



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Ministerial Statement

#### Extremism Definition and Community Engagement

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove)**

[HCWS342] The terrorist attack in Israel on 7 October, its aftermath and the domestic implications have all sharpened our focus on the pressing need to enhance counter-extremism and community cohesion in the UK.

The ways in which extremist agendas are pursued have evolved since extremism was first defined by Government in 2011. The Government's approach must evolve too. There is cause for serious concern about the growing influence of organisations such as the British National Socialist Movement and Patriotic Alternative who promote neo-Nazi ideology and argue for forced repatriation, a white ethno-state and the singling out of minority groups for intimidation. The targeting of both Muslim and Jewish communities and individuals by these groups is a profound concern, requiring concerted action.

Organisations such as the Muslim Association of Britain, the British affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood, and other groups such as Cage and MEND give rise to concern for their Islamist orientation and views. These groups are divisive forces within Muslim communities and cause real harm to them.

Without prejudicing any formal process, these are the kind of organisations that we may assess to consider if they meet our definition of extremism and, if they do, we will take

action as appropriate against them.

Islam is a great faith that is practised worldwide; a religion of peace that provides spiritual nourishment to millions, inspires countless acts of charity and celebrates the virtues of generosity, compassion and kindness. Islamism, however, is a political ideology that seeks to divide, calls for the establishment of a totalitarian state governed by sharia law and seeks to overthrow liberal democratic principles. We must be very conscious of conflating the experiences and motivations of the majority of British Muslims, who want to practice their faith peacefully and in line with British values, and Islamists, who seek to abuse religious values and traditions or subvert our society. Many Muslim scholars have made the distinction: Islam is not Islamism.

To tackle extremism head-on, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has worked with the Home Office, as well as other Government Departments and external agencies and practitioners, to update the 2011 definition of extremism based on a careful consideration of extremist threats to our liberal democracy, rights and freedoms. With this new definition, we will be assessing whether these, and other organisations, meet our definition and we will take action as appropriate.

However, this is not a new law, it does not create new criminal offences, and through this definition we have taken care to protect our democratic right of freedom of expression and belief, and not to curtail the civil liberties and rights of people in the UK.

It is important for Government to be clear and transparent over what extremism is and how it is recognised, so in due course we will also be publishing a framework to support frontline practitioners. This framework will be publicly available and kept up to date with the landscape of extremism.

Community engagement is a fundamental part of the work of many UK Government ministerial Departments. We are proud to engage with groups and individuals from across the country—from charities and community organisations to local people. Our external engagement can strengthen our democracy, our policymaking and our society.

We also know, however, through the independent review of Prevent, that if best practice is not followed, the UK Government's engagement with communities and external groups can inadvertently provide a platform, funding or legitimacy for individuals, organisations or groups that oppose our shared values. This allows extremists, of all ideologies, to exert greater influence and be legitimised and publicly emboldened.

To ensure that we maximise the benefits of engagement and minimise the risks, we are publishing a new set of community engagement principles that central Government Departments will be expected to consider when undertaking external engagement or providing funding.

To support this work to tackle the threat of domestic extremism, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is setting up a new counter-extremism centre of excellence as a world-leading authority on best practice, data and research. The centre of excellence will provide leadership for Departments' operationalisation and implementation of the new extremism definition, cross-Government standards and an extremism-related due diligence process. In time, it will also become home to new counter-extremism assessment and analytical functions and capabilities. The centre will work with the Commission for Countering Extremism to upskill officials and institutionalise counter-extremism literacy, plugging the gaps in HMG's existing counter-extremism capability.

To protect our democratic values and improve social cohesion, it is important both to reinforce what we all have in common and to be clear in identifying the dangers posed by extremism. That is why we are proud to have provided additional funding for the Community Security Trust and Tell MAMA. Furthermore, we are establishing a new cohesion fund to provide additional support for grassroots organisations working to tackle these issues.

We recognise that tackling extremism and supporting community cohesion requires a holistic approach. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has been

working with local authorities, civil society and faith groups—particularly in those areas where social cohesion is most under strain—to reduce tensions and explore the most constructive support that we can offer.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-14/debates/24031435000017/ExtremismDefinitionAndCommunityEngagement>

## House of Commons Ministerial Statement and Q&A

### Extremism Definition and Community Engagement

*col 452* **The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove):** ... The United Kingdom is a success story: a multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-faith democracy, stronger because of our diversity. However, our democracy and values of inclusivity and tolerance are under challenge from extremist groups that are radicalising our young people and driving greater polarisation within and between communities to further their own ends. ...

As our new definition makes clear, extremism can lead to the radicalisation of individuals, deny people their full rights and opportunities, suppress freedom of expression, incite hatred, weaken social cohesion and, ultimately, lead to acts of terrorism. Most extremist materials and activities are not illegal and do not meet the terrorism or the national security threshold. For example, Islamist and neo-Nazi groups in Britain are operating lawfully, but they advocate and work towards the replacement of democracy with an Islamist or Nazi society. ...

From our engagement we hear widespread unease about the safety and security of community organisations, political candidates and elected officials. Councillors have been threatened with violence; council meetings have been disrupted; council officers and elected members talk of walking a tightrope, terrified of inadvertently saying the wrong thing or offending one side or the other. Many choose to remain silent and to take no action, such is the chilling element of these extremist groups on our democracy.

It is gravely concerning that the conflict in the middle east is driving further polarisation. We have seen a terrible increase in antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate crime, as well as a very significant increase in radicalisation. Troublingly, there is also evidence that some Islamists and extreme right-wing groups and others who seek to tear our society apart are working together to maximise the reach of their message and cause. That is why the work of civil society organisations such as the Community Security Trust and Tell MAMA, as well as Muslims Against Anti-Semitism, the educational charity Solutions Not Sides and the Forum for Discussion of Israel and Palestine is so important. We have provided additional funding for the CST and Tell MAMA to counter antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, and we will do more. We will shortly establish a new fund to provide additional, direct and tangible support for grassroots organisations, building bridges and fighting division. I commend those who are doing so much to counter prejudice.

*col 453* Working in civil society, it is critical that we do not unwittingly, or through ignorance, fund or otherwise support organisations or individuals who are themselves extremist. In the past, it has unfortunately been the case that extremist groups and actors have sought to present themselves as moderate voices representative of majority or mainstream opinion. The Government have had a definition of extremism since 2011. It has helped inform our Prevent counter-terrorism work and was designed to assist the Government in engagement. But in a considerable number of cases organisations and individuals with views that are clearly extreme have nevertheless benefited from state engagement, endorsement and support, and furthermore have exploited that association to further their extremist agendas.

Among the most significant was Shakeel Begg, who was labelled an Islamist extremist by a judge. Mr Begg, an NHS chaplain and regular speaker at state schools, ran Lewisham

Islamic Centre and was on both the Metropolitan police's independent advisory group in Lewisham and Lewisham's standing advisory committee on religious education. In 2016, Mr Begg sued the BBC when it described him, accurately, as an extremist. The judge in the case, Mr Justice Haddon-Cave, conducted his own scrupulous research, identifying many occasions when Mr Begg had advocated extreme positions, including promoting and encouraging religious violence, and by telling a Muslim audience that violence in support of Islam would constitute a man's greatest deed. ...

We have since seen how figures of potential extremism concern have been able to work with the Crown Prosecution Service and the Metropolitan police, co-opt charities and benefit from public funding. We know from William Shawcross's excellent independent review of Prevent, that such engagement has inadvertently provided a platform, funding or legitimacy for groups or individuals who oppose our shared values. This apparent legitimising of their views can lead extremists of all ideologies to be emboldened and to exert greater influence. That is why today my Department is publishing an updated, more precise and rigorous definition of extremism, alongside a set of cross-Government engagement principles for use when engaging with external groups. There is also detailed guidance on what the definition does and does not capture. We are also setting up a new counter-extremism centre of excellence in my Department, as a world-leading authority on best practice, data and research. ...

*col 454* Freedom of expression, freedom of religion and belief, the rule of law, democracy and equal rights—these are the cornerstones of our civilised society that Government and Parliament, on both sides of the House, strive always to uphold. To be clear, our definition will not affect gender-critical campaigners, those with conservative religious beliefs, trans activists, environmental protest groups, or those exercising their proper right to free speech. ...

The proposed definition will hold that extremism is the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance that aims to: negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve those results. While the Government in no way intend to restrict freedom of expression, religion or belief, we cannot be in a position where, unwittingly or not, we sponsor, subsidise or support in any way organisations and individuals opposed to the freedoms that we hold dear.

Across the House, I am sure that we agree that organisations such as the British National Socialist Movement and Patriotic Alternative, who promote neo-Nazi ideology, argue for forced repatriation, a white ethno-state and the targeting of minority groups for intimidation, are precisely the type of groups about which we should be concerned and whose activities we will assess against the new definition. The activities of the extreme right wing are a growing worry. The targeting of both Muslim and Jewish communities and individuals by these groups is a profound concern requiring concerted action.

As with our definition of extremism, it is important that we be precise in our use of language when discussing Islamism. Islamism should never be confused with Islam. Islam is a great faith, a religion of peace that provides spiritual nourishment for millions, inspires countless acts of charity, and celebrates the virtues of generosity, compassion and kindness. Islamism is a totalitarian ideology that seeks to divide, calls for the establishment of an Islamic state governed by sharia law, and seeks the overthrow of liberal democratic principles. It has its roots in the thinking of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, Abul A'la al-Maududi, and the Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Sayyid Qutb. The Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood is, of course, Hamas. Organisations such as the Muslim Association of Britain, which is the British affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood, and other groups such as CAGE and Mend, give rise to concern because of their Islamist orientation and views. ...

*col 455* As the Prime Minister has said, the time has come for us all to stand together to



combat the forces of division and beat this poison. The liberties that we hold dear, and indeed the democratic principles that we are all sent here to uphold, require us to counter and challenge the extremists who seek to intimidate, to coerce and to divide. ...

**Angela Rayner (Labour):** ... Hateful extremism threatens the safety of our communities and the unity of our country. Everyone, across the House, can agree that it is a serious problem which demands a serious response, so let me say from the outset that when it comes to our national security, when it comes to the threat of radicalisation and when it comes to the toxic scourge of Islamophobia, neo-Nazism, antisemitism or any other corrosive hatred, the whole House can and should work together. The way the Government do this work matters, and the language that we all use is important. I welcome the Secretary of State's opening comment that it is our diversity, and our values, that make our country stronger. ...

We all have a responsibility to work to extinguish the flames of division, and never to fan them. While it may be part of the nature of our politics for passion sometimes to take centre stage, and while we may challenge and probe these plans today, if the Secretary of State wants to engage going forward, he has my word that we can do so in good faith. ...

col 456 Given this new definition, the public will rightly be alarmed by the idea that Ministers could have already met extremist groups. Can the Secretary of State shed some light on that? Renewed vigilance and diligence are welcome, particularly in the current climate, but if his own Department now needs to cut ties with extremist groups, that begs the question of why it was working with them in the first place. He said in his statement that the new definition "will not affect gender-critical campaigners, those with conservative religious beliefs, trans activists, environmental protest groups, or those exercising their proper right to free speech."

Can he explain which groups it will affect, and where the Government have chosen to draw the line?

This is not the first time that the Government have identified this risk or promised to act. As the Secretary of State mentioned, back at the beginning of 2011 the Conservative Home Secretary told the House: "If organisations do not support the values of democracy, human rights, equality before the law, participation in society...we will not work with them and we will not fund them."—[\[Official Report, 7 June 2011; Vol. 529, c. 53.\]](#)

That prompts another question: why has it taken the Government 13 years to address this? ...

