gentleman will understand.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/BD79E613-6A41-4F6D-BE9B-A82D01A9F7F5/IsraeliHostagesInGaza>

The UN report about conflict-related sexual violence referred to above can be read at <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/report/mission-report-official-visit-of-the-office-of-the-srsg-svc-to-israel-and-the-occupied-west-bank-29-january-14-february-2024/20240304-Israel-oWB-CRSV-report.pdf>

It is unclear which New York Times report is referred to above – most suggest that around 30 rather than 50 hostages may have been killed.

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Marion Fellows (SNP) [901955] If [the Minister] will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): On the question of Britain's priorities in Ukraine, Gaza and across the world, the Government are delivering. ... On Gaza, we are pressing with partners for a humanitarian pause and increased aid flows to Palestinian civilians. We have expanded the blue belt, defended shipping in the Red sea and launched an innovative development partnership with Qatar. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/9935D7B4-B482-4E52-BA73-DB217366092D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-37143557-8655-40E4-85B2-000EE81D1E19>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Rachel Hopkins (Labour) [901958] State-hood is the inalienable right of Palestinian people and not in the gift of any neighbour, so does the Minister agree that no country has the right to veto the UK's recognition of a Palestinian state?

Andrew Mitchell: The British Government have always made it clear that they will recognise the Palestinian state when they think the time is right and such recognition would be helpful.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/9935D7B4-B482-4E52-BA73-DB217366092D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-46B31F08-E7A8-48AA-94CA-32826E5BDA82>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Peter Gibson (Conservative) [901963] Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in order to see Palestinian self-determination, we need an end to human rights abuses, antisemitism and the glorification of violence, and we need Palestinians free from Hamas?

Andrew Mitchell: We certainly agree with my hon. Friend's last point about a Palestine free from Hamas. There is no place for Hamas in the future Government of Palestine. On the point he makes about how we proceed further, the Government are absolutely clear that there is no place in our society, or anywhere else for that matter, for Islamophobia or antisemitism.

Andy McDonald (Labour): Israeli Minister Benny Gantz is the only person to have been granted a special mission status certificate by the Foreign Office since the beginning of last year, in effect protecting him from arrest for his part in suspected breaches of international law. According to reports, Israel did not grant Gantz's delegation official status, so can the Minister explain why the UK Government still chose to provide diplomatic cover for this individual?

Andrew Mitchell: Whatever the position of the Israeli Government, let me assure the hon. Member that Benny Gantz was received in this country. He was seen by the Foreign Secretary, and his visit was most welcome.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/9935D7B4-B482-4E52-BA73-DB217366092D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-4146FC81-0060-414B-A594-285B9911C7EA>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

John Cryer (Labour): I acknowledge what the Minister of State said about sanctioning certain west bank settlers, although four seems a very low number to me. Has he raised the activities of those settlers with his opposite number in the Israeli Government?

Andrew Mitchell: The British Government have certainly raised those activities with the Israeli Government. That is why we have asked that they should be arrested, prosecuted and punished for those activities. On those who may or may not be subject to a sanctions regime, we keep that fully under review, but the hon. Member will understand why I think it is best not to discuss that across the Floor of the House.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/9935D7B4-B482-4E52-BA73-DB217366092D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-9D40C7A2-2FE5-4439-A97D-79408A294B68>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Independent): When Jeffrey Sachs, a UN adviser—from a

Jewish American family, incidentally—says on camera: “Israel has deliberately starved the people of Gaza... I am not using an exaggeration. I’m talking literally starving a population. Israel is a criminal, is in non stop war crime status, now I believe in genocidal status, and it is without shame, without remorse, without truth, without insight into what it’s doing”, and adds: “This is a murderous gang in government right now. These are zealots”, does that not give the UK Government pause to reflect on the funding of UNRWA, and to call for a ceasefire and the recognition of Palestine, which 138 of 193 UN member states have done, rather than see it wiped off the map?

