



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answers

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### Religion: Education

**Jim Shannon (DUP) [17851]** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to page 41 of the Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022-23, published on 23 November 2023, what steps her Department is taking (a) improve the quality of and (b) coordinate stakeholder work on improving religious education in schools.

**Jim Shannon (DUP) [17852]** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to page 41 of the Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022-23, published on 23 November 2023, if he will publish additional non-statutory guidance on religious education syllabus content in schools.

**Damian Hinds:** Religious education (RE) is an important part of a school's curriculum and can contribute to a young person's personal, social, and academic development. When done well, it can develop children's knowledge of British values and traditions, help them better understand those of other countries, and refine pupils' ability to construct well-informed, balanced, and structured arguments. This is why it remains a compulsory subject in all state-funded schools in England for each pupil up to the age of 18.

The department read Ofsted's 2023 annual report with interest and is committed to ensuring high-quality provision of RE in schools. In order to improve teaching

quality, we are offering a £10,000 bursary for RE trainee teachers starting initial teacher training courses in the academic year 2024/25. The department have published this information on the 'Get Into Teaching' website and will be marketing the offer to prospective teachers through other channels.

To support teachers when they are in post, and to ensure high standards and consistency of RE teaching, RE resources will be procured by Oak National Academy during the second tranche of its work. Oak will work closely with the sector and utilise sector experience when producing new materials for RE. This will ensure that high-quality lessons are available nationwide, benefitting both teachers and pupils, should schools opt to use them. Oak RE resources will be available for teaching from autumn 2024, with full packages expected to be available by autumn 2025.

The department also continues to offer eight-week subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses in the academic year 2023/24 for candidates who have the potential to become outstanding teachers but need to increase their subject knowledge. The eight-week SKE course, available in religious education, can be undertaken on a full-time or part-time basis but must be completed before qualified teacher status can be recommended and awarded. Eligible candidates could be entitled to a SKE bursary of £175 per week to support them financially whilst completing their SKE course.

More information on these courses is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/subject-knowledge-enhancement-an-introduction>

The department engages closely with key stakeholders within the RE sector, including the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (NASACRE) and the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE). The department also welcomes the work that the Religious Education Council (REC) has done to assist curriculum developers by publishing its National Content Standard for RE in England.

The department has no plans to publish additional non-statutory guidance on RE syllabus content in schools.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-11/17851>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-11/17852>

*The Ofsted Annual Report referred to above can be read at*

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/655f2551c39e5a001392e4ca/31587\\_ofsted\\_annual\\_report\\_2022-23\\_web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/655f2551c39e5a001392e4ca/31587_ofsted_annual_report_2022-23_web.pdf)

## House of Lords Ministerial Statement and Q&A

### Extremism Definition and Community Engagement

**[The Ministerial statement made in the House of Commons on 14 March was read in the House of Lords.](#)**

The United Kingdom is a success story: a multinational, multi-ethnic and multifaith 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. In order to protect our democratic values and enhance social cohesion, it is important both to reinforce what we all have in common and to be clear and precise in identifying the dangers posed by extremism.

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. ...

**col 146 Baroness Sherlock (Labour):** My Lords, hateful extremism threatens the safety of our communities and the unity of our country. It is a serious problem demanding a serious response. When it comes to national security, the threat of radicalisation and the scourge of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, neo-Nazism or any other corrosive hatred, the whole House can and should stand together. ...

**col 147** However, I have some questions. As far back as 7 June 2011, the then Conservative Home Secretary told the other place: "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, Commons, 7/6/11; col. 53.](#)]

What has been happening between 2011 and now? Have Ministers been engaging with groups that they now regard as extremist? ...

If the means by which it is decided that an organisation meets the criteria in the new definition is to be truly evidence-led, the process must be robust and be allowed to take its course. The nature of that process is, at least to me, still rather opaque. ...

How will the new centre of excellence operate and how it will be resourced? Who will take the decision to declare that an organisation meets the definition of extremism, and is that decision subject to appeal? Can the Minister confirm that this will apply only to central government and not to local or regional government or devolved Administrations? Is it intended that it will apply, now or at any later stage, to other public bodies or to services such as the police or universities? What is happening with the appointment of a new Islamophobia adviser?

I have talked to people from a number of groups from different faith communities, many of whom are worried that they may find themselves caught by this new definition. The Statement says that the 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 the Minister say any more about which groups it will affect, and on what basis the Government have chosen to draw the line? ...

**col 148** We all know there has been a huge surge in online extremism. What action is being taken across government to assess and confront online hate? Will the Government be publishing a new cross-government counter-extremism strategy, given that the last one is now very out of date? Will it include action to rebuild the resilience and cohesion of our communities? What new funding will there be in this area and what will be done to invest in multi-faith dialogue? Given the appalling surge in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in recent months, will we soon see an updated hate crime action plan? ...

**Baroness Hussein-Ece (Liberal Democrat):** ... The majority of us agree that hateful extremism and hate crimes threaten society and the safety of our communities and undermine social cohesion. I will speak quite plainly today. The Government's new non-statutory definition of extremism has not been universally welcomed or embraced, and it has created concerns that it will be used disproportionately to target British Muslim communities and organisations that the Government of the day may disagree with.

Singling out a number of mainstream law-abiding British Muslim organisations that have contributed to society over many years sets a dangerous precedent, undermining democracy, religious freedoms and free speech. ... It was briefed that, for example, the Muslim Council of Britain could be the sort of extremist organisation that the Government must have nothing to do with. The MCB is the UK's largest Muslim umbrella group. Many of us know and respect its first female secretary-general, the dynamic Zara Mohammed. It is an umbrella group with more than 500 affiliated members, including mosques, schools and charitable organisations. Are the Government saying that they are to be labelled as possible extremists?

*col 149* This can serve only to smear groups and individuals. How will the Government address these concerns, in order to counter fear and division? As we have heard, online extremism is on the rise, but surely, smearing organisations and all those who work within them or benefit from them is not the way to bring about social cohesion. ...

What evidence-based threshold will be applied by this new centre of excellence, especially when compiling lists of organisations and guidance? Will any of these organisations have the right to appeal any decision? It is disappointing that the Secretary of State seems to have ignored civil liberties groups. ...

In the past few years, the Government have refused to recognise or accept a definition of Islamophobia, despite it now being widely adopted across civil society and by all other political parties. They said that they would come up with their own definition. In the past week, they have had problems in condemning racism and misogyny in respect of Diane Abbott. There was even a debate on whether making such hateful remarks constituted racism. Yet they are promoting this new definition of extremism with apparently little reference to minority communities, who have seen a massive increase in racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other hate crimes. ...

*col 150* **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Baroness Swinburne):** ... The 7 October terrorist attacks in Israel, the aftermath in Gaza and the domestic implications have sharpened our focus on countering radicalisation.

My department has announced that it is publishing a new definition of extremism ... and a set of cross-government engagement standards to be housed in a new centre of excellence on counter-extremism. To date, the Government's approach to countering radicalisation has focused on preventing people being drawn into terrorism. However, we have not yet taken a comprehensive and strategic approach to preventing a wider cohort of people being radicalised into extremism. Hence, these are vital interventions at this challenging time, and the Government must ensure that they have the tools they need to tackle this ever-evolving threat. ...

The new definition of extremism seeks to limit the advancement of extreme ideologies and ensure that open debate can take place unfettered by those who seek to exploit our freedoms—or, indeed, overturn them. The new definition is more specific, allowing us to better target extremists in this changing landscape while avoiding unnecessary overstep into public debate and the freedom of expression. ...

The definition will capture only those individuals, organisations and groups that are driven by ideologies of hatred, violence or intolerance and intend to negate or destroy our fundamental rights, overturn or undermine our democracy, or intentionally provide a platform for those that do. ...