We know there has been a huge surge in online extremism. Can the Secretary of State give assurances on how that will be dealt with? What action is he taking to work across Government to assess and confront online hate? We know that extremism does not exist in a vacuum, and we need political leadership on this ... The Secretary of State says that the Department has been working with faith groups, civil society and local councils, and I agree that they all have a crucial role to play in tackling extremism, but what form has that consultation taken, and will he publish its findings? ...

col 457 We have seen an appalling surge in antisemitism and Islamophobia in recent months, and the previous strategy is now four years out of date. When will the Secretary of State have an updated hate crime action plan? Have Ministers abandoned plans to introduce a new hate crime strategy? Why are the anti-Muslim hatred working group and the antisemitism working group no longer meeting?

We need much stronger action to tackle the corrosive forms of hatred that devastate lives and corrode communities, but today's statement does not go far enough. Regardless of how workable and effective the new definition and the centre for excellence may be, this announcement will not be enough.

Let me end by echoing the words of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, who have warned that, against the backdrop of growing divisions, it is for political leaders to provide "a conciliatory tone" and to "pursue policies that bring us together, not risk driving us apart." ...

**Michael Gove:** ... I agree with the shadow Secretary of State that ... Passion, vigour and determination are all part of the meat of our politics, and nothing that we have said today should take away from our desire to see free speech exercised as energetically as possible. ...

The shadow Secretary of State asked how the centre of excellence will be staffed and funded. Impartial civil servants with training in this area will be supplemented in their work by studies by academics and academic bodies, and we will work with the existing expertise in the homeland security analysis and intelligence unit within the Home Office in order to ensure that all our work is rigorous. We will make sure that if a decision is made to list an organisation as extremist, we will show our working and the evidence that leads us to that conclusion, and the judgment that we have made will be there for everyone to see.

*col 458* The shadow Secretary of State asked why the Government or arms of the state have unwittingly engaged with extremist organisations in the past. Although the previous definition of extremism was well intentioned and drawn up with care, it was perhaps insufficiently precise and insufficiently policed, so we thought it was appropriate to update it. ...

**Peter Bottomley (Conservative):** ... It is interesting to consider whether it would have been right 90 years ago to identify as a threat Oswald Mosley's approach, as well as the people who marched through the streets to intimidate others. More recently, when Kathleen Stock was at the University of Sussex, the students' union and many others called her a dangerous extremist for writing a rather good book and having views that are now mainstream.

Filling the gap between what is not necessarily criminal but should be identified as wrong is important, and I hope the whole House can give support to today's proposals.

**Michael Gove:** ... There should, rightly, be a high bar on the use of criminal sanctions. We should always seek to encourage free speech, but he is quite right to draw attention to the freedom-restricting harassment that some people have engaged in. ...

**Alison Thewliss (SNP):** ... Friday is International Day to Combat Islamophobia, but Muslims are afraid to speak out, lest they be targeted for their beliefs or, indeed, labelled as extremists. The Government's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, Jonathan Hall, has said that their proposal "could undermine the UK's reputation because it would not be seen as democratic."

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have said in a joint statement that the new definition "risks disproportionately targeting Muslim communities, who are already experiencing rising levels of hate and abuse", and "may vilify the wrong people".

*col 459* Zara Mohammed of the Muslim Council of Britain is concerned that the Government's proposals are undemocratic, divisive and potentially illegal. The organisation is also concerned about the lack of engagement with some of the groups that the Secretary of State has talked about today. Were any of the Muslim groups that he specifically mentioned contacted, so that they knew that they would be mentioned in today's statement?

There has been a desperately worrying increase in Islamophobia and antisemitism since 7 October, and it should concern us all that it is happening. We stand against extremism and the targeting of groups in our society, but extremism is on the rise, driven in no small part by the culture wars stoked by the Conservatives, their hangers-on and those who would call peace demonstrations hate marches. ...

**Michael Gove:** ... we should not conflate the specific challenge from certain Islamist groups with the broader Muslim community. We need to be precise in order to draw that distinction, so that we are able to support organisations on the ground that seek to bring people together and to counter anti-Muslim hate and antisemitism. ...

**Julian Lewis (Conservative):** Surely the essential point here is that the Government are proposing not to ban any organisation, however extreme, from operating legally and within the law, but to identify organisations that should be barred from receiving funding or other support from the Government. ... does the Secretary of State agree that in any democratic society people have a right to decide with which bodies they will or will not associate? ...

*col 460* **Michael Gove:** ... There is, appropriately, a very high threshold for the proscription of organisations, which Hizb ut-Tahrir recently met. We are not seeking to ban or restrict the operation of organisations in a free society; we are simply making it clear that it would be wrong for the Government to use taxpayers' money or public endorsement in engagement with such organisations. ...

**Diana Johnson (Labour):** The Secretary of State said in his statement: "Our definition draws on the work of Dame Sara Khan, the Government's independent reviewer of social cohesion, and Sir Mark Rowley, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, before his appointment to that post."

In our report on the policing of protests, the Home Affairs Committee said: "We find it surprising that the Government has not yet responded to the reports it commissioned from the Commission for Countering Extremism regarding hateful extremism ...

... will [there] be a full response to Dame Sara Khan's report? How will this new definition affect the policing of protests?

**Michael Gove:** ... I had the opportunity to meet Dame Sara and Sir Mark to discuss our work on this new definition and, of course, I have worked very closely with the Home Secretary and, particularly, the Security Minister on framing the definition.

... work in this space is shared between my Department and the Home Office, which is responsible for security and for supporting the police. We are responsible for funding community organisations and encouraging a greater degree of social cohesion and resilience. There will be further responses to some of the recommendations in that report, and indeed in Lord Walney's report and Dame Sara's additional report, which is forthcoming. ...

*col 461* **Priti Patel (Conservative):** ... Although the proposals are non-statutory and will act as a guide for civil servants and Ministers, can the Secretary of State explain what evidential threshold will be applied by the new centre of excellence when compiling the list of organisations and guidance? How will this guidance be applied against the existing legal definitions of racism, incitement and intimidation that guide our security services and our police in upholding the rule of law?

**Michael Gove:** ... the definition does not impinge or alter the legal threshold for prosecution where people incite violence. Indeed, there are arguments for looking again at our laws to make sure that they are fit for purpose, but today's definition is not about changing the criminal law; it is about setting a threshold. That threshold will be evidenced when we come forward with the list of organisations that we believe meet this bar, with evidence that everyone can see makes a compelling case that the ideology that spurs those organisations is extremist in nature.

**Stephen Timms (Labour):** The Secretary of State, in my view very unwisely, recently closed down the Inter Faith Network, which facilitates the kind of dialogue he praised in his statement. He closed it down on the grounds that one of its 22 trustees is connected with the Muslim Council of Britain. If an organisation unjustly finds itself on his proposed list, will it have the opportunity to appeal against its inclusion?

**Michael Gove:** We have not closed down the Inter Faith Network. We ceased our funding, and the Inter Faith Network draws its funding from a variety of sources. We will apply appropriate due diligence and publish evidence. If anyone believes our judgment is wrong, as in any case where it is believed that the Government have acted unreasonably, the option of judicial review is always available.

**Robert Buckland (Conservative):** ... Words matter, and I note in particular the aim to "intentionally create a permissive environment" to deal with the harms that he rightly

identifies and that we all oppose. However, there are dangers in that wording. Will he issue guidance as to what it precisely means? The word “intentionally” is clearly important. Does he accept that, with the Government generally not engaging with the organisations that he rightly identifies, we should not inhibit the work of the security services and agencies, which have to engage with elements of these organisations in order to combat extremism at an individual level?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. and learned Friend makes a very important point, because obviously our intelligence and security agencies, our law enforcement actors and sometimes those working abroad to keep us safe will have to deal with and engage unsavoury individuals. The definition does not cover that activity.

*col 462* **Imran Hussain (Labour):** Let us be clear and call this what it is. It is not a serious and genuine attempt to address a very important issue. It is a further draconian attempt to continue the Tory agenda of culture wars. ...

**Michael Gove:** ... Of course there will be debate, challenge and differences of opinion and emphasis in what we seek to do, but it is a shared endeavour. ...

**Robert Jenrick (Conservative):** ... I fear that the definition, though well intentioned, lands in no man’s land. It does not go far enough to tackle the real extremists, and it does not do enough to protect the non-extremists who are simply expressing contrarian views and who might find that this definition is used against them, perhaps not now but possibly in the future. ...

Secondly, does my right hon. Friend agree that this is not the totality of our anti-extremism strategy, important though it is? We now have to take forward other areas, particularly on William Shawcross’s superb recommendations with respect to the Prevent programme, on revoking the visas of visitors who do not share our values ... and on ensuring that the police vigorously and fairly implement our existing laws so that everyone can have confidence that there is not, and will never be, two-tier policing in our country.

**Michael Gove:** ... He asks whether this definition is enough on its own, and he is right that it is not, but it is a necessary step ...

The previous definition was looser, baggier and capable of many more interpretations than this much tighter definition, which is therefore much less likely to be misused. ...

*col 463* **Joanna Cherry (SNP):** This new definition will require careful scrutiny of its compliance with human rights such as the right to freedom of expression, religion and belief. ... may I ask the Secretary of State to agree that Members of this House have a duty to be careful in their use of language and not to brand groups “extreme” or “hateful” simply because they disagree with them? ...

**Michael Gove:** ... Again, I stress that this is about Government engagement. Although she or I might agree or disagree with an individual or group, we respect their right to free speech and free association. ...

**Kit Malthouse (Conservative):** I share, along with many other Members, some alarm at the emergence of this new definition ... is there really to be no appeal process in this branding of particular groups as unacceptable? I ask that not least because, as I am sure the Secretary of State will intend, putting them on a Government blacklist will have a chilling impact more widely on their place in society; from financial services to the media, who is likely to engage with them? At what stage in the process will those groups that he decides are worthy of examination be able to present evidence in their defence?

My second question is: if a Member of this House disagrees with the view of the Secretary of State or the Government, and decides to invite that group into the House or to be a member of that group, will the Government refuse to engage with the Member of Parliament?

*col 464* **Michael Gove:** ... Organisations such as the British National Socialist Movement and Patriotic Alternative, which I mentioned, are ones that I hope no Member of this House would want to deal with. Obviously, however, each individual



must look to their own conscience about the organisations with which they engage.

This is purely about Government; Parliament is, quite rightly, sovereign.

**Jeremy Corbyn (Independent):** ... I urge the Secretary of State to be cautious in all of this. Those of us who campaigned against apartheid in the 1970s were often condemned, and although the African National Congress was never banned in Britain, there were calls to ban it. Things change and history moves on; those who marched for peace in Ireland were condemned at the time, and later we had the Good Friday agreement. So I ask the Secretary of State: what is the status of this statement? Does it have legal force? Will it be an instruction to the police? Will it be an instruction to local authorities? Exactly how will it be implemented?

... he rightly makes the point that we have rights of religious assembly, free speech and organisation. It is important to state those, and they are all enshrined in the European convention on human rights. Will he assure us—because this is not mentioned anywhere in this document—that there is no plan by the Government or the Conservative party to withdraw from the European convention on human rights and therefore from the European Court of Human Rights? ...

**Michael Gove:** ... this definition governs only Government engagement and funding. Other autonomous organisations must and will make their own judgments; this is simply about what Government and their agencies do. ... There are people who have been members of extremist organisations and have then changed their view and been invaluable in helping us to challenge the work of extremists: those who were formerly members of Islamist organisations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir have been valuable in countering that hate; and those people who were formerly members of neo-Nazi organisations have been invaluable in making sure that we can police their activities. ...

*col 465* **Rehman Chishti (Conservative):** Of course, the first duty of any state is to protect its citizens and maintain national security. ... As someone who comes from a Muslim faith, I get 1,000 pieces of hatred from the far right and the same from Islamist Daesh-inspired individuals. ...

... this statement is being made today, after 16 months of our Government not having an independent adviser to tackle Islamophobia. This statement is also being made two weeks after the Government-funded body Tell MAMA published data showing that there had been 2,000 hate incidents or crimes against the Muslim community—we have not had a statement from the Government on that or on engagement with the Muslim community. People will be looking at today's statement with that backdrop in mind.