Andrew Mitchell: I think almost nothing that the hon. Gentleman has just said could possibly be deemed helpful in trying to bring the two sides together, achieve a pause, get the hostages out, get aid in and achieve a sustainable ceasefire. Therefore, I am afraid I am unable to offer any reassurance on any of the points he made.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/9935D7B4-B482-4E52-BA73-DB217366092D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-25756520-D91C-4CE1-A74A-031C9A9C70D5>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru): Canada is to resume funding for UNRWA having received UN reports. Has the UK Government received such reports, are they being reviewed, and when will that review be concluded and decisions be made?

Andrew Mitchell: We are asking that we have an interim report on both the key reports as soon as possible, and we will look at those reports as soon as they arrive and make our decisions accordingly. During the course of these questions I have adumbrated both those who are supporting the same position as the UK and those who are restoring funding immediately. The hon. Gentleman will want to bear in mind that Britain has fully funded UNRWA for its share up until the next financial year.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/9935D7B4-B482-4E52-BA73-DB217366092D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-6FAE8749-AB27-45B3-B37C-4126F459F8A7>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Mike Amesbury (Labour): I listened carefully, as I always do, to what the Minister said regarding calls for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, but it is now time to step up. It requires all warring parties to stop the rockets, the bombs and the bullets—exactly right—and for the hostages to be released. Surely it would send a very strong signal if the UK Government now called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

Andrew Mitchell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said. He will have heard the five key priorities that the British Government have put on the table, and I am grateful to him for his agreement. Cross-party support is extremely helpful in driving forward an imperative about which Britain feels very strongly.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/9935D7B4-B482-4E52-BA73-DB217366092D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-664D56B8-CE9D-4E6E-9631-C3BD6A25C973>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Debbie Abrahams (Labour): Does the Minister agree that the alleged detention, beating and humiliation of 49 Palestinian medics at the Nasser Hospital last month needs to be investigated by the International Criminal Court—yes or no?

Andrew Mitchell: This session ends with the same question with which it started, and as I set out, we believe there must be accountability and we have made that clear to the Israeli authorities.

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Hamas

David Morris (Conservative) [17138] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the implications for his policies of the debate entitled Recent developments in the Middle East: Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel and Israel's response at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 23 January 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: Israel suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas. Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We want the fighting to stop now. We are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-05/17138>

A report of the debate referred to above can be read at

<https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9352/middle-east-pace-condemns-hamas-terrorist-attack-calls-for-a-ceasefire-and-unhindered-access-to-humanitarian-assistance-for-the-population-in-gaza>

Visas: Gaza

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [16815] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for what reason he has not established a family reunification visa scheme for people in Gaza.

Tom Pursglove: The Government recognises that some people impacted by the conflict in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories may wish to join family in the UK.

The Government currently has no plans to introduce bespoke arrangements for people arriving from the region who do not hold permission to come to the UK. Palestinians who wish to join family members in the UK must do so via the existing range of routes available.

The Government allows individuals with protection status in the UK to sponsor their partner or children to join them in the UK 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16815>

Israel: Air Force

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [17650] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 7 March 2024 to Question 16902, whether the UK has provided (a) servicing and (b) other support for Israeli F-35 planes since 7 October 2023.

James Heapey: No.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/17650>

The answer referred to above can be read at

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

Israel: Arms Trade

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [16822] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how many arms licences have been issued to Israel since (a) 7 October 2023 and (b) the International Court of Justice's order relating to the case of the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v Israel), published on 26 January 2024.

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16822>

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>

Arms Trade: Israel

Zarah Sultana (Labour) [16032] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the press release entitled Arms exports to Israel must stop immediately: UN experts, published by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on 23rd February 2024, if she will take steps to cease the transfer of (a) weapons and (b) ammunition to Israel that would be used in Gaza.

Greg Hands: All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the UK's Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. The Export Control Joint Unit will not issue an export licence to any destination where to do so would be inconsistent with the 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. The Government is monitoring the situation in Israel and Gaza very closely and will take any action the Government considers appropriate as the situation develops. All extant licences are kept under careful review and we are able to amend, suspend or revoke licences as circumstances require.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16032>

The press release referred to above can be read at

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

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Gaza: Hamas

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [16744] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the treatment of female hostages held by Hamas in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government continues to be appalled by the reports of conflict-related sexual violence committed by Hamas on 7 October and against hostages, including the recent report from UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) on sexual violence in conflict, Pramila Patten. The UK condemns sexual violence unequivocally and without exception. Hamas must release all hostages and all reports of sexual violence must be fully investigated to ensure justice for survivors and victims. The UK has been working with partners across the region to secure the release of hostages, including British nationals and their families.