Community engagement is a fundamental part of the work of UK ministerial government departments. We are proud to engage with groups and individuals from across the country, with charities and community organisations and directly with local people. Our external engagement can strengthen our democracy, our policy-making and our society ... However, through the independent review of Prevent, we know 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. If we do not tackle this, this allows extremists of all ideologies—this is not aimed at one part of society—to exert greater influence and be legitimised and publicly emboldened.

*col 151* To ensure that we maximise the many benefits of engagement and minimise the risks, the definition is being published alongside a set of community engagement principles that central government departments will be expected to consider when undertaking external engagement or providing funding. These will

enable officials to make carefully considered, risk-based judgments about the individuals and groups with which they could or should engage. Their implementation across government will ultimately enhance and, I hope, broaden our external engagement practices. ...

It is focused on central government and does not apply to local authorities or public bodies. However, all local authorities have a duty to ensure that public money is being spent effectively and not wasted or misused and, as such, are expected to undertake their own community engagement and due diligence appropriately and responsibly. The extremism definition is not a statutory definition and does not create new powers but instead helps the Government and our partners to target existing powers better. The definition and principles will apply to engagement, including funding undertaken in England, Scotland and Wales by UK Government ministerial departments. Engagement undertaken in Northern Ireland is exempt due to the unique political and historical circumstances, and the definition of principles does not apply to the engagement undertaken by the devolved Administrations themselves. ...

It is important that we tackle the threat of domestic extremism, and we are setting up a counterextremism centre of excellence, which will become a world-leading authority on best practice, data and research in this field. The new centre of excellence will be housed in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and will provide leadership for departments' operations and implementation of the definition. The cross-government engagement principles and extremism-related due diligence process will in time be the home to new counterextremism assessment and analytical functions and capabilities ... In response to the question of who ultimately decides: as joint leader for countering extremism, the DLUHC Secretary of State and the Home Secretary will make the final decision on who will be added to the list. This will be based on the recommendations made using the evidence gathered and analysed by the subject experts. ...

*col 152* During the process of identifying these groups, they will have the opportunity, before things are made public, to provide mitigating evidence, which will then be analysed before a decision is taken. Following publication on a list, 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. ... We plan to appoint a new, independent anti-Muslim hatred adviser. It is important to get this appointment right, and it is currently going through due process. ...

While the Government and their partners have worked tirelessly to combat extremism through the updated Prevent and Contest counterterrorism strategies, the Defending Democracy Taskforce and the integrated review, the pervasiveness of extremist ideologies in the aftermath of the 7 October attacks has brought the need for further action into sharper focus. We are trying to put that in place as part of, and accompanying, our broader counterextremism strategy. ...

On the hate crime action plan, the Government do not intend to publish a hate crime strategy. We keep our approach to tackling hate crime under constant review, and we remain committed to protecting all our communities from crime. We fund the national online hate crime hub, a central capability designed to support local police forces in dealing with online hate crime. ...

**Lord Walney (Crossbench):** ... It is worth reminding the House that it was a Labour Communities Secretary who made the decision on non-engagement with the Muslim Council of Britain in 2009, which has stayed in place for much of the previous 14 to 15 years, on the basis that the then deputy general secretary of that organisation endorsed a call by Hamas for attacks on foreign troops, including British troops, so this has not come

out of the blue. Nevertheless, the process of who ends up on the list is really important. col 153 Does the Minister have an update on how long the Government anticipate that process taking before a list can be published?

**Baroness Swinburne:** We are just finalising the criteria regarding how this will be measured, what the metrics are, and how the evidence will be compiled and then decided. As and when that happens, we would expect to complete this within weeks and certainly as quickly as we possibly can.

**Lord Wolfson of Tredegar (Conservative):** My Lords, the proposition that my enemy's enemy is my friend is probably one of the most wrong-headed and dangerous in politics. I am proud that over the past few years, when the Jewish community marched first against Mr Corbyn and more recently in favour of and to support Israel, we have absolutely rejected the far-right extremists trying to hijack our demonstrations because they think we have a common opponent. That is a completely wrong-headed and dangerous thing to do, because we all know that, ultimately, all extremists want to take us to the same place: to divide communities and to undermine our democratic process. Does my noble friend the Minister therefore agree that what fundamentally underpins this definition of extremism is a distinction between those who want to work within our democratic process, albeit perhaps to change it, and those who seek to undermine the democratic process, which is the foundation of all civilised debate and safe living for all communities in this country?

**Baroness Swinburne:** Absolutely. ... We are in a period of heightened tensions. Anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hate crime levels are at an all-time high. Flags, symbols and graffiti are all causing division and stoking fear locally, and now is the time to tackle this issue head on. The definition tries to ensure that it focuses on extremism that is founded in hatred, violence or intolerance, and which poses a threat to our rights and our freedoms. It does not matter where it comes from: we need to tackle it and try our best to stop it.

col 154 **Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Labour):** ... I want to ask the Minister about one point ... this work complementing the Government's updated Prevent guidance. I am puzzled by the guidance issued last year, which lists socialism, anti-fascism and anti-abortion on the Prevent list of terrorism warning signs. A section on the left wing goes on to say: "Two broad ideologies: socialism and communism. Each are united by a set of grievance narratives which underline their cause"....

... that seems to show some of the risks of Prevent making these quite alarming statements and, because of what Mr Gove has said, their maybe being translated into the extremism definition. ...

**Baroness Swinburne:** I certainly will undertake to do that. The sole purpose of bringing this under one umbrella is to ensure that all departments treat this with the same lens. ...

**Lord Mann (Non-affiliated):** ... The New British Union describes itself as the fastest-growing far right organisation. What criteria were used to determine that it should not be included on the list? For those organisations that are included on the list, if an individual says publicly that they have left such an organisation, will the Government engage with them immediately, or after a year or in five years' time? What timescale will the Government use after someone has been directly connected with one of the five current organisations, or however many it ends up being, for non-engagement? Is there a specific timescale in which the Government will choose not to meet, associate with and recognise individuals from those organisations?

**Baroness Swinburne:** ... The Secretary of State referred in the other House to the types of groups and extremism that we are concerned about. This was not in any way an exhaustive list and it certainly was not "the" list. The process of making those assessments, following the evidence and collecting all the data is ongoing. It has not been completed and therefore there is no list. ...

On someone who has left an organisation, rejected the ideology and now wants to

be considered in a different light, I suspect that will need to be on a case-by-case basis, and the evidence and data will need to follow it. There will be experts in the group who will be able to make that judgment. I suspect they have not yet got far enough down the processes to determine the timeline.

*col 155* **Baroness Gohir (Crossbench):** My Lords, there have been examples, recently and in the past, of Conservative politicians making unfounded allegations, particularly against Muslims, that have resulted in the paying of damages. Words have consequences, such as death threats, damage to reputation, loss of livelihood and mental ill-health. This new extremism definition could be abused to make false allegations that inflict lasting damage. What safeguards will be put in place to ensure that power and position are not abused? ...

**Baroness Swinburne:** ... If anybody uses inappropriate language it should be condemned and called out immediately. ...

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire (Liberal Democrat):** ...I think there was an overlap between some of the work that the Intelligence and Security Committee has been doing about foreign interference in British politics and the dangers this is trying to address. ...

*col 156* ... if one looks at opinion surveys, one sees that we face a public in Britain who are now more disillusioned with our parliamentary democracy than we have seen in our lifetimes. That breeds extremism, particularly among those who are unskilled or unemployed, or who have done badly in school. ...

**Baroness Swinburne:** ... For me, there is no boundary as to where this goes. If somebody is practising extremism that matches the definition—that it is founded in “violence, hatred or intolerance” and poses that threat to our “rights or freedoms”, or our liberal democratic positions that uphold them—they need to be called out. It does not matter whether they are far left or far right, or another other colour or description you would give in between. ...