I want the Secretary of State to provide me with clarification about the interpretation of the definition. Am I right to say that a Minister will make the determination as to whether something creates a “permissive environment” or is “intolerant”? ... giving Ministers that responsibility raises a real concern, because it then comes down to each Minister's own judgment. We need to ensure that we have a thorough, independent and fair process, because we are all committed to our national security.

**Michael Gove:** ... He makes two important points. The first is about the need to be vigilant in dealing with anti-Muslim hatred. That is why my right hon. Friend the Security Minister announced more than £100 million of funding to better protect mosques, schools and other Muslim community centres ... It is also why the Government continue to fund the excellent organisation Tell MAMA ... My hon. Friend asks whether Ministers alone will make the judgment. Ministers will make that judgement, informed by impartial civil service advice and academic research.

**John McDonnell (Labour):** For a number of years, I have been meeting and working with an organisation that in 2018 published its report “Our Shared British Future: Muslims and Integration in the UK”. I supported that report because it called for “equal integration for all”, for us to “break down barriers” and work towards tackling the challenges that hinder integration, and for us to “celebrate British diversity” and the success of our model of

integration. It also reported on the role of faith organisations in integration, recognising that faith can support integration efforts.

That organisation is the Muslim Council of Britain. The Secretary of State deprecated the leaks around this report, but the informal spin and briefings that have taken place have dragged the name of the Muslim Council of Britain through the mud in recent days. He has not answered the question as to what appeal process there will be, aside from judicial review. Will organisations and individuals have access to legal aid for judicial review in challenging decisions made by the Secretary of State on this?

*col 466* **Michael Gove:** ... Any organisation about which concerns are raised is an organisation that we will be very careful in scrutinising before taking any steps. When we do take any steps—if we take any steps—the evidence will be clearly laid out.

**Miriam Cates (Conservative):** ... In separating the definition of extremism from actual violence and harm, and in using terms like “fundamental rights”, which do not have a definition in law, we risk criminalising or, at the very least, chilling the speech of people who have perfectly legitimate, harmless views.

To go back to the example of gender critical feminists, a gender critical feminist might be intolerant of the right of people to change their sex on their birth certificate. They might seek to undermine that right by seeking to repeal the Gender Recognition Act 2004, for example. They would be labelled extremists under these regulations, as I understand them. As to impartial civil servants deciding these things, I am afraid I do not think that is always the case. Certainly, I have seen civil servants wearing very unimpartial lanyards on this particular issue. I seek my right hon. Friend’s reassurance that not only will such groups not be labelled extremists now, but there will be protections so they will never be labelled that way in the future.

**Michael Gove:** It is precisely because I share the concerns raised by my hon. Friend that we have made the definition tighter. I am sure she is aware of the existing wording of the 2011 definition, which has a far broader range of groups that could fall within its ambit. By being more narrow, precise and rigorous, we more effectively protect free speech. She referred to criminalising. Let us be clear that there is nothing in this definition that would lead to a ban. It is simply about saying which organisations Government should and should not engage with. I am sure she would agree with me that neo-Nazi organisations and Islamist organisations, of the kinds that I drew attention to, are the kinds of organisations the Government should not be engaging with. It is regrettable that in the past we have.

**Richard Foord (Liberal Democrat):** The Government’s independent reviewer of terrorism, Jonathan Hall, and the Government’s independent adviser on antisemitism, Lord Mann, have both criticised what they have learned of these outline proposals for a new non-statutory definition of extremism. Jonathan Hall points out that Hizb ut-Tahrir was proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000—quite rightly—for its reactions to the attacks of 7 October, and he said the proposals mark a shift “away from people who are doing bad things, towards people who think bad things”.

Lord Mann points to the contradiction in banning some speakers from universities, having just passed a law to enshrine freedom of speech in universities, and he talks about “the politics of division” doing nothing to help the Jewish community. Will the Secretary of State reflect on the advice of the Government’s independent reviewer of terrorism and their independent adviser on antisemitism?

*col 467* **Michael Gove:** I met them both in the preparation for the work we have done today. I think it was the case that the independent adviser on antisemitism, Lord Mann, whose work is outstanding, said on broadcasts today that he regarded this as an improvement on the existing definition. ...

**Edward Leigh (Conservative):** ... Will my right hon. Friend reassure me that nothing in this statement will add to the increasing culture, in what should be a free country, of the

intolerance of the right to offend? I might be offended if people make extreme attacks on Christianity, but they have an absolute right to do so. People have a right to criticise religious people or particular religions. Equally, Orthodox Jews, devout evangelical Christians with a particular view of the Bible and devout traditional Muslims have an absolute right to say what they believe in a free society, even if it is very unfashionable.

**Michael Gove:** I could not agree more. ... ideas should contend on the plain of argument and people should be able to discern good arguments from bad arguments.

All the statement does is to tighten the existing definition. ...

**Andy Slaughter (Labour):** This tweet was liked by Sir Paul Marshall: "Civil war is coming. There has never been a country that has remained peaceful with a sizeable Islamic presence... Once the Muslims get to 15-20% of the population the current cold civil war will turn hot."

Many other incendiary tweets were liked or retweeted by Marshall, a substantial donor to both the Tory party and the Secretary of State personally, according to a recent investigation by HOPE not hate and "The News Agents". How does the Secretary of State square his definition of extremism with accepting money from someone like Marshall?

**Michael Gove:** I deprecate the personal attack on Sir Paul Marshall, who is a distinguished philanthropist and a supporter of Ark academies ...

**col 468 Mark Logan (Conservative):** Last evening in the House of Commons, I attended the Big Iftar celebration of the all-party parliamentary group on British Muslims. One person after another said to me in private that they were fearful of an increasing mood of Islamophobia. Indeed, right hon. and hon. Friends have referred to the Tell MAMA statistics that show a 335% increase in anti-Muslim hatred since October.

I am worried about a slippery slope. ... Will it lead to a position across the criminal law, months and years ahead, where people feel that they are no longer able to speak their minds? As an example, two or three weeks ago I attended a rally in my own constituency in support of Gaza but, as we have seen in recent months, such attendance has almost been outlawed and people have been silenced. ...

**Michael Gove:** ... The Department that I lead funds Tell MAMA, which does such important work in highlighting and recording acts of anti-Muslim hatred. There has been a dreadful increase in such acts. We want to work with organisations on the ground to counter that hatred. As I mentioned, sadly some of the organisations that have been supported in the past have been extremist and have sought to intimidate British Muslims. That is why we need to be careful about those with whom we work, in order to present a united front against anti-Muslim hatred.

**George Galloway (Workers Party of Britain):** ... It is not good enough to say that it does not seek to ban or jail anyone—try getting a bank account once you have been branded by Michael Gove as an extremist. ...

This building is designed to show that politics is full of division, and sometimes those reviled as extremists turn out to have been right all along.

**col 469 Michael Gove:** ... There is nothing in this definition that any hon. Member should fear will inhibit them in making their case. ...

**Desmond Swayne (Conservative):** By stating that a free society requires that the Muslim religion accommodates itself to the same level of scrutiny, criticism and even blasphemy that Christianity has become accustomed to, am I straying into the Secretary of State's permissive environment? I am not an extremist, am I?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend is many, many things ... He is not an extremist, and I shall continue to admire the rigour with which he prosecutes his case.

**John Cryer (Labour):** I share the concern of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) that Government Departments may have been engaging with extremists and racists in the past. The Secretary of State seems to indicate that engagement, or lack of engagement, is dependent on the definition. Is it not also

dependent on the common sense of Ministers? If Ministers are willing to engage with extremists and racists, surely they should not be Ministers in the first place.

**Michael Gove:** I absolutely take the hon. Member's point. The key thing here is that sometimes there are organisations and individuals that seek to operate by presenting one face to one group and a different face to another. That is why we need due diligence. Mistakes have been made in the past. I think those mistakes were made in good faith and unwittingly ...

**Andrew Rosindell (Conservative):** ... Does the Secretary of State agree that what underpins Britain is our ancient liberties and freedoms, free speech and the rule of law, which uphold our democracy under the Crown? Does he believe, as I do, that we must defend all our British values and traditions? We must teach them in schools, and we must ensure that British values are the order of the day.

**Michael Gove:** ... In our schools and other institutions, we should make sure that people from every background are acquainted with our history and taught the very British habits of scepticism, questioning and sometimes raucous expressions of opposition to Governments and others. ...

*col 470* **Claire Hanna (SDLP):** The press release attached to this statement, which refers to 7 October, seems to imply, deliberately or otherwise, that protests and other human responses to the horrors of the Hamas attacks on Israel and the bombardment of Gaza are extreme. In my diverse and shared Belfast South constituency, we are battling extremism at the moment, in the form of a rash of menacing and racist posters about foreigners and housing. ... This kind of politics and the departure from pluralism and tolerance are part of the reason why I and many others advocate for a new Ireland by exclusively peaceful and democratic means. That would of course undermine and change the constitution of the United Kingdom and its democracy. Can the Secretary of State confirm that people like me, who advocate for a new Ireland, are not extremists under the second part of his definition?

**Michael Gove:** No, of course not. The Social Democratic and Labour party has a long and proud tradition of arguing for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to become a new state, and that has an impeccable political tradition. As she rightly points out, many people wish to protest about what is happening in the middle east. We may disagree about aspects of that conflict, but I hope we all share a sincere desire to bring peace to the middle east. ...

**James Sunderland (Conservative):** ... At this time of tension and sensitivity, does the Secretary of State agree that politicians have a responsibility to dial down the rhetoric, that divisions must not be exploited for political gain, and that we all must work together across the House to achieve that?

**Michael Gove:** I could not agree more ...

**Deidre Brock (SNP):** The Secretary of State spoke of sharing our workings about affected organisations. He did not share his workings after his abrupt decision to pull Government funding from the Inter Faith Network, causing that respected organisation to close. ...

**Michael Gove:** A letter was published outlining the reasoning behind that, and the Government are only one of a number of funders of the Inter Faith Network.

*col 471* **Tom Hunt (Conservative):** I do not want to be accused of dialling up the rhetoric, but I must say that I and millions of people in this country are utterly fed up with these protests that have been taking place in our nation's capital. Not every person who attends these protests is an extremist, and not every person who attends these protests is a radical, but many are, and they are going unchallenged. I have Jewish friends who will not go into their own capital because they do not feel safe, and it is weekend after weekend after weekend. When is something going to happen? All the public see is impotence. It is fuelling extremism, and it is linked to this debate. If the situation does not get any better, and we continue to see hate on our streets going unchallenged, is the Government prepared to strip responsibility for policing in London from the Mayor of London, and to



give a far stronger steer to the Metropolitan police, who every weekend, from what I can see, are failing to stand up for our values, and for Jewish people, so that they feel safe?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend speaks passionately about this. I know from talking to Jewish friends that some of the statements and actions that accompany these marches cause them to feel a profound sense of fear. That has been well recorded not just by the Government's Commission for Countering Extremism, but by Members of this House, so I share his concern for the Jewish community.

I should say that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner takes his responsibilities very seriously. There have been a number of arrests alongside these marches, and individuals have been prosecuted for incitement and for hateful actions. In addition, my colleagues in the Home Office have commissioned a report from Baron Walney, John Woodcock as was, looking at how we give the police all the powers that they need. We will come forward in due course with a response to that report.

**Richard Burgon (Labour):** I am afraid that the statement has not assuaged the fears that so many have about what the Government are really up to here. Given recent events, on which the Secretary of State was remarkably silent in his statement, may I ask whether we should count as an extremist someone saying that an MP should be shot? Or are those who have donated £10 million to the Conservative party exempt from such definitions? Would the Tory party not be better off getting its own house in order, rather than making this clearly political intervention, which has more to do with the upcoming general election, and trying to silence the huge numbers of peaceful opponents of the Government's Gaza policy, than it has with public safety?