Gaza: Hamas

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [16741] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had discussions with officials from the Israeli government on the number of Hamas terrorists killed in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government has not made an official estimate of the number of Hamas terrorists killed in Gaza since 7 October 2023. We continue to engage closely with the Israeli Government at all levels on the ongoing conflict.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16741>

Gaza: Hamas

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [16742] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what his policy is on the potential future role of (a) Hamas and (b) Hamas-affiliated groups in (i) civic, (ii) military and (iii) political roles in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: 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.

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

The Palestinian Authority 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 Palestinian Authority, who must also take much needed steps on reform, including setting out a pathway to democratic progress.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16742>

UNRWA: Finance

Philippa Whitford (SNP) [17569] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether the Government plans to resume funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the context of the interim investigation by the UN into allegations against UNRWA staff and the resumption of funding by other nations.

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.

Any future funding decisions will be taken after UNRWA's review has concluded.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/17569>

UNRWA: Finance

Dan Carden (Labour) [17647] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the joint NGO statement entitled EU and Member States must sustain funding to UNRWA, published on 29 February 2024.

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.

We are aware of the NGO statement referred to by the Member for Liverpool, Walton.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/17647>

The joint statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/joint-ngo-statement-eu-and-member-states-must-sustain-funding-unrwa>

Gaza: Access

Ian Byrne (Labour) [16947] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to help ensure access (a) into Gaza and (b) across the Strip.

Andrew Mitchell: An immediate humanitarian pause is the most effective way of increasing the flow of much-needed aid into Gaza and securing the safe release of hostages. Crucially, it would also allow for progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

We have been clear about the steps which are needed to get more aid into Gaza. All parties must take immediate action to ensure unhindered humanitarian access, ease restrictions on humanitarian supplies and ensure the UN and aid agencies can reach civilians in need throughout Gaza. We are focussed on five key humanitarian needs in our engagements with Israel:

1. An effective de-confliction mechanism to enable safe distribution of aid through that extended humanitarian pause.
2. Increased capacity inside of Gaza, enabling the humanitarian system and private sector to scale up the provision of goods.
3. Increased access for aid through land and sea routes.
4. An expansion of humanitarian assistance for Gaza, including fuel, shelter and public health items, as well as items critical for infrastructure repair.
5. The provision of electricity, water and telecommunications.

We have trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings. The Foreign Secretary has appointed his Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian

Territories, Mark Bryson-Richardson. He is based in the region and is working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16947>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat) [16868] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what medical (a) equipment and (b) other aid the UK has sent to Gaza by equipment type.

Andrew Mitchell: We have tripled our overall aid commitment and are supporting NGO and UN partners to deliver medical aid and care in the Gaza Strip. This includes support for primary healthcare, trauma and emergency care services, disease surveillance and outbreak response, and deployment of Emergency Medical Teams.

We have provided targeted support for children through a £5.75 million contribution. This is supporting work to assist over 5,800 children with severe malnourishment and 853,000 children, adolescents and caregivers affected by the conflict, to receive emergency and child protection services, including mental health and psychosocial support. At the end of February, we announced £4.25 million to the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. This support is expected to reach about 111,500 women, around 1 in 5 of the adult women in Gaza. It will support up to 100 community midwives, the distribution of around 20,000 menstrual hygiene management kits and 45,000 clean delivery kits. On 21 Feb, 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. We are also exploring further options to help meet the medical needs of Palestinians.

It must be recognised that the support to large scale appeals prevents us from directly attributing UK funding to specific items.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16868>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Beth Winter (Labour) [16036] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what estimate his Department has made of the number of aid trucks reaching Gaza each (a) day and (b) month in the last year.

Andrew Mitchell: There were 500 trucks entering Gaza per day before the conflict, now that number is around 150. There was a 31 per cent decrease in the average number of trucks entering Gaza daily between January (140 trucks) and February (97 trucks).