Everyone has a right to freedom of expression. Freedom of speech is a fundamental right that we will always protect in this country, but obviously there are limitations to that if it does damage to others. The definition does not single out single subjects as inherently extremist, but calls for that careful assessment of evidence in relation to any individual organisation or group. In each case, the question is whether they are taking action to advance or promote that ideology with the “violence, hatred or intolerance” in mind. It is very specific, but it is likely to cover a broad swathe from all different parts of the spectrum. ...

**Baroness Mobarik (Conservative):** ... Organisations have been named publicly; what evidence has there been to deem them extremist? Would that evidence stand up in a court of law? Where does it all end? If I stand here one day and say, “I believe that there should be an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem should be lifted, in a process towards peace and mutual recognition”, and if some people feel that to be extremist in some way, how does that impact any kind of public discourse? I have grave concerns about the way this has been put out and articulated, and the communities that it will impact the most.

*col 157* **Baroness Swinburne:** ... those documents being leaked is really unfortunate, and has had some damaging effects. I assure the House that the list does not currently exist; the evidence and data are being compiled, and therefore an assessment will be made in due course. There is no list at this point in time. ...

I have heard the messaging that the Muslim community is finding this difficult. The way in which it has come out in the media has caused some issues. But it is really important for me to say at the Dispatch Box that the Muslim community makes an enormous contribution to British society, and has done so for centuries. Islam is a religion observed peacefully by over a billion people worldwide; we need to acknowledge that there is a huge difference between those who practise Islam and Islamist extremists. Therefore, we need to differentiate between them.

Rightly, the Prime Minister has made it clear that we stand for British Muslim communities; we maybe need to accelerate and emphasise that a little more. Some of that will be by working with those Muslim communities and, indeed, in the support we give to some of those Muslim groups. We certainly need to encourage most of those groups to come forward to work with us to counter extremism. I think this gives us the ability to work with a broader, more diverse group of individuals, to try to see whether we can make a bigger difference. ...

**Baroness Hussein-Ece:** I just think it is important that the record is straight ... An organisation that in the past had somebody associated with it, who is no longer there, continues to be smeared. ...

An organisation is smeared if it is continually associated with somebody who has not been involved for over a decade. It is really important we have that distinction. I urge the Minister to look into that closely. That is being said; it was said here about somebody who was involved, who supported Hamas 10 years ago, and it is not fair to continue that in the present day, to keep that on the record.

**Baroness Swinburne:** I confirm that the list has not yet been generated. As and when it is, I expect it to be on current, up-to-date data and evidence. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-19/debates/0641C02D-BD26-47DB-900A-2916104490CB/ExtremismDefinitionAndCommunityEngagement>

*The new definition of extremism referred to above can be read at*

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

*and*

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

## Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

### Prevent Strategy (Delivery)

**Bill Kidd (SNP) [S6O-03228]** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of any implications for its role in supporting the delivery of Prevent in Scotland of the United Kingdom Government's new definition of extremism.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** The Scottish Government takes the threat of extremism seriously and works with partners in Scotland and the UK to ensure that we can identify and tackle it effectively.

As debate about the UK Government's definition of extremism has illustrated, it is difficult to find consensus. We do not believe that a definition is helpful to our approach to tackling extremism, which focuses on building inclusive and cohesive communities. Extremism is devolved, but Prevent is reserved, although it is delivered by devolved sectors. We will keep the decision not to adopt or develop a definition of extremism under review, along with any implications for the delivery of Prevent in Scotland.

**Bill Kidd:** In the week that the Conservatives' top donor said that the MP Diane Abbott—Britain's longest-serving black MP—made him “want to hate all black women” and that she “should be shot” it was perhaps ironic, at best, that they redefined extremism. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the new definition threatens rather than strengthens democracy, and that only through building cohesive and inclusive communities can we tackle the threat of extremism? What steps is the Scottish Government taking to achieve those aims?

**Angela Constance:** There are two issues here. On the comments directed at



Diane Abbott, I speak on behalf of the Scottish Government and unequivocally condemn racism in all its forms. I am sure that that sentiment is shared by everyone across Parliament.

Let me also say, without fear or favour to any political party, including my own, that finding and building consensus on the issues in and around extremism is absolutely fundamental and crucial, because division only nurtures hate and extremism. The issue should not be used as a political football.

The focus of the Scottish Government will remain on building resilient and cohesive communities in which extremist narratives find it harder to resonate. The strength of our relationships and engagement with our diverse communities are of particular importance in that regard. A threat exists across the UK, but the complexion of that threat varies in different parts of the UK.

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15772&i=134593#ScotParlOR>

## Northern Ireland Assembly Written Answer

### Schools: Collective Worship and Religious Education

**Nick Mathison (Alliance)** [AQW 7929/22-27] To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of the June 2023 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendation that the NI Executive repeal provisions for compulsory attendance in collective worship and establish statutory guidance to ensure the right of all children to withdraw from religious classes without parental consent.

**Minister of Education:** I have no plans to repeal provisions for compulsory attendance in collective worship. Parents continue to have the right to have their child withdrawn from religious education or collective worship. Collective worship is governed by Article 21 of The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986. This article states:

*“21(1) Subject to the provisions of this Article, religious education shall be given in every grant-aided school other than a nursery school and the school day in every such school shall also include collective worship whether in one or more than one assembly on the part of the **registered pupils** at the school”.*

Since all pupils including those above compulsory school age are registered at school, the need for parental consent to be excused from religious education or collective worship would still be required as defined by article 21(5):

*“If the parent of any pupil requests that the pupil should be wholly or partly excused from attendance at religious education or collective worship or from both, then, until the request is withdrawn, the pupil shall be excused from such attendance in accordance with the request”.*

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=391669>

The UNCRC report and recommendations referred to above can be read at

<https://undocs.org/en/CRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7>

The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1986/594/contents>

TOP

# Holocaust

## Scottish Parliament Motion

**Jackson Carlaw (Conservative) [S6M-12534] Holocaust Survivor Henry Wuga’s Sad Passing** – that the Parliament acknowledges, with regret, the sad passing of Holocaust survivor and Giffnock resident, Henry Wuga; understands that Henry died peacefully at home on 15 March 2024, weeks after he reached the milestone age of 100 years old on 24 February; recognises that Henry first entered the UK on the Kindertransport in 1939, and that he was initially sent to Glasgow; further recognises that Henry was evacuated to Perth after the start of hostilities in the Second World War, but later returned to Glasgow where he met his future wife, Ingrid Wolff; acknowledges that Henry and Ingrid married on 27 December 1944 and celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary in 2019; understands that Henry and Ingrid spent countless hours sharing their own testimony and educating others about the Holocaust; notes that, for a period of 20 years, Henry and Ingrid were involved with fundraising activities for the Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice; acknowledges that Henry worked as a ski instructor for the British Limbless Ex-Serviceman’s Association (BLESMA), where he taught people who had limbs missing how to ski; recognises that Henry received the commendation of MBE in 1999 for services to sport for disabled people, and that Ingrid was awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) in 2019 for her dedication to Holocaust education, before she sadly passed away in October 2020; believes that Henry had an incredible life, and offers condolences to family and friends for his sad passing.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12534>

TOP

# Israel

**See also the Lords Ministerial statement and Q&A “Extremism Definition and Community Engagement” that is included in the Home Affairs section above, and Commons written answer 18510 “Armed Conflict: Children” that is included in the Foreign Affairs section below.**

## House of Commons Oral Answers

### Israel and Gaza

**col 805 David Lammy (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the situation in Gaza and Israel.

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell):** ... Israel suffered the worst terrorist attack in its history on 7 October last year. The scenes that we saw on that day were appalling, and Hamas’s disregard for civilian welfare continues today, more than five months later. We remember all the time those who are still being held hostage and their families, and we call once again for their immediate release. However, we naturally remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the impact of the conflict on all Palestinian civilians. We have borne witness to death and displacement on a vast scale. More than 1,700,000 people have had to leave their home, many on multiple occasions. We are deeply concerned about the growing risk of famine, exacerbated by the spread of disease, and, of course, about the terrible psychosocial impacts of the conflict, which will be felt for years to come.