**Michael Gove:** As I mentioned earlier, speaking as someone who was the victim of a determined effort to kill me, and because the individual who was trying to kill me went on to kill a friend and colleague from this House, I take incredibly seriously threats of violence. I have long admired the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), and I have no hesitation in stating that those comments were disgusting, but the intention in bringing forward this definition today is to make sure that the Government—we are talking about only the Government—work with organisations that are committed to peace and greater social cohesion. ...

*col 472* **Anna Firth (Conservative):** ... [my constituents] have seen the antisemitic slogan "From the river to the sea" projected on to their Parliament—if such slogans are not already against the law, they certainly should be—and they have seen the police take insufficient action. On marches against the middle east war in Southend, we have seen dolls covered in white bandages, spattered with a red substance, and placards saying, "Anna Firth kills babies". Clearly, both those things are, if not extreme, then very close to being within my right hon. Friend's definition of extremism. Can he assure me and the House that we will ensure that the message about what is extremism and what is against the law gets through to the police, and that appropriate action is taken?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is correct to draw attention to the fact that there have been occasions recently when people motivated to make a particular point have crossed the threshold. I know that the police take those transgressions incredibly seriously, as do the Security Minister and the Home Secretary.

**Sam Tarry (Labour):** ... How can my constituents ... have any faith in the Secretary of State's ability to decide who is, and who is not, an extremist? I ask because it has also been briefed that his preferred appointment as the anti-Muslim hatred adviser is Haras Rafiq, the former chief executive officer of the Quilliam Foundation, which worked with US anti-Muslim think-tanks and promoted the favourite theory of Nick Griffin, the great replacement theory—a conspiracy theory that is so debunked and extreme that it should be nowhere near the thinking of the Secretary of State. Yesterday, most damningly, Tommy Robinson, a far-right extremist ... praised that appointment. ...

**Michael Gove:** Because we will publish the evidence behind them.

**Bob Blackman (Conservative):** ... we have to consider the fact that organisations are populated by individuals. Individuals who have hateful views may be expelled by those organisations, or may go off and form other organisations that will not be on the banned list. ... What action will the Secretary of State take to ensure that foreign nationals who seek to radicalise our young people are prevented from doing so?

**Michael Gove:** ... The Home Office is vigilant about who it allows to come here, and it conducts appropriate work to ensure that visas are not granted to people who are here to sow division and hate.

*col 473* **Steward Hosie (SNP):** We know from the work of the Intelligence and Security Committee ... and its report on extreme right-wing terrorism that a number of people are radicalised not simply by shadowy organisations on the dark web, but at least in part by the mainstream media. ...

**Michael Gove:** All of us have a responsibility to be vigilant about the dangers of extremism. ... the most important thing to recognise is that a vigorous culture of free speech, sustained by a free and independent press, is a critical part of our democratic culture.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-14/debates/4E9FCBC1-F151-470C-840B-1CC58EBF73F4/ExtremismDefinitionAndCommunityEngagement>

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

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63e26968d3bf7f17385a3421/Independent\\_Review\\_of\\_Prevent.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63e26968d3bf7f17385a3421/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf)

*The joint statement from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, referred to above, can be read at*

<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/joint-statement-archbishops-warns-government-over-new-extremism-definition>

*The Muslim Council of Britain statement referred to above can be read at*

<https://mcb.org.uk/muslim-council-of-britain-slams-governments-flawed-extremism-strategy/>

*The Home Affairs Committee report referred to above can be read at*

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

*The funding announcement referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-commits-more-funding-to-protect-uk-muslims>

*The Muslim Council of Britain report referred to above can be read at*

<https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/MCB-Our-Shared-Future-online.pdf>

*The press release referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-strengthens-approach-to-counter-extremism>

*The Intelligence and Security Committee report referred to above can be read at*

[https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism\\_Accessible.pdf](https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf)

## House of Commons Oral Answers

### Prime Minister's Questions

**Afzal Khan (Labour):** Despite serious opposition from the Archbishop of Canterbury, three former Home Secretaries and three Government advisers on antisemitism, social cohesion and political violence, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is due to widen the definition of extremism tomorrow. While Members on the Government Benches peddle far-right conspiracy theories about Islamists and Muslims taking over Britain, should the Prime Minister's priority not be to get his own house in order and to

stamp out extremism, racism and Islamophobia in the Conservative party? Will the Prime Minister finally take Islamophobia seriously and agree to the definition?

**The Prime Minister:** Discrimination has no place in our society. It is important to distinguish between strongly felt political debate on one hand and unacceptable acts of abuse, intimidation and violence on the other. I urge the hon. Gentleman to wait for the details of the strategy. It is a sensitive matter, but it is one we must tackle because there has been rise in extremists who are trying to hijack our democracy. That must be confronted. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-13/debates/0F85365D-BD56-4647-B8B5-EC356A1BD132/Engagements#contribution-A5EAD44D-1F18-4805-9150-5E315469DD8C>

### Prime Minister's Questions

**Miriam Cates (Conservative)** [902010] Radical Islamists pose a serious threat to our nation's security. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that we must urgently address that, but reports that the Government wish to broaden the definition of extremism are concerning, because in separating the definition of extremism from actual violence and harm, we may criminalise people with a wide range of legitimate views and have a chilling effect on free speech. Will my right hon. Friend reassure me that, instead of trying to police people's thoughts and speech—as Opposition Members clearly wish to do—the Government will target specific groups that foster terrorism and those who fund them?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. That is why the strategy, which I urge her to wait for, will be one that she can support. It is our duty to ensure that the Government have the tools to tackle the threat that she rightly identifies and highlights. This is absolutely not about silencing those with private and peaceful beliefs, and nor will it impact free speech, which we on this side of the House will always strive to protect.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-13/debates/0F85365D-BD56-4647-B8B5-EC356A1BD132/Engagements#contribution-3E8CF613-0A2F-437E-9170-2A14445ED04F>

### Business of the House

**Michael Ellis (Conservative):** Labour demands that a large donation to the Conservatives be returned because of a racist comment made five years ago, but does my right hon. Friend recall that Mark Serwotka, the head of the Public and Commercial Services Union, said six years ago that Israel “created” the antisemitism row in the Labour party? The Board of Deputies said at the time that that was antisemitic, but Serwotka was subsequently elected president of the whole TUC. Applying the same standards, should not Labour return the tens of millions that it has received from trade union donations?

**Penny Mordaunt:** ... We wait to see what the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) does.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-14/debates/2D54D9CC-4912-406B-AC5A-6E32D737AB64/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-DA3B4159-ADA4-4F84-B769-85D32F5E7408>

## House of Commons Written Answers

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

**Anneliese Dodds (Labour)** [16852] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, 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.

**Tom Tugendhat:** 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/2024-03-04/16852>

*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](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>

### **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps**

**Matthew Offord (Conservative)** [16751] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment of the level of activity of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the UK.

**Tom Tugendhat:** While we do not routinely comment on the detail of operational or intelligence matters, the UK will always stand up to threats from foreign nations. The UK Government has long been clear about our concerns over the malign activity of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and we will continue to hold Iran and the IRGC to account. The UK has sanctioned the IRGC in its entirety and on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024 the UK and US announced new sanctions to tackle the domestic threat posed by the Iranian regime. The UK sanctioned 7 individuals and 1 organisation, including senior Iranian officials and members of organised criminal gangs who collaborate with the regime, in order to expose and disrupt Iran's activities in the UK and overseas.

We continually assess potential threats in the UK and use all tools at our disposal to protect the UK and our interests from Iran-linked threats.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16751>

*The announcement referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-us-step-up-action-to-tackle-domestic-threat-from-iran>

## **House of Lords Written Answer**

### **Universities: Antisemitism**

**The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative)** [HL3156] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support Jewish university students following recent increases in incidents of antisemitism on campuses.

**Baroness Barran:** Antisemitism, intimidation, and threats of violence must never be tolerated on university campuses. The Community Security Trust 2023 annual report highlights the unprecedented increase in antisemitic incidents in higher education (HE) and this unacceptable rise is deeply concerning. All antisemitism is abhorrent and universities should have robust systems to deal with incidents of support for unlawful antisemitic abuse and harassment. We will not tolerate unlawful harassment or the glorification of terrorism.

Since the 7 October attacks, we have actively intervened to ensure that universities act swiftly and appropriately to deal with incidents of antisemitism.

The Secretary of State for Education and the Minister for Skills wrote to all universities on 11 October 2023, urging them to respond swiftly to hate-related incidents, and actively reassure Jewish students that they can study without fear of



harassment or intimidation. The Minister wrote again to Vice Chancellors on 16 November 2023, emphasising that they must use disciplinary measures wherever appropriate, highlighting the importance of police engagement, and reiterating that student visas could be suspended where a foreign national is found to have committed or incited acts of racial hatred. This was one of the key actions set out in the five point plan for tackling antisemitism in HE, which was published on 5 November 2023. The plan also involves:

- Calling for visas to be withdrawn from international students who incite racial hatred. Visas are a privilege, not a right, and we will not hesitate to remove them from people who abuse them.
- Logging specific cases and sharing them with the Office for Students for their consideration.
- Continuing to make it clear in all discussions that acts that may be criminal should be referred to the police.
- Establishing a Tackling Antisemitism Quality Seal which will be an award available to universities who can demonstrate the highest standards in tackling antisemitism.

On 22 November 2023, the department announced in the Autumn Statement an additional £7 million over three years to tackle antisemitism in education. The Quality Seal will be the cornerstone of this package for universities, providing a framework of measures that will make clear what good practice is in tackling antisemitism in HE, and making sure that our universities are a safe and welcoming space for Jewish students and staff.

The department will not hesitate to take further action across education to stamp out antisemitism and harassment of Jewish pupils, students and staff.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-08/hl3156>

*The CST report referred to above can be read at*

[https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic\\_Incidents\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic_Incidents_Report_2023.pdf)

*The 11 October letter referred to above can be read at*

<https://twitter.com/GillianKeegan/status/1712461243267829960>

*The 16 November letter referred to above is not available online.*

*The five-point plan referred to above can be read at*

<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/11/05/how-were-protecting-jewish-students-on-university-campuses/>

*The Autumn Statement referred to above can be read at*

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

## House of Commons Library

**Letter from Chris Philp MP to Munira Wilson MP regarding an update on how the £7 million announced in the Autumn Statement to tackle antisemitism in schools and universities had been allocated, as discussed during the Oral Statement on Antisemitism in the UK**

[https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2024-0281/Minister\\_Philp-Tackling\\_antisemitism\\_in\\_schools\\_and\\_universities.pdf](https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2024-0281/Minister_Philp-Tackling_antisemitism_in_schools_and_universities.pdf)

**Letter from Chris Philp MP to Jim Shannon MP regarding whether discussions had taken place with the Devolved Administrations regarding funding to support those who feel unsafe in their communities amid the current protests, as discussed**

## Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

### Government strengthens approach to counter extremism

... An updated, more focused definition designed to help tackle the ever-evolving threat of extremism in the UK has been published by the government ...

The updated and more precise definition of extremism will be used by government departments and officials alongside a set of engagement principles, to ensure they are not inadvertently providing a platform, funding or legitimacy to groups or individuals who attempt to advance extremist ideologies that negate our fundamental rights and freedoms and overturn the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy. This definition is not statutory and has no effect on the existing criminal law – it applies to the operations of Government itself.

Since the 7 October Hamas terror attacks in Israel concerns have been raised about the wide-ranging risk of radicalisation. On hate crime, since 7 October the Community Security Trust recorded 4,103 antisemitic incidents in the UK in 2023, an increase of 147% compared to 2022, and Tell MAMA recorded a 335% increase in anti-Muslim hate cases in the last four months. ...