A minimum of 500 trucks of humanitarian aid are now needed in Gaza. We have been clear that Israel must take action to allow more aid into Gaza. We want to see a scale up of the Jordan corridor, with a streamlined screening and delivery process, the opening of a crossing in northern Gaza (Karni, Erez or a new crossing point), Ashdod Port fully opened for aid delivery and increased screening capacity at Kerem Shalom and Nitzana to seven days a week and extended hours.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16036>

World Food Programme

Beth Winter (Labour) [17026] 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 World Food Programme Deputy Executive Director's statement to the UN Security Council on 27 February 2024.

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Beth Winter (Labour) [17027] 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 statement by World Food Programme's Palestine Country Director of 4 March 2024 on the need for an aid corridor to northern Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza. We have trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we will continue to support the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver humanitarian aid. We have been clear that Israel must take concrete steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid across Gaza including allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses and opening more routes into Gaza.

We need Israel to ensure the UN has the people, vehicles, equipment and fuel to distribute aid safely across Gaza, and to open the Erez Crossing to allow direct access to the north of Gaza.

We continue to call 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/2024-03-04/17026>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/17027>

A report of the statement to the UN Security Council referred to above can be read at

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

A report of the 4 March statement referred to above, made during a press conference, can be read at

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/04/aid-corridor-needed-urgently-to-prevent-famine-in-north-gaza-says-wfp-official>

Gaza: Babies

Dan Carden (Labour) [16874] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the statement by UNICEF of 3 March 2024, what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of reports that infants in Gaza are dying from (a) dehydration and (b) malnutrition.

Andrew Mitchell: We are directly funding UNICEF and the Red Cross to provide vital support for children's health in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including mental health services, medical care, essential supplies, food security, nutrition, clean water, shelter and other humanitarian assistance. For UNICEF specifically, we have provided targeted support for children through a £5.75 million contribution, part of our wider £60 million humanitarian uplift. This is supporting their work to assist over 5,800 children with severe malnourishment. The UK has also supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. 750 tonnes of life-saving food aid arrived in the first delivery in December and there have been numerous deliveries since.

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. We have reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza, for Nitzana and Kerem Shalom to be open for longer, and for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza. We continue to raise this with Israel at the highest levels.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16874>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Viscount Stansgate (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs what steps he is taking to increase the amount of humanitarian aid to Gaza. ...

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton): My Lords, we are doing all we can to increase aid into Gaza. We have been collaborating with Jordan on humanitarian air drops and are now working with partners to operationalise a maritime aid corridor from Cyprus. However, this cannot substitute delivery by land, which remains the best way to get aid in at the scale needed. Israel must open more land routes, including in the north, for longer and with fewer screening requirements. I have been clear: we need an immediate humanitarian pause to increase aid into Gaza and get the hostages out. Israel must remove restrictions on aid and restore electricity, water and telecommunications.

Viscount Stansgate: My Lords, the House understands that aid from the air is problematic and aid from the sea takes time. Can the Foreign Secretary explain to the House why he has been unable to persuade the Israeli Government to allow the border crossings to be opened to provide the access for the hundreds of trucks needed daily? What are the Government intending to do so that, when the aid reaches Gaza to the people who so desperately need it, it is distributed to the people on the ground by local networks not controlled by Hamas?

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: We have repeatedly made points about the need to open crossings and allow more aid in. I can give the latest figures to the House. They are slightly more encouraging. The average number of trucks getting through per day in January was 140. This fell to 97 in February but has gone up to 162 so far in March. So we are making a difference. The opening of Kerem Shalom happened, and that made a difference. With regard to what is happening on the maritime front, which is encouraging, I say that, if Israel really wanted to help, it could open the Ashdod port, which is a fully functioning port in Israel. That could really maximise the delivery of aid from Cyprus straight into Israel and therefore into Gaza.

On the noble Viscount's question about how to make sure that aid gets around Gaza, that is one of the trickiest pieces of the jigsaw. One of the things that Israel needs to do is give out more visas to UN workers who are capable of distributing the aid when it arrives in Gaza.