We are totally committed to getting humanitarian aid to all those people in Gaza who desperately need it, doing so either ourselves or through UN agencies and British or other charities. We and our partners are pushing to get aid in through all feasible means, by land, sea and air. We have trebled our aid funding to the Occupied Palestinian Territories this year, providing just under £100 million, of which £70 million has been delivered as humanitarian assistance. On 13 March a further 150 tonnes of UK aid arrived in Gaza, including 840 family tents, 13,440 blankets, nearly 3,000 shelter kits and shelter fixing kits, 6,000 sleeping mats, and more than 3,000 dignity kits. A field hospital, provided through UK aid funding to UK-Med, arrived in Gaza from Manchester last Friday. This facility, staffed by UK and local medics, will be able to treat more than 100 patients a day. Along with Cyprus, the United States, the United Arab Emirates and others, Britain will help to deliver humanitarian aid by sea to a new temporary US military pier in Gaza via a maritime corridor from Cyprus.

We have made it clear, however, that air and sea deliveries cannot be a substitute for the delivery of aid through land routes. Only through those routes can the demand for the volume of aid that is now required be met. We continue to press Israel to open more land crossings for longer, and with fewer screening requirements. There is no doubt that land crossings are the most effective means of getting aid into Gaza, and Israel must do more. There is also no doubt that the best way to bring an end to the suffering is to agree an immediate humanitarian pause, and progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life. Reaching that outcome is the focus of all our diplomatic efforts right now, and a goal that is shared by our international partners. We urge all sides to seize the opportunity, and continue negotiations to reach an agreement as soon as possible.

*col 806* **David Lammy:** Yesterday, a UN-backed report revealed the shocking reality that famine in Gaza is imminent. Half the population is expected to face catastrophic levels of hunger—the highest number of people ever recorded as being in that category under this system. Only twice in 20 years have famine conditions been reached, but what distinguishes the horror in Gaza from what has come before is that it is not driven by drought or natural disaster; it is man-made. It is the consequence of war. It is the consequence of aid that is available not reaching those who need it. Food is piled up in trucks just a few kilometres away, while children in Gaza are starving. It is unbearable, and it must not go on.

International law is clear: Israel has an obligation to ensure the provision of aid. The binding measures ordered by the International Court of Justice require it. The world has demanded it for months, yet still aid flows are woefully inadequate. Aid actually fell by half between January and February. That is outrageous. The continued restrictions on aid flows are completely unacceptable, and must stop now—just as Hamas must release the hostages now. ...

Amid this accelerating hunger crisis, Prime Minister Netanyahu reportedly approved plans for an offensive against Rafah. That would risk catastrophic humanitarian consequences. It would be a disaster for civilians and a strategic mistake. How are the Government working to prevent a further attack on Rafah? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, report is clear: it says that famine is a very real scenario. We are doing everything we can to try to head that off ... In addition to famine, there is also the danger of disease, the lack of health services, and the acute danger from the lack of clean water and effective sanitation. ...

... on Sunday, 192 trucks did get in, but that is woefully short of what is required. It is more than have been getting in in March, which has averaged 165 each day so far, and in February that figure was only 97—although he will be well aware that

before the crisis, more than 500 trucks a day were getting in. ...

As everyone in the House will know, the ICJ judgment is binding. In respect of the offensive against Rafah, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, and indeed all our allies, have consistently warned that an offensive against Rafah at this time would have the most appalling humanitarian consequences.

*col 807* May I finish by taking the point that the right hon. Gentleman again made about a ceasefire? As far as I am aware, the position of the Labour Front Bench is still the same as the position of the Government: we are calling for an immediate pause so that we can get the hostages out and aid in—followed, we hope, by a sustainable ceasefire. ...

**Alicia Kearns (Conservative):** May I start by putting on the record my gratitude to the Minister for the Middle East, who made significant representations ahead of Ramadan to reduce tensions in Jerusalem and allow access to the Al-Aqsa mosque, which so far remains calm? The IPC report makes for breathtakingly difficult reading and the humanitarian situation is catastrophic, but it need not be. May I ask that we please push harder on truck entry from Jordan and ensure that it is fully operationalised, and can my right hon. Friend tell me when the House will be formally updated on whether Israel is demonstrating commitment to international humanitarian law?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... In respect of international humanitarian law, we are going through the necessary legal processes, which are complex, but ... as soon as we are in a position to update the House on what we have set out clearly before, we will do so. ...

**Brendan O'Hara (SNP):** ... The reports of an imminent famine should surprise no one; we have all known that this deliberate, man-made famine was coming. The Foreign Affairs Committee has just returned from al-Arish, on the Egypt-Gaza border, where we saw hundreds and hundreds of lorryloads of food and aid waiting for permission to get into Gaza.

Let us be very clear about our language here: the people of Gaza are not starving; they are being starved. Does the Minister accept that there is no food shortage in the region? Does he accept that people are starving to death just 44 miles from Tel Aviv—the distance between Glasgow and Edinburgh—as a direct result of the Israeli siege and the premeditated decision to cut off food supplies? Does he also accept that starving a civilian population to death is a war crime? Finally, does he still believe that the UK is right, both legally and morally, to continue selling weapons to Israel?

*col 808* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... he is well aware of the arms sales regime that Britain adopts. ... it is the toughest regime anywhere in the world. ...

... the way to get aid into Gaza is by road and by truck. Of course we are doing everything we can to explore every way, including the maritime route and dropping aid from the air, but at the end of the day, aid is delivered by road. That is one reason why we are working so closely with Jordan to ensure that the aid route into Gaza by road is enhanced. ...

**Oliver Heald (Conservative):** ... right at the core of this conflict is the visceral feeling of the Israelis that they want their people home, which anyone can understand. Has any progress been made ...?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... trying to get the hostages home and out of Gaza, and trying to get food in, are absolutely our twin objectives. ...

**Richard Burgon (Labour):** A new independent multi-agency investigation by the United Nations into an Israeli military airstrike on a residential compound housing an emergency medical team—including from Medical Aid for Palestinians, a UK charity—has found that it most likely involved a 1,000 lb US-manufactured bomb fired from an F-16 jet. Those F-16s include parts supplied by the UK. Can the Minister today set out conclusively that no parts supplied by the UK were used to bomb a compound housing medical staff from a UK charity—will he rule that out?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The events that the hon. Gentleman describes are appalling, and what the British Government would say is that there must be a full and transparent inquiry and examination into how those events took place.

**Andrew Percy (Conservative):** It remains incredible that some people in this place can barely utter a word of criticism of the Hamas regime in Gaza, who themselves are being accused of stealing and hoarding aid. With regard to the operation in Rafah, the Israeli Government have been very clear that hostages are being held there and that some of them have been subjected to sexual violence and other abuse. Are we saying to the Israeli Government that they have no right to go in and seek to rescue those hostages?

*col 809* **Andrew Mitchell:** No. ... we have been absolutely clear throughout that Israel has the right to self-defence, and what he is describing is covered by the right to self-defence. He sets out eloquently that absolute blame for what has happened lies with Hamas for perpetrating the events of 7 October, and once again he is absolutely right to set out that context.

**Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat):** We are talking as if famine is imminent, but the fact is that the UN reports that 27 Palestinian children have already died from starvation and hunger. Josep Borrell has said that hunger should not be used as a weapon of war, and I hope that the Minister would agree. We need that ceasefire immediately. We need it to get the hostages out, we need it to get aid in, and we need it to get all the killing to stop. ... What we are doing is not working, but there is one more thing we can do, which is to change how we vote at the Security Council. Will the UK stop abstaining and join the rest of the world in calling for that immediate ceasefire now?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... The problem with calling for an immediate ceasefire is that it may salve our consciences but it is not deliverable, because neither side in this appalling brutality is willing to embrace a ceasefire. ...