The new definition and engagement principles will make sure those who promote extreme ideologies or spread hate in their communities are not legitimised through their interactions with government. Following publication, the Government will undertake a robust process to assess groups for extremism against the definition, which will then inform decisions around government engagement and funding. ...

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said: The United Kingdom is a success story – a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-faith democracy. It is stronger because of its diversity.

But our democracy and our values of inclusivity and tolerance are under challenge from extremists. In order to protect our democratic values, it is important both to reinforce what we have in common and to be clear and precise in identifying the dangers posed by extremism.

The pervasiveness of extremist ideologies has become increasingly clear in the aftermath of the 7 October attacks and poses a real risk to the security of our citizens and our democracy. This is the work of Extreme Right-Wing and Islamist extremists who are seeking to separate Muslims from the rest of society and create division within Muslim communities. They seek to radicalise individuals, deny people their full rights, suppress freedom of expression, incite hatred, and undermine our democratic institutions.

Today's measures will ensure that government does not inadvertently provide a platform to those setting out to subvert democracy and deny other people's fundamental rights. This is the first in a series of measures to tackle extremism and protect our democracy.

The new definition provides a stricter characterisation that government can use to make sure that extremist organisations and individuals are not being legitimised or given a platform through their interactions with government. It reads:

Extremism is the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims to:

1. negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or
2. undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or
3. intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in (1) or (2).

The new definition is narrower and more precise than the 2011 Prevent definition, which did not provide the detail we now need to assess and identify extremism. This new definition helps clearly articulate how extremism is evidenced through the public behaviour of extremists that advance their violent, hateful or intolerant aims. ...

The definition is clear that extremism involves advancing or promoting an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, a high bar that only captures the most concerning of activities. It is not about silencing those with private and peaceful beliefs – not will it affect free speech, which will always be protected.

It does not create new powers, it instead helps the government and our partners better to identify extremist organisations, individuals and behaviours.

Alongside the new definition, the government is also publishing a set of engagement principles which are designed to help officials to engage more widely whilst mitigating the risk of undertaking engagement that undermines government's core aims to:

- Maintain public confidence in government;
- Uphold democratic values; and
- Protect the rights and freedoms of others.

UK Ministerial departments will be expected to consider the engagement standards when deciding whether to move forward with engagement with groups that meet the new definition. ... Non-central government institutions, such as arms-length bodies, higher education institutions and independent organisations including the police and CPS, will not be obliged to adopt the definition or apply the engagement principles initially.

To ensure that government has the tools it needs to effectively counter extremism, a new counter-extremism centre of excellence has been established in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This unit will provide leadership for the cross-government counter-extremism community, ensure consistent application of the definition and engagement standards, and take the lead on producing strategic assessments of extremism. ...

Lord Walney, Independent Adviser on Political Violence and Disruption, said: The threat to Britain from extremists includes those who may not use violence directly yet target our core values, so it is welcome that this updated definition includes those who seek to undermine or replace liberal democracy.

Greater clarity in defining extremism can underpin a concerted approach across civil society to protect our country.”

Professor Ian Acheson, Senior Advisor, Counter Extremism Project said: These are necessary next steps to confront and deter those who advocate for violent extremism. Hateful anti-British ideas that undermine our democracy creating intimidation and fear need ideologues to drive them. It is intolerable that the state underwrites people and organisations poisoning community life in one of the most successful multi-ethnic countries in the world.

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-strengthens-approach-to-counter-extremism>

**Guidance: New definition of extremism (2024)**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-definition-of-extremism-2024/new-definition-of-extremism-2024>

## Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

### Former barrister sentenced for grossly offensive antisemitic blog posts

A disbarred barrister who posted grossly offensive antisemitic material online has been sentenced.

Between May 2021 and April 2022, Ian Robert Millard persistently posted about his hatred of Jewish people online, while claiming he was simply exercising his freedom of speech. Statements made by Millard included that ‘there is nothing wrong with being antisemitic’, that England would ‘be a great deal better’ with more antisemitism and suggestions that the Holocaust was ‘fake history’.

He also posted imagery which portrayed antisemitic conspiracy theories.

Working closely with Hampshire Constabulary, the CPS trawled through twelve months’ worth of evidence from Millard’s blog.

Unpicking the evidence, piece by piece, including one month of posts alone which totalled 450 pages, prosecutors were able to show the continuous barrage of offensive material – all of which needed to be considered by prosecutors to build the strongest possible case.

At trial, prosecutors utilised the evidence to prove Millard was not simply expressing his freedom of speech, but was engaged in a campaign of antisemitic hate, publishing grossly offensive material which breached the Communications Act.

Having been found guilty after trial of five charges of breaching the Communications Act, Millard, 67 and of the New Forest, was sentenced at Southampton Magistrates’ Court on 14 March 2024 and received a nine month Community Order.

Sophie Stevens, Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor with CPS Wessex, said: “Antisemitism has a devastating impact on individuals and communities – we won’t hesitate to bring offenders of hate crime to justice.

“This was a complex prosecution which required many hours scrutinising the masses of online content that Ian Millard deemed perfectly acceptable.

“In fact, what he posted were grossly offensive and criminal claims about Jewish people. It is particularly shocking that a former barrister, who is meant to engage the law in the pursuit of justice, would express such flagrant hatred.

“We will continue to prosecute antisemitic offenders and bring the perpetrators of any hateful crimes to justice.” ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/wessex/news/former-barrister-sentenced-grossly-offensive-antisemitic-blog-posts>

## Welsh Government

**Action, not words: towards an anti-racist Wales by 2030**

<https://dmscdn.vuelio.co.uk/publicitem/00561071-f66a-49ce-b3c4-dd75c7759cf5>

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## Holocaust

### Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

**Holocaust Memorial Day Trust** We are heartbroken at the passing of Henry Wuga MBE, aged 100. Our Chief Executive, @OliviaRMW, shares a few words on this sad occasion.

*We are heartbroken at the passing of Henry Wuga MBE.*

*Henry was a gentleman, charming, dapper, and above all, a force for good. The work that he, and his late wife Ingrid, did in sharing their testimonies, made an immense impact on thousands of people across Scotland.*

*All of us at the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust send our deepest sympathies to his daughters Hilary and Gillian, and all his family and loved ones.*

*Thank you for everything, Henry. We will miss you.*



## Scottish Government

**Humza Yousaf** I'm devastated to hear of Henry's passing. His loss will be felt by communities right across Scotland & beyond. He worked over decades to remind us of the horrors of the Holocaust, which must never be forgotten. My thoughts with Henry's family, friends & the many who loved him. [plus link to video of Humza Yousaf speaking about Henry Wuga in the Scottish Parliament]

<https://twitter.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1769345757239226422>

## Scottish Conservative Party

**Douglas Ross** Very sorry to hear that Henry Wuga passed away Friday evening. Henry escaped the atrocities of Nazi Germany and spent his later life educating Scottish pupils about the Holocaust. His bravery and resilience will remain an inspiration to us all.

<https://twitter.com/Douglas4Moray/status/1769343503731925231>

## Scottish Labour Party

**Anas Sarwar** I'm so sorry to hear of the passing of Henry Wuga. Warm, charming and compassionate, his strength and personality helped inspire us all. We owe it to his generation to share their stories and always strive for peace.

<https://twitter.com/AnasSarwar/status/1769349268278546482>

TOP

## Israel

### House of Commons/Lords/Westminster Hall Debate

*See also the Commons Ministerial statement and statement and Q&A “Extremism Definition and Community Engagement” and Home Office press release “Government strengthens approach to counter extremism” that are included in the Home Affairs section above, and*

*The OHCHR statement “UN experts warn Islamophobia rising to “alarming levels” that is included in the Other Relevant Information section below.*

### House of Commons Oral Answers

#### Prime Minister's Questions

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op)** [902013] One hundred and fifty eight days, and there is no peace and no justice. There is no food, no clean water, no sanitation and no medical aid. There are just no words left, as disease is spreading and the death toll is rising, not least among children—the victims of these atrocities. It is evident that the Prime Minister's plan is not working, so will he change track for the sake of these children and so many more, and work to secure a bilateral, immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas?

**The Prime Minister:** I have said repeatedly that we are incredibly concerned about the growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Too many civilians have lost their lives, and nowhere near enough aid is getting through. In contrast to what the hon. Lady said, actually the UK is playing a leading role in alleviating that suffering. Just recently, we increased the amount of aid this year to £100 million. Just today, 150 tonnes of UK aid is due to arrive in Gaza, and a full field hospital, flown from Manchester to the middle east last week, will arrive in Gaza in the coming days, staffed by UK and local medics to provide lifesaving care. We are doing absolutely everything we can, working with our allies, to bring much-needed aid to the people of Gaza.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-13/debates/0F85365D-BD56-4647-B8B5-EC356A1BD132/Engagements#contribution-CCA0C4F8-F048-405F-A53B-4F71F409CD95>

### International Humanitarian Law

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op)** [901966] What discussions [the Attorney General] had with her Israeli and Palestinian counterparts on compliance with international humanitarian law during her visit to the middle east in February 2024.

**Rupa Huq (Labour)** [901971] What discussions [the Attorney General] had with her Israeli and Palestinian counterparts on compliance with international humanitarian law during her visit to the middle east in February 2024.

**Andy Slaughter (Labour)** [901974] What discussions [the Attorney General] had with her Israeli and Palestinian counterparts on compliance with international humanitarian law during her visit to the middle west in February 2024.

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [901975] What discussions [the Attorney General] had with her Israeli and Palestinian counterparts on compliance with international humanitarian law during her visit to the middle east in February 2024.

**Jeff Smith (Labour)** [901976] What discussions [the Attorney General] had with her Israeli and Palestinian counterparts on compliance with international humanitarian law during her visit to the middle east in February 2024.

**The Attorney General (Victoria Prentis):** I visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories between 14 and 16 February. In Israel, I met Israel's Attorney General, lawyers for the Israel Defence Forces, and the president of the Supreme Court. In the west bank, I met the Palestinian Attorney General and the Prime Minister.

**Rachael Maskell:** History will not judge kindly when asked whether we did everything we could to prevent possible genocide in Gaza, given the scale of suffering brought about by weapons, disease, hunger, and in the light of the International Court of Justice's interim order on restraint. When the Attorney General met the officials that she referred to, did she clarify that under the genocide convention, the ICJ order must be adhered to fully, and did she give any indication that the UK will cease participating in arms sales to Israel until that happens?

**The Attorney General:** I know that the hon. Lady cares very deeply about this region—she and I have visited it together. I reassure her that my discussions with those I met, both in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, were very frank, and I am confident that our messages were delivered clearly. I made clear the importance of international humanitarian law being respected, civilians being protected, and compliance with the Geneva conventions when it comes to detainees.

**Rupa Huq:** The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), has stated that the Government respect the ICJ's independence and role, but do not think that its ruling of plausible genocide was helpful. Given the forcible displacement taking place, the demolition of

homes and structures, the near famine in Gaza, and the expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied west bank worsening daily, how does the Attorney General—who has seen all this stuff with her own eyes—propose to uphold international law before it is too late?

**The Attorney General:** The hon. Lady and I served on the Justice Committee together, and I know that she shares my deep feeling that we must do everything we can to make sure that international humanitarian law is respected in the region. The UK has repeatedly raised with Israel the need to limit operations to military targets, to protect health facilities, and to avoid harming civilians. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have repeatedly raised those matters with their counterparts.

**Andy Slaughter:** The UK Government's less than wholehearted endorsement of the ICJ process and the International Criminal Court war crimes investigation, which is led by British lawyers, means that the alternative is that people increasingly turn to violence. That is the view of the Israeli civil society organisations that came to meet us yesterday, with the co-operation of Yachad. We have to uphold international law. Will the Attorney General recommit to both those processes?

**The Attorney General:** The hon. Gentleman has long campaigned on these issues, so I know that he feels particularly passionately about the region as well. I am absolutely happy to commit this Government once again to upholding, wherever we can, international humanitarian law. Across this House, there is a great deal of consensus: we want the fighting to stop now. We are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and the hostages out, and then to progress to a permanent ceasefire. We applaud the part of the ICJ's provisional measures order that calls for exactly that.