Lord Polak (Conservative): My Lords, I am very pleased that Mark Bryson-Richardson met with COGAT [Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories] today. I would ask the Foreign Secretary to confirm the following: first, there is no backlog at all at the Kerem Shalom crossing from Israel; secondly, there is a backlog at Rafah—there are columns of trucks in sovereign Egypt after they have been inspected and cleared by the Israeli authorities; thirdly, as has just been said, there is also, sadly, a backlog on the Gazan side, where the UN agencies are struggling to distribute the aid at the pace that Israel is facilitating it through.

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: I am delighted that Mark Bryson-Richardson, who I appointed as my aid co-ordinator, has met with COGAT; that is very useful. I can say to my noble friend that, yes, of course, getting more aid into Gaza requires the work of more than just Israel taking the relevant steps. But Israel is the country that could make the greatest difference, because some of the blockages, screening problems and all the rest of it are its responsibility. One proof point of that is that 18 trucks were dispatched from Jordan and they were held for 18 days at the Allenby/King Hussein bridge crossing. That seems to me the sort of the thing we

need to act on faster to get that aid into Gaza. As I said in answer to the previous question, once it is in Gaza, it needs people to distribute it. That is about visas and capabilities, and deconfliction.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat): The Foreign Secretary was very eloquent in describing the unnecessary blockages that have been put in place. He will agree with me that Article 50 of the Geneva Convention, on the requirement on occupying powers for children, is that they will not “hinder the application of ... food, medical care and protection ... in favour of children under fifteen years, expectant mothers and mothers of children under seven years”.

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that these hindrances and blockages are potentially a war crime under the Geneva Convention and that, if any Ministers in the Israeli Government are actively blocking the inward supply of aid, we should consider sanctioning them?

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: It is our legal position, and has been for some time, that Israel is the occupying power in Gaza; that was the case before 7 October. After the evacuation of Gaza in 2005, it was not truly freed up as an independent functioning territory, so it is true that the way that Israel behaves as the occupying power in allowing humanitarian aid into Gaza is a material consideration when it comes to looking at how it is complying with international humanitarian law. As I have said many times at this Dispatch Box already, what matters is whether it has the commitment and the capability, and whether it is complying. That is what we keep under review.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, the words that the Foreign Secretary has just used are the ones he used last Tuesday. But today in the Commons, Andrew Mitchell was asked a question by Lisa Nandy on precisely this point, particularly in relation to the BBC investigation into the treatment of medics at the hospital in Gaza. She asked Andrew Mitchell why we were not ensuring that the Israelis comply with the provisional measures of the ICJ. Andrew Mitchell was unable to support Lisa Nandy’s call. Why?

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: What I would say, as I think Minister Mitchell said in the House of Commons, is that these are very disturbing pictures and reports that have come out from this hospital. We need to get to the bottom of what exactly happened; we need answers from the Israelis. When we have those, it will be easier to comment.

Lord Austin of Dudley (Non-affiliated): My Lords, this crisis has been caused by Hamas, which hides terrorists and weapons in densely packed civilian areas and steals food and fuel meant for humanitarian relief. It is absolutely clear that there will be no prospect of peace—let alone the two-state solution that the Government want to see—until Hamas is completely removed from power in Gaza. This is why the Government should be doing all they possibly can to ensure that Israel has all the support it needs to win this war.

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: I thank the noble Lord for his question. We completely agree that we will not have a two-state solution if the people responsible for 7 October are still running any part of Gaza. Obviously, what we would like to see is an immediate pause, the hostages released and a series of conditions put in place to make sure that the pause turns into a permanent ceasefire without a return to fighting. One of those conditions would be that the people responsible for 7 October—the leadership of Hamas—would have to leave Gaza and the terrorist infrastructure would have to be dismantled. If that did not happen through a process of negotiation, the noble Lord is no doubt right that there would be a return to fighting. That needs to be understood by people. ...