**Kit Malthouse (Conservative):** Over the past few months we have all listened to the Minister explaining that the Government have been begging, pleading with and pressing the Israeli Government to allow more aid in, but seemingly to little effect. Has he now reached the conclusion that the Israeli Government are wilfully obstructing the entrance of aid into the Gaza strip? If so, that would presumably be a breach of the International Court of Justice's ruling, and indeed of international humanitarian law. What would be the consequence of that conclusion?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I do not agree with my right hon. Friend's premise, because I do not think we are in the position to reach that judgment, but the point he is making is that it is essential to get more food, aid, support and medicine into Gaza, and every day the British Government are working intently to that end.

**Beth Winter (Labour):** ... "Famine is a reality...the highest hunger level of anywhere else in the world in terms of total numbers...all manmade...A ceasefire is an absolute requirement".

Those are the words of Matthew Hollingsworth, the country director of the World Food Programme, and of the UN Secretary-General. Starvation is indeed being used as a weapon of war. In Gaza, it is clear that Israel is engineering a famine for more than 2 million civilians. It is also clear that UK diplomacy has failed, so the Minister must now indicate what action the Government will take to escalate pressure to stop Israel's military assault, to demand a ceasefire and to ensure that emergency assistance is provided through UNWRA to those being starved to death.

*col 810* **Andrew Mitchell:** I think that many people in Israel and elsewhere will find part of what the hon. Lady has said profoundly offensive. She is right to say that the characteristics of famine are present in Gaza ... and that is why we are doing everything we can, together with our allies, to get as much food and support into Gaza as possible.

**Michael Ellis (Conservative):** Officials on the ground have stated that Hamas are appropriating—or misappropriating—as much as 60% of the humanitarian aid entering

the Gaza strip. This is part of a long pattern of prioritising fighters, abusing aid to produce rockets and using construction materials to build hundreds of miles of tunnels for their terror activities. We know that they do it; they have done it for years and they are doing it now. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that Hamas are flagrantly disregarding the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza, while Israel has been increasing the amount of aid going in exponentially?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I very much agree ... that Hamas are using ordinary people in Gaza as a human shield. ...

**Florence Eshalomi (Labour Co-op):** Humanitarian organisations have been warning repeatedly that this would happen. ... we are seeing healthcare being attacked and systematically degraded. We are seeing no safe zones left. We are told of the onset of famine, and that the number of people being killed keeps rising. Will the Minister finally please listen to the calls of Members across this House, of the international communities and of the people working on the ground and call for an immediate ceasefire and unrestricted aid?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I have set out several times already today why calling for an immediate ceasefire may make us feel better but is not a practical resolution. ...

**David Jones (Conservative):** My right hon. Friend has mentioned the floating pier to be constructed by the United States. What assurances has he received that the pier will be used solely for the delivery of humanitarian aid and not, as has been suggested, subsequently repurposed for military use?

*col 811* **Andrew Mitchell:** It is early days yet to see precisely how that maritime initiative will deliver, but I do not believe that what my right hon. Friend fears will be allowed to happen ...

**Joanna Cherry (SNP):** I do not think I have ever received as many emails of concern from constituents as I have about the situation in Gaza. ... over 500,000 Palestinians are at starvation levels and 27 children and three adults have died so far as a result of starvation and dehydration. In the words of Medical Aid for Palestinians: "This is not happening because the rains have failed or there has been a poor harvest. It is because...the Israeli authorities refuse to allow enough food into Gaza". ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** The point that I hope the hon. and learned Lady will make to her Edinburgh constituents is that she and I, the Government and the whole House are intent on ensuring that more food and more support get into Gaza as rapidly as possible. ...

**Neil O'Brien (Conservative):** ... it is appalling to think that large numbers of innocent people, including children, are about to starve when there is aid just over the border. He is right that aid must flow across the border and that it is better to transport it in trucks, but if that is not possible, we must think of this like the Berlin airlift. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... every single mechanism must be explored, but he will know that the amount of aid we can drop from the air, the danger to those underneath and the danger of the aid being misappropriated and stolen by Hamas are very real difficulties. He will also be fully aware of the difficulties of maritime entry. ...

**Imran Hussein (Labour):** The ICJ's interim ruling makes it clear that the killing of Palestinians in Gaza must stop, but it has not; that immediate humanitarian aid must be allowed into Gaza, but it is not; and that the safety and security of civilians must be guaranteed, but it is not. As a result, more than 1 million Palestinians in Gaza are left starving and on the brink of famine, as confirmed by today's IPC report...

What will it take for this Government to stand with international humanitarian law and oppose the actions of the Israeli military? How many more innocent Palestinians must be massacred? How many more children must die through starvation? When will the Government call for an immediate ceasefire?

*col 812* **Andrew Mitchell:** The one thing that is missing from the hon. Gentleman's list is an urgent call for the release of the hostages. ...

Israel must do more. We set out very clearly the five steps it needs to take: an immediate humanitarian pause; increased capacity for aid distribution inside Gaza; increased humanitarian access through land and maritime routes; expanded types of humanitarian assistance allowed into Gaza, such as shelter and items critical for infrastructure repair; and the resumption of electricity, water and telecommunications services. ...

**Henry Smith (Conservative):** The Israeli hostages must be released, and innocent Palestinians in Gaza must be supported. ... What particular support can this country provide to the Egyptians on delivering aid and averting a potential humanitarian and refugee crisis if the situation is not stabilised?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... We are in very close contact to make sure that British aid and British support enhance the excellent efforts that the Red Crescent is doing everything it possibly can to prosecute.

**Ben Bradshaw (Labour):** ... Mrs Thatcher suspended arms sales to Israel in 1982, and Tony Blair did the same in 2002. What on earth would it take for this Government to follow their example?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... Israel is a pluralist democracy—the only one in the region. He will be aware that Israeli Minister Benny Gantz, whom the Foreign Secretary recently met in London, has different views from Prime Minister Netanyahu. There are many different views, and Britain strongly supports the views that I have set out to the House today.

It is not for Ministers to make policy on arms sales and the arms regime from the Dispatch Box. It is for the proper due processes—as laid down and approved by Parliament, and as laid down in law—and that is what we follow.

**col 813 Flick Drummond (Conservative):** Given the impending famine in Gaza, as outlined by the IPC report, will the UK align with the EU, Sweden, Australia, Canada and many other countries by restoring funding to UNRWA as the most effective way to urgently and immediately scale up the delivery of aid, food and medical supplies to Gaza?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... we expect the report from the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services and, indeed, the interim report from Catherine Colonna, the former Foreign Minister of France, tomorrow, and we will read it with very great interest. ... we hope that her report will show a road map by which funding to UNRWA from Britain and many other countries can be restored. ...

**Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru):** It is estimated that people in northern Gaza have gone entire days and nights without heating at least 10 times over the last 30 days. Lord Cameron has said that UNRWA is the only body with a distribution network in Gaza ... Will he assure the House that the UK Government will take a decision on resuming funding as soon as possible, and at least before the end of this month, which is only 12 days away?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a precise timetable, but I can answer yes to his question about it being done as soon as we think it is possible to do so.

**Mark Pritchard (Conservative):** ... At the centre of this crisis—a crisis started on 7 October by Hamas's unprovoked attack on innocent civilians—whatever their faith or lack of faith, are children, women, men and vulnerable people who are suffering right now as we go off to our lunch or afternoon tea. ...

The figures vary, but it is estimated that 30,000 civilians and roughly 10,000 Hamas terrorists have been killed in Gaza. If it is true that 10,000 other terrorists are despicably hiding in Rafah among the civilian population, making it difficult to deliver aid, are we likely to see another 30,000 civilians killed so that Israel can find those terrorists? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** The awful symmetry that my right hon. Friend sets out is certainly one that no one wants to see. ...