**Stephen Morgan:** It is seven weeks since the ICJ issued its interim ruling on Israel's conduct in Gaza. The Netanyahu Government have failed to comply with that ruling, and we are still waiting for the UK Government to urge them to do so. Will the Attorney General today call on Israel to take the steps it was ordered to take by the Court?

**The Attorney General:** We do not feel that that case was particularly helpful at this moment in the negotiations. We absolutely respect the ICJ—I have appeared there myself—and we of course understand that the interim measures order is binding on the parties. As I said to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), elements of that order are extremely sensible, and we wholeheartedly respect them. We call, as the ICJ has done, for aid to go in and the hostages to come out immediately. That is the right way to proceed if we are ever to achieve a permanent ceasefire and, ultimately, a resolution of this dreadful conflict. However, we do not think terms such as “genocide”, without a formal final ruling of the Court, are particularly helpful to use.

**Jeff Smith:** I welcome the Attorney General's strong condemnation of settler violence against Bedouin communities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and I also welcome the sanctions recently imposed on some of those involved in the violence. Based on her recent visit, does she think that there is a need to go further and sanction those extremist Israeli politicians who are encouraging the violent and illegal expansion of settlements?

**The Attorney General:** When I visited the region with the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) many years ago, we saw some of the actions of settlers in the occupied territories. So far as I was able to, I reprised that visit when I went to the region most recently, and I was surprised at the difference in the level of violence used. I was able to visit a Bedouin village and talk to those who feel that at a very difficult time for the farming community, during lambing, they were being pushed off their land. I listened very carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said, and I reassure him that the Government continue to keep this issue under review. ...

**Robert Neill (Conservative):** I welcome the Attorney General's comments. I think every one of us shares the desire for the fighting to stop, and respect for the International Court

of Justice. However, does she agree that it is important to be careful when we use legal terms in broader political debate? For example, the test of plausibility in the jurisprudence of the International Court of Justice is essentially about the admissibility of a claim, rather than its ultimate merits. The Court itself has described that, in a judgment involving Myanmar, as a “low threshold”. It is important not to make more of a preliminary finding than we should before final litigation is completed.

**The Attorney General:** As ever, the Chairman of the Select Committee makes a very important point ... He does make an important point: words really matter; there will shortly be a statement to the House about that, and about the meaning of the term “extremism.” It is very important that we all choose our words carefully, particularly when it comes to this long-running and difficult conflict. We respect the rulings of the ICJ—of course we do—but that does not mean that we think every case before it is well brought.

**William Cash (Conservative):** On the issue of international conventions, treaties and international law, including international humanitarian law and the international refugee convention, will the Attorney General place in the Library over the weekend a legal statement on the circumstances in which international law is trumped by clear and unambiguous words in an Act of Parliament? Will she include in that statement the necessary citations from the Supreme Court and the House of Lords?

**The Attorney General:** My hon. Friend is a great and long-standing Member of this House, and is able to ask questions the answers to which might not automatically be obvious. We are talking here about Palestinian and Israeli counterparts being in compliance with international law, but I am of course delighted to say again to my hon. Friend that this Government are committed to international law—we have said that repeatedly from the Dispatch Box—and I do not see any need to lay a statement such as he suggests, but I will continue to enjoy our conversations on this topic.

**Neil Hudson (Conservative):** This week, in the other place, the Foreign Secretary said on the tragic conflict in the middle east: “You have to obey the rules and obey the law”.—[\[Official Report, House of Lords, 12 March 2024; Vol. 836, c. 1915.\]](#)

That is an important affirmation from this Government that Israel both has a right to self-defence and very much has a duty to obey international humanitarian law. Can the Attorney General reaffirm that the Government will continue to stress both that right and that duty in this conflict, which we all want to end as soon as possible?

**The Attorney General:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and I would not like any Member of this House to be in any doubt: we all, across this House, want the fighting to stop now. That message is delivered by the Government on behalf of the House and the nation repeatedly and loudly. We are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, and then progress to a permanent ceasefire. We need five things to happen: the release of the hostages; the formation of a new Palestinian Government; Hamas’s capacity to launch attacks stopped; Hamas to no longer be in charge of Gaza; and a credible pathway to a two-state solution. I think we can all get behind that.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-14/debates/07E2DBDE-987E-415B-B3B9-041821B6CB3D/InternationalHumanitarianLaw>

*The International Court of Justice interim 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>*

*Information about the International Criminal Court case referred to above can be read at <https://www.icc-cpi.int/palestine>*

### **Application of Genocide Convention**

**Imran Hussain (Labour)** [901973] Whether [the Attorney General] has had recent

discussions with the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs on UK compliance with international humanitarian law in the context of the International Court of Justice's order in the case on the application of the genocide convention in Gaza.

**The Attorney General:** Regulars at Attorney General's questions know that the Law Officers convention prevents me from disclosing outside Government whether or not I have provided advice and the specifics of that advice. Colleagues also know that I take seriously my obligations to ensure that the Government are acting in a lawful manner on both domestic and international fronts.

**Imran Hussain:** I have listened to the Attorney General, and she will know that the UK Government, as a signatory to the genocide convention, have a clear responsibility not only to punish but—under article 1—to undertake to prevent genocide, as one of the gravest crimes under international law. Given that the Government will still sell arms to the Israeli military after the International Court of Justice found the actions in Gaza to be plausibly in breach of the genocide convention, what legal advice has she provided to the Foreign Office that allows her to fulfil the legal obligation to prevent genocide at the same time as selling arms? If the ICJ ultimately rules that it is genocide, and it is proven that civilians have been killed by UK-sold arms, does that not leave the UK complicit in genocide?

**The Attorney General:** I believe that I dealt earlier with the substance of the hon. Gentleman's question. We respect the independence of the ICJ. We have considerable concerns about this case, which is not helpful in the goal of achieving a sustainable ceasefire. We accept that the Court has made a provisional measures order, much of which we wholeheartedly agree with. We would suggest, however, that terms such as genocide not be bandied about until there has been a final ruling of the Court. ...

The FCDO continues to assess Israel's commitment and capability to comply with IHL. The assessments are supported by a detailed evidence base, including analysis of the conflict, reporting from NGOs, international bodies and partner countries, statements from the Israeli Government and military representatives, and Israel's track record. We have asked the Government of Israel specific questions on their approach to complying with IHL—I did some of that myself to help inform that advice. Applications for export licences are assessed on a case-by-case basis against strategic export licensing criteria, including with regard to IHL—that is a major part of that assessment. We keep licences under careful and continuing review. The Government can amend, suspend, refuse or revoke licences as circumstances require.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-14/debates/9EC3905F-41BD-41A7-9D90-EDB6A0E9AE0E/ApplicationOfGenocideConvention>

*The International Court of Justice interim 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 Genocide Convention, referred to above, can be read at*  
[https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1\\_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf)

### **Business of the House**

**Richard Foord (Liberal Democrat):** We had a debate in Westminster Hall on 12 December on arms export licences for sales to Israel. On the same day, the Foreign Secretary decided he was satisfied that there was “good evidence to support a judgment that Israel is committed to complying with IHL”—international humanitarian law. It is Liberal Democrat policy to have a presumption of denial for arms sales to countries on the most



recent Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office list of territories designated as human rights priority countries. May we have a debate in Government time on that list of human rights priority countries, so that we may better interdict Iranian arms supplies to Hamas and Hezbollah, but also look again at UK arms exports to Israel?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I will certainly ensure that the Department for Business and Trade, which has oversight of this matter, is aware of what the hon. Gentleman has said. The House scrutinises the policies and procedures that surround arms export controls. We are very transparent and we have one of the most rigorous regimes in the world. I am sure that we would welcome further scrutiny of it, because I think it is a sound policy.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-14/debates/2D54D9CC-4912-406B-AC5A-6E32D737AB64/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-D736323D-27F6-4773-8223-D04ED82476AF>

*The debate referred to above can be read at*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-12/debates/BF12F435-8E9A-44B0-AA34-ADA9D01616E0/ArmsExportLicencesIsrael>

*A report of the circumstances of the Foreign Secretary's comment referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/jan/21/david-cameron-clarify-claim-decision-israel-arms-sales>

## House of Commons Written Answers

### Armed Conflict: Visas

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op)** [16823] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had discussions with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the potential merits of enabling (a) Palestinian civilians in Gaza and (b) other people living in war zones to apply for a visa without visiting a visa application centre.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The Foreign Secretary meets regularly with the Home Secretary to discuss relevant policy matters between the two departments. Visa applications can be started online at any time. Applicants are required to enrol their biometrics in a Visa Application Centre (VAC) as part of the visa application process to support identity assurance and suitability checks on foreign nationals who are subject to immigration control. Foreign national dependents of British citizens who are travelling from Gaza to Egypt and require visas to come to the UK can apply online and then visit the Visa Application Centre in Cairo or Alexandria to provide their biometric information. Further advice on travelling to Egypt from Gaza is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>. The FCDO Consular Contact Centre can be contacted on 020 7008 5000.

There are no plans to authorise entry clearance without biometrics for visa applications from Palestinian civilians in Gaza and or other people living in war zones. Palestinians in Gaza who want to apply for a UK visa but are not a dependent of a British National are not currently eligible for FCDO assistance.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16823>

### Gaza: Journalism

**Rupa Huq (Labour)** [17448] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent steps he has taken to ensure the protection of journalists in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We recognise the valuable role of journalists operating on the

ground in Gaza, providing important coverage of the conflict in incredibly challenging circumstances. On 5 December, the UK supported a joint statement of the Media Freedom Coalition expressing concern over the repercussions for the safety of journalists and access to information due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. We continue to call on all parties to the conflict to comply with international law and protect civilians, including guaranteeing the protection of journalists and media workers.

There must be a reduction in civilian casualties and Israel must take greater care to limit its operations to military targets. These are points that the Prime Minister has consistently made and reinforced with Prime Minister Netanyahu when they spoke on 15 February.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-06/17448>

*The statement referred to above can be read at*

<https://mediafreedomcoalition.org/statements/joint-statement/2023/journalists-in-conflict/>

### **Gaza: Orphans**

**Sarah Green (Liberal Democrat)** [17625] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he is taking steps to help support children in Gaza who have been orphaned in the conflict.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We have been clear that there must be a reduction in civilian casualties. All parties must act within International Humanitarian Law. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians, in particular children, and destroying homes. 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.

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 and 853,000 children, adolescents and caregivers affected by the conflict, to receive emergency and child protection services, including mental health and psychosocial support.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/17625>

### **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

**Mark Pritchard (Conservative)** [17327] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how much UK Development Aid has been transported by road and air into Gaza in 2024.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza. Much of this support is in the form of contributions to large scale appeals, which prevents us from directly attributing UK funding to specific items. It includes support to the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. A delivery of 315 tonnes of life-saving food aid was made via this route in January. We also delivered 87 tonnes of aid - inclusive of five tonnes of Cypriot aid - on board RFA Lyme Bay in early January and in late January the UK and Qatar delivered a joint consignment of 17 tonnes of family sized tents. In February the UK

and Jordan delivered 4 tonnes of aid by air to Tal Al-Hawa Hospital in northern Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-06/17327>

### **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

**Sarah Green (Liberal Democrat)** [17626] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he is taking steps to help ensure that civilians in Gaza receive medical aid.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, with a focus on practical solutions that save lives. We have trebled our aid commitment this financial year 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 February, the UK and Jordan air-dropped life-saving aid to the Tal Al-Hawa hospital in northern Gaza. Four tonnes of vital supplies were provided, including medicines, fuel, and food for hospital patients and staff. We are also exploring further options to help meet the medical needs of Palestinians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/17626>

## **House of Lords Oral Answer**

### **Scottish Government: Devolved Competences**

**Lord Austin of Dudley (Non-affiliated):** My Lords, the UK Government suspended payments to UNRWA following the shocking news that its staff had been involved in the kidnap and murder of Israeli civilians on 7 October. How can it therefore be right that the First Minister of Scotland undermines UK foreign policy by restoring those payments? What are the Government going to do about it?