Lord Green of Deddington (Crossbench): My Lords, I thank the Foreign Secretary for his first response, which set out very clearly and practically what the Government are trying to achieve in the Middle East. The problem though is pretty clear; the problem is the Israeli Government, who are not prepared, it seems, to accept the suggestion by the UK and the

United States. So will he now make it clear to the Israeli Government that their continuing pressure on Palestinians, especially on their women and children, is absolutely unacceptable and, furthermore, that it risks antagonising millions of Arabs and Muslims for years and years to come? I say that having served for many years myself in the Middle East.

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: I am very familiar with the noble Lord's service in a number of our embassies in the Middle East and his long experience in that part of the world. I say to him that we have said repeatedly that Israel must abide by international humanitarian law. As the noble Lord, Lord Austin, said, Israel has a right to self-defence. Hamas fighters started this conflict by their appalling invasion and terrorist pogrom in Israel, which led to the murder of over 1,400 people—and it is worth remembering that they still hold hostages. We are more than 150 days in. If Hamas fighters wanted to end this conflict, they could do so tomorrow—they could do so today—by releasing those hostages, getting their leaders out of Gaza and laying down their weapons. They do not do that. But the noble Lord is absolutely right to make the point that we had this experience fighting terrorist insurgencies in our own country, in our own history. You have to obey the rules and obey the law; if you do not and you lower yourself to the standards of the people you are fighting against, that does not end well.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-12/debates/9A72BCFC-FE5F-4279-BD14-D3BEDC5F2E6B/GazaHumanitarianAid>

The BBC report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68513408>

The International Court of Justice provisional measures (Order) referred to above can be read at

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

House of Lords Library

Letter from Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon to Stephen Doughty MP regarding consular support for British nationals and eligible persons in Gaza

<https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2024-0239/Doughty.pdf>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Major humanitarian push as 150 tonnes of UK aid enters Gaza

... Around 150 tonnes of UK aid, including more than 13,000 blankets and 840 family-sized tents, has entered Gaza today, where the United Nations [UNICEF] will distribute them to those in need.

In addition, a full field hospital, provided by UK Aid funding to UK-Med, will arrive this week. The facility can be adapted according to needs on the ground and usually includes a pharmacy, triage area, major injuries and resuscitation unit, and maternity care tent. ...

This facility can be operational in as little as 48 hours and will be able to treat more than 100 patients a day. It will be staffed by both local health workers and international medics, including many from the UK, on the UK-Med Register.

Alongside the latest deliveries of aid, the Foreign Secretary has announced a further £10 million in aid funding for the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), bringing the total spend to over £100 million this financial year. This funding will support UN agencies on the ground to deliver lifesaving aid and will also provide core relief items, such as tents, for the most vulnerable.

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said: Too many people in Gaza are suffering. No one should be without basic amenities like shelter and bedding, and everyone deserves the dignity that basic hygiene kits provide. Our largest aid delivery, combined with a new UK funded field hospital, will save lives.

But an immediate pause in the fighting is the only way to get aid into Gaza in the quantities desperately needed. This will also allow for the safe release of hostages.

We could then work towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting or loss of life. ...

An estimated 3.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in the OPTs, with over half a million at risk from famine.

The UK is committed to ensuring aid reaches those who need it most, as Palestinians continue to face a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary has been clear that Israel must increase capacity to safely distribute aid within Gaza. This includes opening a land crossing in the north and issuing more visas to UN staff who are capable of delivering aid when it arrives in Gaza. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-humanitarian-push-as-150-tonnes-of-uk-aid-enters-gaza>

Welsh Senedd Oral Answer

International Women's Day

Sioned Williams (Plaid Cymru): ...Many women have expressed deep distaste and despair seeing politicians who will not call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza celebrating progress on women's rights in Wales and the UK last week while an estimated 9,000 women have reportedly been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza. While we were thanking and thinking of our mothers this Sunday, an estimated 37 mothers were killed in Gaza. Some 60,000 pregnant women are suffering from dehydration and malnutrition there, and there's no period dignity in Gaza, no access to toilets, pads or clean water. ... The discourse of women's rights cannot be apart from the fact of the military violence in Gaza. I am in this place because my rights as a woman were hard won. It is my duty as a woman in this place to raise my voice against that violence. We must do more to support our sisters in Gaza, and use our voice as a nation to condemn this horrific war. Are you prepared, Minister, to add the Welsh Government's voice to the international calls for an immediate ceasefire and an end to the mass suffering of Palestinian women and girls?