**col 814 Kim Leadbeater (Labour):** ... does the Minister agree that all available aid corridors must be opened without delay and that there must be an immediate ceasefire, to

enable food, water and urgent medical supplies to reach more than 1 million people in desperate need? All hostages must be released and this living hell must end.

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... calling for an immediate ceasefire is not, in the opinion of the British Government, a practical proposition. ...

**Sara Britcliffe (Conservative):** Yesterday, the Israeli Prime Minister vowed to press ahead with the assault on Rafah, despite warnings from the international community. The prospect of millions in Rafah, who are there only as they desperately escape conflict to the north, being subjected to further suffering is intolerable. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... In respect of any military operations in Rafah, may I draw her attention to the words of the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister about the terrible dangers, loss of life and humanitarian consequences involved in that? ... I hope, everyone else in the House, will be hoping that no such operation goes ahead.

**Clive Efford (Labour):** I have no problem condemning Hamas, but I also have no problem condemning the use of starvation as an act of war. ... Do the Government agree that Israel, as the occupying force, has a legal duty to oversee the distribution of that aid?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The important point about the distribution of aid is that it should be able to get into Gaza, preferably through road and land routes. ...

**Steve Double (Conservative):** ... the very definition of the word “ceasefire” means that both sides have to agree to end hostilities. Does my right hon. Friend agree that anyone calling for an immediate ceasefire needs to make it clear that that must include Hamas releasing the hostages, ceasing all hostilities and committing to a future peace?

*col 815* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... Israel has the right of self-defence and the right to protect itself from the appalling acts that Hamas perpetrated on 7 October ever taking place again. Hamas have made it clear that they wish to repeat those awful acts. Those things do not sound to me like a strong basis for having a ceasefire.

**Clive Lewis (Labour):** Three standout statements from today have been that starvation is being used as a weapon of war; Israel is provoking famine; and the UK is still selling arms to Israel. When will the Minister understand the damning nature of this and the damage it is doing to the UK’s international reputation—or, rather, what is left of it?

**Andrew Mitchell:** We have been clear that Israel has the right of self-defence but it must abide by international humanitarian law and the rules of war. ...

**James Sunderland (Conservative):** I welcome the recent news that the UK will be sending a UK Aid field hospital to Gaza. What assurances have been sought and what assurances have been given in respect of sufficient force protection for all the staff there, some of whom may be British?

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are acutely conscious of the way in which humanitarian workers—not just in Gaza, but all around the world—put themselves, unarmed, in harm’s way for the sake of their fellow human beings. ... a field hospital provided by UK Aid funding to UK-Med arrived in Gaza from Manchester last Friday. That facility is staffed by UK and local medics, who will be able to treat more than 100 patients a day. We are acutely conscious of the contribution they are making and we do everything we can to ensure that they are protected.

**Andy McDonald (Labour):** To any reasonable and informed observer, the conduct of the war in Gaza by Israel contravenes basic international humanitarian law, in failing to distinguish between armed combatants and civilians, in using force beyond what is militarily necessary, and in offences against the prohibition of inflicting unnecessary injury, and it is wholly disproportionate. ... The Minister relies on Israel being a democracy that is capable of abiding by its legal obligations, but the overwhelming evidence is that it is not doing so, so what legal advice has he received about the complicity of and dangers to our country in failing to take sufficient action under the relevant treaties to which this country is a signatory, to deter such gross breaches of international humanitarian law?

*col 816* **Andrew Mitchell:** As I said, we continue to assess Israel’s commitment



and capability to comply with international humanitarian law. Those assessments are supported by a detailed evidence base, conflict analysis, reporting from charities, non-governmental organisations, international bodies and partner countries, statements and reports by the Israeli Government, and their track record of compliance. We take all of that into account in making our judgments. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that when it comes to targeting and military action, the Israel Defence Forces have their own lawyers embedded in those units, in much the same way of prudence that the British military do. That is not something we see in any other force in the region and it should give some confidence that the Israelis are seeking to abide by international humanitarian law.

**Greg Smith (Conservative):** I welcome reports that Israel is opening new routes to directly deliver humanitarian aid into northern Gaza, amid a slowdown in UN operations and the widespread Hamas misappropriation of that aid ... Significantly, at the same time, every day the IDF documents more and more Hamas infrastructure, weapons and missiles within civilian buildings—this week at al-Shifa Hospital and last month underneath UNRWA's own headquarters. So is the grim reality not that as long as Hamas remain in control of Gaza, no matter how many times people cry for a ceasefire, there can be no peace?

**Andrew Mitchell:** As my hon. Friend sets out, it is clear that there is no place for Hamas in any future for Gaza. What happened on 7 October is uniquely appalling and I agree with him that until Hamas are removed from Gaza, the opportunity of peace is very limited.

**Caroline Lucas (Green):** The UN's special rapporteur has been crystal clear that arms sales to Israel for use in Gaza are unlawful, given the clear risk that they will be used to violate international humanitarian law. Yet the Government have consistently refused to disclose whether licences, for example, for F-35 fighter planes, have been reviewed, let alone amended. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ...these matters ... are always kept under review. Equally, they are not decided at the whims of Ministers standing at the Dispatch Box; they are decided through a detailed, proper, legally governed, code-governed process ...

**col 817 Zarah Sultana (Labour):** ... children are starving to death in Gaza. Babies are so malnourished that UNICEF says that they do not have the energy to cry. Famine is not just imminent; it is happening, according to the head of Refugees International. This is not a natural disaster and it is not accidental; it is intentional. Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war to collectively punish the Palestinian people. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Lady uses florid language to describe these matters, but I hope that she will agree that the right thing is to do everything we possibly can to get the hostages out, support the people whom she so eloquently describes, and get support into Gaza ...

**Andy Slaughter (Labour):** Every month in Hammersmith, we hold "Ukrainian open house" to bring together all those supporting Ukrainian families who have fled that war. Every month, I am asked why there are not similar visa schemes to allow Palestinians to join their relatives in the UK, or to be hosted by families who wish to give them refuge here. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... the two positions are not analogous; they are very, very different. ...

**Amy Callaghan (SNP):** Save the Children has reported that 1.1 million people across Gaza are facing catastrophic food insecurity at the hands of Israel, with one in three children acutely malnourished. Does the Minister agree that Israel's tactic of starving the Palestinian people is a war crime?

**Andrew Mitchell:** As I have set out several times, we are doing all we can to make sure that the necessary food and resources get into Gaza ...

**Sam Tarry (Labour):** ... the UK supplies approximately 15% of the components used in F-35 stealth bombers currently being deployed in Gaza—the very same bombers allegedly being deployed from RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus. Earlier this month, a Dutch court ordered the

country's Government to block all exports of F-35 parts to Israel after concerns that they were being used, in violation of international law, during the ongoing war in Gaza. Will the Minister commit today to suspending the supply of F-35 components, and will he also confirm whether RAF bases are being used as a launch pad for bombing in Gaza, or indeed, in any military operations supportive of the IDF and the Israeli military forces?

**Andrew Mitchell:** I repeat that these decisions are not made at the whim of a Minister standing at the Dispatch Box. They are made in the normal way through a proper legal and coded practice. ...

**col 818 Afzal Khan (Labour):** Canada, Australia, Sweden and the European Union have now confirmed that they will restore the funding to UNWRA, refuting Israel's position that 450 members of the agency's staff had participated in the 7 October attack. ... In light of the catastrophic situation in Gaza, will the Minister commit to restarting and increasing this funding to UNRWA as a matter of urgency?

**Andrew Mitchell:** We have already increased funding significantly, including to UNRWA. ... Britain is not at the moment in the position of having to make that decision, because we have fully funded what we said we would fund and are not due to provide any further money until the end of April. ...

**Chris Stephens (SNP):** Can the Minister try to help the House in understanding the Government's position on who they believe is directly responsible for blocking the aid going into Gaza? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... I have explained to the House the difficulties of the air and maritime options, but those difficulties are not stopping us from pursuing those opportunities. At the end of the day, it is by agreement with Israel that we will get more trucks in, open up more points of entry, and find other ways of bringing aid in by road. ...