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe:** I hear what the noble Lord says, but these are matters for the Scottish Government to answer. No doubt Scottish taxpayers will reflect on whether the donation to UNRWA was justified.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-13/debates/5463D54F-D164-448A-8701-0E0077AEF433/ScottishGovernmentDevolvedCompetences#contribution-45450428-3237-40D5-8544-0FAC0AA14E86>

## **House of Lords Written Answer**

### **Gaza: Press Freedom**

**The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative)** [HL2955] To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the governments of (1) Egypt, and (2) Israel, about allowing free access to Gaza for all foreign media through the Rafah Crossing.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We recognise the valuable work of journalists operating on the ground in Gaza, providing important coverage of the conflict in incredibly challenging circumstances. On 5 December, the UK supported a joint statement of the Media Freedom Coalition expressing concern over the repercussions for the safety of journalists and access to information due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. As the statement highlights, access to reliable, independent and diverse information sources and access to the internet are essential in times of conflict. We call on all parties to the conflict to comply with international law and protect civilians, including guaranteeing the protection of journalists and media workers.

We continue to engage closely with the Israeli Government to discuss a range of issues relating to access to Gaza, and we continue to reiterate the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza. We are working with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities to support any remaining eligible people still in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/hl2955>

*The statement referred to above can be read at*

<https://mediafreedomcoalition.org/statements/joint-statement/2023/journalists-in-conflict/>

## UK Parliament Early Day Motions

**Martyn Day (SNP) [504] Detention of Palestinian human rights lawyer Diala Nader Ibrahim Eideh** – That this House notes that, on 24 January 2024, the Israeli military issued an administrative detention order against Palestinian lawyer Diala Nader Ibrahim Eideh for a period of four months; condemns the degrading and humiliating treatment of Ms Eideh by Israeli soldiers throughout her initial ordeal; expresses grave concern at Israel's ongoing practice of administrative detention; believes that this practice is in breach of a number of international agreements and conventions, including the fourth Geneva Convention; further notes that Israel's use of administrative detention effectively circumvents due process and the principles of natural justice, using it as a tool of systematic persecution against Palestinians; also notes Israel's practice of deporting Palestinian prisoners from the Occupied Palestinian Territories to Israel and the subsequent isolation of detainees with denial of family visits and access to lawyers; expresses its view that extensive detention without charge or trial amounts to inhumane, degrading and punitive punishment of prisoners; acknowledges that the detention of Ms Eideh is solely because she is a human rights lawyer and an advocate for human rights; highlights that the frequency of administrative detentions has escalated recently, with the current number of administrative detainees reaching 3,558, the highest since the beginning of the occupation; regrets the Government's lack of any meaningful or substantive action against administrative detention; and calls on the Government to make urgent representations to the Israeli government to cancel this policy, restore rights to all Palestinian prisoners and to release all Palestinians being held without charge or trial.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62001>

**Caroline Lucas (Green) [505] Palestinians and the Researchers at Risk scheme** – This House commends the Researchers at Risk scheme instituted by the British Academy in partnership with the Council for At-Risk Academics and with support from the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society; notes that the scheme was funded primarily by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and is currently restricted to Ukrainian academics and their families; observes that every higher education institution in Gaza has been destroyed or severely damaged during the war waged by the Israeli government in the wake of the horrific terror attacks of 7 October 2023; deplores that an estimated 30,000 civilians have been killed in Gaza in

this time, including historians, economists, scholars of English literature and language, poets, physicists, gynaecologists, political scientists, psychologists, surgeons and lawyers; believes the academic community in Gaza is currently one of the most at risk in the world; and therefore calls on the UK Government to provide specific protection by renewing the funding for the Researchers at Risk scheme and opening it to Palestinian academics immediately and without delay.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62002>

## Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

### **International Labour Organization Governing Body: UK Statement on report on crisis-related ILO work in the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

1. ... We are shocked by the sheer scale of people killed and the loss of livelihoods of both Israeli and Palestinians, including workers and employers.
2. Let's recall that Israel suffered the worst terror attack in its history on 7th October at the hands of Hamas, and Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.
3. ... we want the fighting to stop now.
4. In our view, the best way to achieve a sustainable, permanent ceasefire - without a return to further destruction, further fighting and further loss of life - is to start with an immediate pause and agreements to get aid in and hostages out.
5. The UK wants to open all routes and crossings into Gaza. There is a desperate and immediate need for increased humanitarian support in Gaza. ...
7. Like others here, we support a two-state solution that guarantees security, stability and sovereignty for both the Israeli and Palestinian people. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/international-labour-organization-governing-body-uk-statement>

*The report referred to above can be read at*

[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_914521.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_914521.pdf)

**David Cameron** I welcome the appointment of Mohammad Mustafa as Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority. The formation of a new Palestinian government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package, is one of the vital elements for a lasting peace.

[https://twitter.com/David\\_Cameron/status/1768352829826048489](https://twitter.com/David_Cameron/status/1768352829826048489)

## European Parliament Resolution

### **The immediate risk of mass starvation in Gaza and the attacks on humanitarian aid deliveries (2024/2616(RSP))**

- ... A. whereas on 7 October 2023, Hamas terrorists attacked Israel, deliberately murdering 1 139 Israeli and foreign citizens; whereas 134 hostages are still being held in terrible conditions;
- B. whereas Parliament has repeatedly condemned this despicable attack and reaffirmed Israel's right to self-defence within the limits of international law; whereas its disproportionate response resulted in over 30 000 people being killed and 70 000 injured in Gaza since this attack;
- C. whereas there is desperate food insecurity and impending starvation in Gaza;



whereas, according to the WHO, almost 16 % of children in Gaza are already suffering from acute malnutrition; whereas Palestinians face terrible, life-threatening conditions because of lack of access to sufficient food, and other basic needs;

- D. whereas on 29 February 2024, over 100 Palestinians were tragically killed and 700 injured when Israeli troops opened fire during humanitarian aid deliveries; whereas, since 20 February 2024, the UN has suspended food deliveries to North Gaza after convoys faced attacks and looting;
1. Strongly condemns the obstruction of humanitarian aid and attacks against humanitarian convoys; strongly condemns Hamas' hijacking and looting of aid convoys; urges Israel to immediately allow and facilitate full, unimpeded, safe aid delivery into and throughout Gaza via all existing crossings ...
  2. Strongly condemns repeated attacks on civilians seeking aid, and on humanitarian and medical facilities and workers ...
  3. Condemns the killing of 161 UN aid workers, 340 health workers, 7 humanitarian staff and 133 journalists and media workers;
  4. Reiterates its calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire to address the looming risk of mass starvation in Gaza, and to immediately and unconditionally release all hostages; strongly condemns the rise in extremist settler violence and attacks by the Israeli armed forces against Palestinians in the West Bank, who have already killed hundreds and injured thousands of Palestinian civilians; strongly condemns the acceleration of the illegal settlement of Palestinian land, which constitutes a violation of international law; calls for the International Committee of the Red Cross to be given immediate access to all hostages being held in Gaza and to provide them with medical care;
  5. Expresses deep concern about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza ...
  6. Expresses its deep concern about the risk of escalation of the conflict ...
  7. Calls on Israel to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law ...
  9. Demands the immediate restoration of vital infrastructure ...
  10. Is firmly convinced that there can be no prospect of peace, security, stability and prosperity for Gaza or for Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation as long as Hamas and other terrorist groups play any role in the Gaza Strip ...

**To read the full Resolution see**

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0159\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0159_EN.pdf)

## UNICEF

### **Acute malnutrition has doubled in one month in the north of Gaza strip**

31 per cent - or 1 in 3 children under 2 years of age – in the Northern Gaza Strip suffer from acute malnutrition, a staggering escalation from 15.6 per cent in January.

Malnutrition among children is spreading fast and reaching devastating and unprecedented levels in the Gaza Strip due to the wide-reaching impacts of the war and ongoing restrictions on aid delivery.

At least 23 children in Northern Gaza Strip have reportedly died from malnutrition and dehydration in recent weeks, adding to the mounting toll of children killed in the Strip in this current conflict – about 13,450 reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Nutrition screenings conducted by UNICEF and partners in the north in February found that 4.5 per cent of the children in shelters and health centers suffer from severe wasting, the most life-threatening form of malnutrition, which puts children at highest risk of medical complications and death unless they receive urgent therapeutic feeding and treatment, which is not available. The prevalence of acute malnutrition among children under 5 years of age in the north has increased from 13 per cent to as high as 25 per cent.

“The speed at which this catastrophic child malnutrition crisis in Gaza has unfolded is

shocking, especially when desperately needed assistance has been at the ready just a few miles away,” said Catherine Russell, UNICEF Executive Director. “We have repeatedly attempted to deliver additional aid and we have repeatedly called for the access challenges we have faced for months to be addressed. Instead, the situation for children is getting worse by each passing day. Our efforts in providing life-saving aid are being hampered by unnecessary restrictions, and those are costing children their lives.”

Screenings conducted for the first time in Khan Younis, in the middle area of the Gaza Strip, found 28 per cent of children under 2 years have acute malnutrition, more than 10 per cent of which have severe wasting.

Even in Rafah, the southern enclave with the most access to aid, the results from screenings among children under 2 years doubled from 5 per cent who were acutely malnourished in January to about 10 per cent by the end of February, with severe wasting rising fourfold from 1 per cent to more than 4 per cent over the month. ...

“We are doing everything we can to avert a worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, but it is not enough,” said Russell. “An immediate humanitarian ceasefire continues to provide the only chance to save children’s lives and end their suffering. We also need multiple land border crossings that allow aid to be reliably delivered at scale, including to northern Gaza, along with the security assurances and unimpeded passage needed to distribute that aid, without delays or access impediments.”

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/acute-malnutrition-has-doubled-one-month-north-gaza-strip-unicef>

## UNRWA

### **At least one UNRWA staff killed when Israeli forces hit UNRWA centre used for food and lifesaving supplies**

... “Today’s attack on one of the very few remaining UNRWA distribution centres in the Gaza Strip comes as food supplies are running out, hunger is widespread and, in some areas, turning into famine. Every day, we share the coordinates of all our facilities across the Gaza Strip with parties to the conflict. The Israeli Army received the coordinates including of this facility yesterday,” said UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini.

Since the war began five months ago, UNRWA has recorded an unprecedented number of violations against its staff and facilities that surpass any other conflict around the world.

- At least 165 UNRWA team members killed including while in the line of duty;
- More than 150 UNRWA facilities were hit, some totally destroyed, among them many schools;
- More than 400 people killed while seeking shelter under the UN flag;
- Tunnels have reportedly been found under UNRWA facilities and installations used for military activities;
- UNRWA staff have reportedly been mistreated and humiliated while in Israeli detention centres.

“The United Nations, its personnel, premises and assets must be protected at all times. Since this war began, attacks against UN facilities, convoys and personnel have become commonplace in blatant disregard to international humanitarian law. I am calling once again for an independent inquiry into these violations and the need for accountability,” added Lazzarini.

<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/least-one-unrwa-staff-killed-when-israeli-forces-hit-unrwa-centre-used>

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## Foreign Affairs

**See also Commons written answer 16751 “Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps” that is included in the Home Affairs section above.**

## Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

**Defending freedom of religion or belief for all and combating intolerance against all is a UK priority: Statement by Ambassador James Kariuki at UN General Assembly on UN General Assembly resolution "Measures to combat Islamophobia".**

Hatred on the basis of religion or belief, including anti-Muslim hatred, antisemitism and the persecution of Christians, is deplorable. We condemn incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence wherever it occurs.