Deputy Minister for Social Partnership (Hannah Blythyn): ... People fought hard for us to be here, and we definitely don't take that for granted, and we will fight hard for others, whether that is some of the horrific things we are seeing in Gaza at the moment, but also here at home in terms of making sure the next generation has a better future than us.

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/13743#C575563>

European Union

United Nations: Speech by High Representative Josep Borrell at the annual UN Security Council session on EU-UN cooperation

There are moments in history when darkness of the world is becoming darker, and today is one of these moments. The world is even darker than usual. Black is blacker, and pain and despair become the ordinary of human condition. ...

What we see is that every day the UN Charter is being flouted, distorted, hijacked or ignored. Ignored in some cases with a sense of impunity that is increasingly worrying. ...

Gaza is just the tip of an extraordinarily serious conflict that has been raging between Israelis and Palestinians for almost a century. It is the one Hundred Years War.

And we have condemned repeatedly - here again I will do it - the terrorist attacks that took place on 7 October and Israel's right to defend itself. But we have also stated, equally strongly and repeatedly, that this has to be done in full respect of International Law and International Humanitarian Law. And when you look what is happening, you may doubt about it.

I do not want to teach anyone of you about what is happening in Gaza. 30,000 people dead, 1.8 million displaced, 500,000 people on the brink of starvation.

We are facing now a population fighting for their own survival. Humanitarian assistance needs to get into Gaza, and the European Union is working as much as we can in order to make it possible.

But this is a humanitarian crisis which is not a natural disaster. It is not a flood. It is not an earthquake. It is man-made.

And when we look for alternative ways of providing support – by sea or by air – we have to remind that we have to do it because the natural way of providing support through roads is being closed, artificially closed. And starvation is being used as a weapon of war.

When we condemn this happening in Ukraine, we have to use the same words for what is happening in Gaza.

In Gaza, the United Nations agencies - Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), World Food Programme (WFP) and UNRWA - are the last lifeline for many people.

Yes, UNRWA is facing allegations. But allegations have to be proved, that is why they are allegations. And we await with interest the conclusions of the United Nations' independent investigation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), an audit to be conducted by EU experts, and the findings of the Colonna Commission set up by the United Nations Secretary-General.

But let me remind something: UNRWA exists because there are Palestinian refugees. It is not a present to the Palestinians, it is an answer to their needs. UNRWA exists because first there were Palestinian refugees. We won't make these refugees disappear by making UNRWA disappear. They will still be there.

In fact, there is only one way to make UNRWA disappear: making those refugees citizens of a Palestinian state that coexists with an Israeli state. Almost everybody agrees on that, but how can we make this solution a reality?

There is no magic solution. But maybe there are credible ways to try to achieve it. The two-state solution. We talked about it many years ago, and now, we talk [about] it again. But admittedly, we have never seriously tried to make it a reality. And in order to make it a reality, the first step should be a unanimous resolution by this Security Council, endorsing a two-state solution and defining the general principles which may lead to this result. And on that, the European Union is ready to cooperate.

I think that we have a wonderful opportunity to show that our principles are not empty words.

And since we all agree on the implementation of this solution - the two-state solution - as the only viable solution to the conflict, we must act accordingly, following - in my opinion - three principles that should guide our actions.

The principle of clear separation between the two states, since there is no viable alternative to this separation.

The principle of security, without which tragedies like the one of October 7th can only be repeated once and again, because both Israel and Palestine need to feel secure.

And finally, the principle of regional integration, since both Israel and Palestine are perfectly capable of taking their place in a peaceful regional collective.

Today, we are dominated by the images of war and hatred. But it is not impossible to imagine a pacified region based on a complementarity between Israel and its wider

neighbourhood, from the Mediterranean to the Gulf.

This was Shimon Peres' dream. Shimon, my old friend, he was dreaming about it. Let's try to make this dream come true. Let's roll up our sleeves. Let's try to engage on that. Because the world peace is at stake.