**Sarah Owen (Labour):** The need for an arms embargo in Israel was laid out by the International Court of Justice in January due to genocidal risk and serious harm to civilians. Since then, we have had no action from Ministers. UN experts have rightly called for hostage exchange and release, but they have also warned that the transfer of weapons or ammunition to Israel should cease immediately. We have seen more than 13,000 children killed, the destruction of 60% of civilian homes and hospitals destroyed. Water and food supplies are so low that Gaza is already in the midst of a catastrophic, man-made, state-made famine.

**col 819** The Minister boasted moments ago that the UK has an arms licensing framework with some of the toughest regulations in the world. It is plain for all to see that that claim is in tatters. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** As I have repeatedly said to the House, the issue of arms sales is dealt with in a legal and coded way. ...

... I agree that it is essential that we are able to get more supplies into Gaza. We spend all our time arguing for new ways of entry and for new opportunities to get aid in, but, as I set out in our five key aims, we want the resumption of electricity, water and telecommunication services as well as infrastructure repair to start as soon as possible.

**John McDonnell (Labour):** Across the House, we are all desperate to see the release of the hostages, but the negotiations for their release are not aided by the treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and detention centres. The Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, has reported that 27 Palestinian detainees have died in Israeli custody since the war and some during direct questioning. It has reported beatings, abuse, torture, sexual assault, and prisoners being prevented access to doctors, lawyers and medication. A magistrate in Jerusalem has reported that the prisoners are detained in cages not fit for human beings. Now we have had the family of Marwan Barghouti, the Palestinian leader who many hope will secure peace, say that he has been beaten with clubs by guards. Will the Minister demand that the Israeli Government provide access to

the detention centres and prisons for humanitarian bodies to investigate these abuses and bring forward a report, which, hopefully, will end the abuse and assist in the negotiations for the release of the hostages?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... the treatment of detainees is governed by international humanitarian law and the Geneva convention. He will have seen what the Foreign Secretary has said about the treatment of detainees, and Britain has consistently called for an inquiry, and for transparency in that inquiry, into any alleged abuses.

**Liam Byrne (Labour):** The Minister has laid great weight this afternoon on the legal and coded process that governs the export of arms, but a new international humanitarian law compliance assessment process cell has been created in his Department. Will he publish every assessment that that cell has made of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law, and will he tell the House whether the threshold has now been reached to review or cancel any extant open general export licence for arms sales?

*col 820* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... when we receive advice on international humanitarian law, we look at it extremely carefully, and when the Law Officers make their judgments on this matter, we come to the House and update it. ...

**Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat):** Many of us in this place have been calling since November for the release of the hostages, the removal of Hamas, an immediate bilateral ceasefire, and humanitarian aid. Sometimes, it seems the only thing that has changed is that the situation has got worse for people in Gaza. ...

Does the Minister accept that one of the biggest barriers to peace is illegal Israeli settlement in the west bank? Recently, there were sanctions against four Israeli settlers who had committed human rights abuses against Palestinians. The Liberal Democrats hope that that is just the start. Will the UK Government consider sanctioning Ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, who promote that extremist agenda, and all the settler movements connected to them in a way that finally makes a difference to what is happening?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... Britain has consistently condemned settler violence. We have made it clear that we expect those responsible to be caught, arrested, tried and punished for it, and we will continue to do so. ... four settlers have been sanctioned. We do not discuss on the Floor of the House the operations of the sanctions regime, but she may rest assured that the opinion of the Government is that the settlements and the acts that she described are illegal, and we will do everything we can to ensure that they stop.

**Holly Lynch (Labour):** ... children in Gaza are starving—they are being starved—and we cannot tolerate it. If the UK's standing on the rules-based order and international humanitarian law is to be worth anything around the world, the ICJ ruling must be binding, and there must be consequences for failure to comply with it. What are those consequences?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... The issue is what we can constructively do to bring about an end to the very worrying starvation figures that have been revealed this week. We are doing and will continue to do everything we can. ...

*col 821* **Andrew Gwynne (Labour):** ... International law matters, and we must show leadership when it comes to the rulings of international institutions such as the ICJ. What is Britain doing to ensure that Israel and other parties hold to the rule of international law and the judgments of the ICJ?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... Britain is showing real leadership in trying to address the humanitarian situation and to ensure that negotiations to get the hostages out are successful. ...

**Deidre Brock (SNP):** ... the world's media are prevented from reporting inside Gaza almost entirely. If we saw the daily reality of life there in more detail, I suspect the international pressure on Israel would be even stronger. What are the UK Government doing to ensure that any deliberate targeting of journalists—particularly Palestinian journalists—who are protected under international humanitarian law, is being passed on

to the International Criminal Court for its investigation into war crimes?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... in the IDF—as in the British military—the issue of targeting is, unusually, governed by legal advice. Lawyers are embedded with the people who are making those decisions. In respect of the media, any such targeting would be absolutely outrageous. ...

**Khalid Mahmood (Labour):** I want to make it clear that I have opposed Hamas since 2007, I deplore the action taken on 7 October, and I totally believe that the hostages on both sides must be released. However ... the Israeli blockade is leading to famine and to death and displacement. Young children are dying of malnutrition and hunger. He says continually that the two sides will not sit down together. Why, then, does he not put a Security Council resolution to the United Nations to ensure that something is done on an international level, such as putting in a peacekeeping force to deal with the issue and allow people to continue normal lives?

*col 822* **Andrew Mitchell:** ...the issue of a policing force inside Gaza is premature. ...

In terms of the United Nations Security Council and its resolutions, the hon. Gentleman will know that Britain is one of the leading architects of those resolutions in our role as one of the permanent five in New York. ...

**Chris Law (SNP):** The unfolding famine is entirely man-made and is being used as a weapon of war by Israel. It is a war crime, and those who continue to support that collective punishment and deny aid are complicit in this unfolding tragedy. Last week, Janez Lenarčič, head of humanitarian aid and crisis management at the European Commission, said that neither he nor any other UNRWA donor had been presented by Israel with any evidence of UNRWA involvement in the 7 October attacks. When the International Development Committee visited northern Egypt recently and spoke to the head of UNRWA, they also had no evidence, so my question is very simple: has the Minister been presented with any evidence to support his decision to pause the UK's life-or-death funding to UNRWA?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Gentleman will have seen the evidence that has been put before the international community, and will know that it was sufficiently strong for the head of UNRWA to immediately act against some of his officials. ...

**Stella Creasy (Labour Co-op):** As the Minister will be aware, thousands across Israel have protested in opposition to the approach that Prime Minister Netanyahu is taking, including the hostage families—they know that the situation in Gaza will not help release their family members. People in Israel see what is happening to the Palestinians; they hear the words of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, who has said today that what is happening and Israel's continuing restrictions on aid “may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war”. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are always in receipt of legal advice, and we act on it. ...

*col 823* Israel is a pluralist democracy. There are different views, and I tweeted last weekend about the extraordinary, moving work being done by two people who had come together from opposite sides, whose families had suffered so grievously in the aftermath of 7 October. It is that pluralist democracy that gives us the chance that accountability will be properly followed in Israel, which—as I say—is the only pluralist democracy in that part of the world.

**Navendu Mishra (Labour):** The IPC report published today shows that one in three children under two years old in the north of Gaza is now acutely malnourished. In February, that figure was one in six. ... The situation in Gaza is dire and urgent, so will the Minister call for an immediate ceasefire to ensure that no civilian goes hungry, malnourished or without medical support in Gaza?

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Gentleman and I both share the desire that people should not go hungry in Gaza. That is why the Government, along with our allies, are working so hard to get more food in. ...

**Alison Thewliss (SNP):** Does the deliberate starvation of a civilian population constitute a war crime—yes or no?

**Andrew Mitchell:** There would be, I think, very serious doubt about the term “deliberate starvation”, so I am unable to give a yes or no answer to the hon. Lady’s question.