The UK is a proud multi-ethnic, multi-faith democracy. However, we recognise the challenges we face, and seek to address these issues. We are funding a national organisation to support victims of anti-Muslim hatred, as well as protective security programmes for mosques, and schemes helping to keep the Jewish community safe.

Defending freedom of religion or belief for all, and combating intolerance against all, is a UK priority. Therefore it is with regret that there were elements of this resolution the UK could not support – and, for that reason, we abstained.

In the UK, we have a proud tradition of religious freedom alongside the freedom to critique ideas and teachings of religions.

OP2 of this resolution imposes limits on freedom of expression that go beyond the parameters of international law. We agree that people should not burn holy books or express religious intolerance, and that such acts can be done to incite religious hatred. But we disagree with the strong implication that such acts always incite hatred.

We believe that free speech is important. We must take care not to introduce processes for blasphemy laws by the back door. People must be free to practice religion; be free from persecution for the practice of their religion; but also be free to criticise religion if they choose.

While we have seen an unacceptable rise in anti-Muslim hatred, globally many people of other beliefs or religions also face discrimination. We are concerned by the resolution's narrow focus on one religious group.

OP3 mandates a UN mechanism to address problems faced by one specific religious community when those of other religions or beliefs do not have equivalent mechanisms. ... Going forward, we hope to work together to protect all people from religious hatred and intolerance, and to uphold freedom of religion or belief, and freedom of expression.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/defending-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-for-all-and-combating-intolerance-against-all-is-a-uk-priority-explanation-of-vote-at-the-un-general-assembly>

*The Resolution referred to above, which has been adopted by the UN General Assembly, can be read at*

<https://undocs.org/en/A/78/L.48>

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## Other Relevant Information

### Council of Europe

#### **Coordination Meeting on Combating Anti-Muslim hatred**

On 14-15 March 2024, the Coordinators, Special Representatives, Envoy and Ambassadors on Combating Anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination met for the first time to discuss the global increase in reports of anti-Muslim hatred. ...

The participants met against the background of a global rise in anti-Muslim hatred both online and offline. Dehumanising language, polarisation, and disinformation have reached alarming levels worldwide with widespread discriminatory and racist narrative. Muslims and other groups continue to report threats, violence, harassment, intimidation and vandalism against religious spaces and community centres. Discrimination, racism and hatred are having a chilling effect on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in the civic and online space. ...

The participants expressed their solidarity with those who feel discriminated and reaffirmed that hatred against Muslims, as all other forms of hatred and racism, is a threat to our pluralistic and democratic societies. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://rm.coe.int/draft-joint-press-release-15-march-no-footnote/1680aee3bc>

### Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

#### **More determined efforts needed to combat anti-Muslim prejudice amidst surge in hatred, OSCE says**

Hatred against people from specific religious or belief communities rarely takes place in isolation, often going hand in hand with other forms of intolerance. Violence and discrimination do not only harm the individuals and communities concerned, but can also undermine security across the OSCE region, with tensions potentially escalating into wider conflicts.

There has been an upsurge in hatred against Muslims especially since the renewed outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East in October last year, with online and offline hate speech, threats and violence having a negative impact on Muslim communities, particularly women and girls. ...

“Negative stereotypes and acts of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims have increased in recent years, making it all the more important to take urgent action and ensure we avoid stigmatisation or inflammatory rhetoric,” said ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci. “At the same time, we are encouraged by the growing recognition that more dialogue and understanding are needed. ...

... while data on Anti-Muslim hatred is available in ODIHR’s [hate crime database](#), many victims across the OSCE area are reluctant to report their experiences to the authorities. Victims of hate often turn to civil society organizations to report a crime, seek support, and access the services they need. Through genuine collaboration with civil society, states can develop efficient and targeted activities to tackle hate crime and meet the differing needs of individual victims.

Freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right that states the right of each individual to have, adopt, or leave a religion or belief. At its core is the understanding that respecting our differences is the only way for us to live together peacefully. Against this backdrop, dialogue and understanding between religions and cultures emerge as a pivotal instrument, offering a platform for open, respectful exchanges that transcend religious boundaries. Through these meaningful interactions, we can discover common ground,

appreciate our differences, and forge an inclusive and harmonious path forward. The Personal Representative of the Chair-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, Ambassador Evren Dagdelen Akgun, noted that “Cases of deliberate attempts to tarnish the sanctity of Islam, of Muslims being stereotyped, attacked; instances of their beliefs belittled or culture represented as a threat and justified in the guise of security concerns are widespread, even normalized in some countries.” ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.osce.org/chairpersonship/564821>

## United Nations

### **With Islamophobia on Rise, Everyone Must Work Together to End Anti-Muslim Hate, Bigotry Everywhere, Secretary-General Stresses in Observance Message**

... For nearly 2 billion Muslims across the world, Islam is a pillar of faith and worship uniting people in every corner of the globe. And let us remember that it is also a pillar of our shared history.

For centuries, Muslims have been a crucial source of culture, philosophy, scholarship and science. From the enormous influence of Avicenna, the great physician and philosopher whose interpretations of Plato and Aristotle helped shaped the development of Western European philosophy.

To the Muslim mathematician and astronomer Al-Khwarizmi, responsible for delivering Hindu-Arabic numerals and the father of algebra. To the “father of rationalism”, Averroes, whose groundbreaking commentaries bridged Islamic and Western thought. To the countless contributions of Muslims across every field — from science, technology and medicine, to literature, art, music and architecture.

Today’s event shines a light on a vicious plague that represents a complete denial and ignorance of Islam and Muslims and their undeniable contributions: The plague of Islamophobia.

Around the world, we see a rising tide of anti-Muslim hate and bigotry. That can come in many forms. Structural and systemic discrimination. Socioeconomic exclusion. Unequal immigration policies. Unwarranted surveillance and profiling. Restrictions in accessing citizenship, education, employment and justice.

These and other institutional barriers violate our shared commitment to human rights and dignity. They also perpetuate a vicious cycle of exclusion, poverty and disenfranchisement that echoes across generations.

Meanwhile, divisive rhetoric and misrepresentation are propagating stereotypes, stigmatizing communities and creating an environment of misunderstanding and suspicion. This can lead to an increase in harassment and even outright violence against Muslims — rising accounts of which are being reported by civil society groups in countries around the world. Some are shamefully exploiting anti-Muslim hate and exclusionary policies for political gain. We must call this what it is. Hate. Plain and simple.

And purveyors of hate speech are misusing the most powerful megaphone in history to amplify and spread their despicable ideologies — social media. Online platforms have become breeding grounds for extremist ideologies and harassment. This not only deepens divisions. It fuels real-life violence.

Sadly, this alarming trend is part of a wider pattern of supremacist ideologies and attacks against Jews, minority Christian communities and many others. Hatred of one group fuels hatred of another. Hate normalizes hate. Hate destroys the fabric of our societies. And hate undermines the equality, understanding and respect for human rights upon which a peaceful future — and a peaceful world — depend.

We cannot stand on the sidelines while hatred and bigotry run wild. Today’s event reminds us that we all have a responsibility to confront and root out the scourge of anti-Muslim



bigotry. ...

Digital platforms must moderate and prevent the spread of hateful content, while protecting users from harassment. Artificial intelligence must reduce biases and stereotypes, not reproduce and amplify them.

And all of us must do our part to dismantle the walls of intolerance and division. ...

Let us promote empathy and invest in social cohesion — by embracing diversity as a strength rather than a source of division. And let us stand in solidarity with Muslims from around the world ...

Together, we can build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies where every individual, regardless of their faith, can live in harmony and peace.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sqsm22159.doc.htm>

## UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

### **UN experts warn Islamophobia rising to “alarming levels”: International Day to Combat Islamophobia**

Acts of harassment, intimidation, violence and incitement based on religion or belief have risen to “alarming levels” across the world, including against Muslims, a group of UN independent experts warned today. On the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, they issued the following statement:

In proclaiming 15 March the International Day to Combat Islamophobia in 2022, the UN General Assembly [called](#) for “strengthened international efforts to foster a global dialogue on the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels”.

Yet today, hate entrepreneurs, political parties, armed groups, religious leaders and even State actors around the world, are trampling on respect for diversity of religions and beliefs, discriminating, violating human rights, and overlooking or even attempting to justify these violations.

Acts of harassment, intimidation, violence and incitement based on religion or belief have risen sharply across the world last year, reaching alarming levels, shocking our conscience and creating a climate of fear and deep distrust.

We urge States to ground their responses to all forms of religious hatred, including Islamophobia, in the universal values, principles and legal framework of international human rights.

Orchestrated public burnings of the Holy Qur’an are deplorable. Expressions of religious intolerance engender deep hurt and fear at individual and community levels, and [must be condemned](#). ...

During this holy month of Ramadan, we are appalled at the continued refusal by Israel to allow adequate humanitarian assistance and food aid to be provided to the mainly Muslim civilian population in Gaza despite the widespread hunger and signs of severe malnutrition. We are seriously concerned about undue restrictions imposed on access to the Al Aqsa Mosque. These restrictions are particularly alarming, in the context of monumental loss of life and destruction of a significant number of places of worship in Gaza. Cultural property is protected in international humanitarian law during armed conflict since it recognises damage to the cultural property of any people as resulting in damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind. ...

**To read the full statement see**

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/03/un-experts-warn-islamophobia-rising-alarming-levels>

## **International Day to Combat Islamophobia: High Commissioner urges dialogue, tolerance and respect**

... We are living through an era of intensifying global crisis and conflict, spurred by deep – and deadly – divisions between our human family. We see these tensions and divisions rising on many fronts, including through a wave of renewed hate speech, discrimination, and violence in all regions, including against Muslims.

All forms of religious hatred and intolerance are unacceptable. ...

We know that fear breeds hate, ignorance and distrust of the other.

Islamophobia has stolen lives. It has dehumanized entire communities. It has sparked torrents of hate speech, magnified by social media. Many have been subjected to surveillance and religious profiling. Mosques have been attacked, and sometimes destroyed. Counter-extremism laws, policies and practices have been misused, leading to illegal arrests, arbitrary detention and violence.

In the context of the current conflict in the Middle East, multiple reports have emerged showing huge spikes in Islamophobic incidents: for example, an up to 600% increase in some countries in North America and Europe. One organisation noted a tenfold increase in incidents between 7 and 23 October in one country in the Asia-Pacific region.

The surge in Islamophobia is shocking, and it is occurring as part of a broader trend. I am also profoundly concerned about the continuing rise of Antisemitism, Christianophobia and prejudices against people of other religions or beliefs; of hatred that is directed at migrants, refugees and minorities, including Roma; about deep-seated racism against people of African descent and Indigenous Peoples; and many other forms of discrimination and xenophobia.

The recording and collecting of reliable data are essential for more effective responses to hate speech and hate crime, everywhere. More must be done to ensure incidents are reflected in official statistics and that all countries have the systems and methodology needed to record disaggregated data. ...

Faith literacy – in other words, knowledge and understanding about the values of each religion and belief – is also crucial. I urge States to include it as part of comprehensive training initiatives on combating religious hatred for law enforcement officers and the judiciary, faith-based actors, teachers and media professionals. ...

I sincerely hope that by embracing and celebrating our differences, we can stop these vicious cycles of prejudice, hate and violence.

And in doing so, we can rebuild the space for dialogue, tolerance and respect for our fellow human beings, no matter their religion, and no matter who or what they believe in. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/international-day-combat-islamophobia-high-commissioner-urges>

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## **Relevant Legislation** \*\* new or updated today

### **UK Parliament**

#### **Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill**

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

#### **\*\* Criminal Justice Bill**

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

Amendment Paper

[https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0155/amend/criminal\\_rm\\_rep\\_0318.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0155/amend/criminal_rm_rep_0318.pdf)

## **Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill**

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

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

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

Amendment Paper

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54390/documents/4586>

## **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 tomorrow**

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

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

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