Let humanitarian support flow into Gaza. Continue asking – and more than asking – Israel not to impede humanitarian to go through the natural way, which is by road. And in the meantime, let's try for other solutions that will be less efficient and never an alternative to the hundreds of trucks that should come into Gaza to avoid the starvation of hundreds of thousands of people.

This is the scenario on which we cooperate, where the United Nations and the European Union cooperate. ...

To read the full transcript see

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/united-nations-speech-high-representative-josep-borrell-annual-un-security-council-session-eu-un_en

United Nations

Speakers at Security Council Debate on Working Methods Express Widespread Concern over Use of Veto, Citing Its Destructive Consequences in Gaza, Ukraine

The Security Council must amend its working methods, including through restraining the use of the veto and making improvements to its penholdership system and sanction regimes, to enhance its transparency, accountability and credibility and to improve its ability to take effective action in the face of multiplying and worsening global and regional conflicts, speakers told the 15-member organ ...

The issue of the veto by the Council's permanent members was the focus of widespread concern, with many delegates calling vociferously for it to be addressed, citing its destructive consequences in the unfolding conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine. ...

The United Kingdom's delegate ... [pointed] out that [the Russian] delegation had brought the Council "Roger Waters as a briefer on Ukraine". While stressing the need to continue to hear the views of relevant and competent civil society briefers, he warned members of the dangerous trend of using the Council as a platform for disinformation and revisionist history, through the use of underqualified briefers in "vexatious" debates in support of a war of aggression in breach of the Charter of the United Nations.

In a similar vein, **France's representative** objected to some members' use of the Council as a platform for disinformation and for saturating it with propaganda meetings. Working methods will never replace the spirit of responsibility and compromise, which remains essential to finding solutions to crises, he said, pointing out that, while the Council remained the only multilateral forum that exists to preserve peace and international security, it was not in a position to condemn the 7 October attacks; nor to call for a ceasefire in Gaza; nor halt Moscow's war of aggression in Ukraine. ...

The representative of the United States, meanwhile, observing that many have been deeply frustrated by his delegation's use of the veto over the past several months, offered that Washington, D.C., has, vice versa, "been deeply frustrated by the use of the veto by other permanent members over the last few years". ...

The representative of Egypt, underscoring the need for the inclusion of views of States that are directly affected by conflicts, said that all Member States should have access to draft resolutions and presidential statements, and be kept abreast on consultations on issues that directly affected them, as in the case of the conflict in Gaza, which had repercussions for the entire region.

In a similar vein, South Africa's delegate voiced concern over the Council's inability to find a lasting solution to the conflict in Gaza, where a veto was used by one of the permanent members three times against resolutions calling for a humanitarian ceasefire. He also

encouraged deepened cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union, in the context of the Council's adoption of resolution 2712 (2023), to make available assessed contributions for peace operations led by the African Union. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15619.doc.htm>

UNSCR 2012, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2712\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2712(2023))

UNRWA

Philippe Lazzarini Staggering. The number of children reported killed in just over 4 months in #Gaza is higher than the number of children killed in 4 years of wars around the world combined. This war is a war on children. It is a war on their childhood and their future. #ceasefireNow for the sake of children in #Gaza [plus bar chart]

<https://twitter.com/UNLazzarini/status/1767618985397272831>

TOP

Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

UN Security Council: Reform

Dan Carden (Labour) [17644] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the UN Meetings Coverage reports GA/12563, published on 17 November 2023, and GA/12586, published on 5 March 2024, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of proposals to reform the UN Security Council to limit the power of veto.

Andrew Mitchell: As a permanent member of the Security Council, we consider the veto a heavy responsibility, to be used in the interests of securing international peace and security.

We support responsible and accountable use of the veto. The UK Government was proud to co-sponsor the Veto Initiative that enables the General Assembly to scrutinise use of the veto. We support the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency code of conduct, through which we have committed not to vote against a credible draft resolution to prevent or end a mass atrocity. The UK has not used its veto since 1989.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/17644>

The UN reports referred to above can be read at

<https://press.un.org/en/2023/ga12563.doc.htm>

and

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12586.doc.htm>

The Code of Conduct referred to above can be read at

<https://undocs.org/en/A/70/621>

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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>

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 5 days**

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

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

TOP

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