**Diana Johnson (Labour):** We all know that behind Hamas sits the malign power of Iran and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The same is true of Hezbollah and the Houthis. ... can the Minister update the House on what progress has been made on proscribing the IRGC?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... the issue of proscription is not one that we discuss on the Floor of the House, but the arguments for and against are kept under very close review by the Government ...

**Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour):** ... it is imperative that both sides agree to an immediate ceasefire ... Aid in huge quantities is critical, and any attempts by the Israeli Government to block it must be condemned ...

*col 824* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... in order to get a ceasefire, both sides in this terrible conflict need to agree to one, and there is absolutely no indication whatsoever that Hamas have any intention of a ceasefire—indeed, they have made absolutely clear that they wish to perpetrate once again the terrible events that took place on 7 October.

**Andrew Bridgen (Independent):** Hamas’s cold-blooded murder of at least 1,300 Israeli civilians on 7 October was truly abhorrent, but sadly, those horrific numbers are now dwarfed by the number of innocents of all faiths who have had their lives taken away from them in Gaza. ... The Minister has stated that the International Court of Justice ruling is binding; will he inform the House how that ruling can be enforced?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... the Government have made it clear throughout that we will do everything we possibly can to achieve a pause, so that we can help get the hostages out and food and support into Gaza. ...

**Jessica Morden (Labour):** The head of the UN, António Guterres, the head of security policy for the EU, Josep Borrell, and multiple accounts on the BBC have all indicated that famine is under way. The Minister has repeatedly said this afternoon that ... the Government are doing everything they can. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** I have set out for the House the work that we are doing, in respect of both the maritime corridor and supporting food and medical supplies delivered from the air. At the end of the day, though, those are inevitably going to be relatively small amounts, particularly from the air. The answer is to try to open up more access points into Gaza by road and to make sure that trucks flow more easily through those access points. ...

*col 825* **Chi Onwurah (Labour):** I am absolutely clear that the hostages must be released. I am also absolutely clear that the situation in Gaza has gone from dire to horrendous to cataclysmic...

The majority leader in the US Senate has identified Netanyahu’s ultra right-wing Government as a barrier to peace, and the European Union foreign policy chief has said that Israel, one of the richest and most militarily powerful nations in the world, is “provoking famine”. So will the Minister say clearly that it is unacceptable for Israel to prevent aid from entering Gaza? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** I thank the hon. Member for her clarity on the issue of the hostages. She asks why all of this is being allowed to continue. ... the Government, along with our allies, are doing everything we possibly can to stop it continuing. ...

**Alan Brown (SNP):** Children in Gaza are dying at the fastest rate the world has ever seen, according to the IPC report. Instead of calling out Israel for its culpability, the Government still refuse to sign UN resolutions and they still sell arms to Israel. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... The current legal advice is that Israel has both the capacity

and the will to abide by international humanitarian law ...

**Debbie Abrahams (Labour):** We heard this morning how half the population in Gaza—and this is the first time in modern history that such a large population has been affected—is being subjected to famine. We also heard about the absolute imperative that we as a country, and also our allies, obey and abide by international law. Given that, and that the Minister has said that he and his Government are doing all they can, can I ask ... why it seems to be so ineffective?

*col 826* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... everyone must abide by international humanitarian law, and Britain is doing everything it can to ensure that the rules of war and international humanitarian law are respected. ... All of us—the Americans, the European Union and those across the region—are doing our very best to ameliorate the suffering going on in Gaza. It is a collective effort, and Britain will not be found wanting ...

**Emma Hardy (Labour):** The horrific famine in Gaza is made even worse by the fact that we know it is man-made. There is no agency better than UNRWA at delivering the small amount of aid that there is currently. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Lady is right that UNRWA has the logistics hubs, warehouses, vehicles and infrastructure that are essential for the delivery of aid in Gaza, and everyone understands that. She asks me whether I can guarantee that we will be able to resume funding at the end of April. I very much hope that will be the case. It will be very much dependent on the report ...

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op):** ... Prime Minister Netanyahu confirmed with his Cabinet that he plans to proceed with an operation in Rafah. We know this assault will end in the killing of many civilians, including children, and it will of course impede aid flowing into Rafah, which is the main place where aid now enters Gaza. The consequences will be catastrophic. ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** On military operations in Rafah, the hon. Lady will have heard what the Prime Minister has said ... and she will have heard what the Foreign Secretary has said very clearly indeed. She will have heard what the European Union has said, and indeed what President Biden has said. We very much hope that the Israeli Government and Prime Minister Netanyahu will heed these words, which come not from enemies of Israel, but from friends of Israel.

*col 827* **Matt Western (Labour):** ... Does the Minister agree that the Israeli Government must allow the full reopening of land bridges into Gaza, and that they should recommence the issuing of new visas for humanitarian workers? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... We have consistently urged the Israeli Government to grant the UN visas and, indeed, renew visas as swiftly as possible. ...

**Paula Barker (Labour):** ... The holy month of Ramadan risks turning into a further tragedy for millions of Palestinians facing hunger and disease. Stern words just are not cutting it with Netanyahu, so what will it take for the Government to go further, and stop the export and sales of weapons to the Israeli Government? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... The underlying points the hon. Lady makes are the reason why we are arguing with such force and passion for a humanitarian pause in which we could get resources into Gaza and get the hostages out, and such a pause could lead to a sustainable ceasefire. ...

**James Murray (Labour Co-op):** We urgently need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, a massive surge in aid, all hostages released, and a lasting peace with a two-state solution. ...

*col 828* **Andrew Mitchell:** ... We are working with all the resources we can to make sure that the aid can be delivered and is not siphoned off, pilfered or attacked by people who are very short of food and desperate to get it.

**Jim Shannon (DUP):** ... what aid and assistance have been provided to those in the Gaza area who can use arable land to attempt to grow food for community use? Can we in this

place do anything more to provide self-sustaining aid?

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... The issue of arable land use inevitably takes a bit of a back seat at the moment because of the difficulty growing crops in Gaza, but in a future settlement, and in building towards a two-state solution, that would definitely be part of reconstruction. ... progress made at Oslo was on the back of appalling events in the second intifada, and we must hope that, in spite of the desperate current events, we are able to lift people's eyes to the political possibilities of a two-state solution in which both Palestine and Israel live in peace behind secure borders. Ensuring that that happens, when the moment comes, is the central aim of the British Government, and a great deal of work and planning is going into what such an initiative would look like.

**Olivia Blake (Labour):** Just last week, the UN reported that humanitarian aid is being denied or postponed by Israeli authorities. ... what else can the Government do to lobby the Israeli Government on allowing more aid to enter Gaza as a matter of urgency? ...

**Andrew Mitchell:** ... it is the view of the Government and many others that a pause for humanitarian purposes could lead to a sustainable ceasefire. That is the sensible way to proceed. ... Britain is doing everything it possibly can to achieve aims that are commonly held across this House: bringing an end to the situation in Gaza; getting the hostages home; and getting aid and support into Gaza. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-19/debates/3C0812EC-E75C-4F39-873B-2EAC5CF71E51/IsraelAndGaza>

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

[https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC\\_Gaza\\_Strip\\_Acute\\_Food\\_Insecurity\\_Feb\\_July2024\\_Special\\_Brief.pdf](https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Gaza_Strip_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Feb_July2024_Special_Brief.pdf)

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

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

*Josep Borrell's comments referred to above by Layla Moran can be read at*

[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-humanitarian-forum-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-opening-ceremony\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-humanitarian-forum-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-opening-ceremony_en)

*Matthew Hollingsworth's comments referred to above by Beth Winter can be read at*

<https://www.wfp.org/stories/hunger-gaza-famine-findings-dark-mark-world-says-wfp-palestine-country-director>

*The Medical Aid for Palestinians comments referred to above by Joanna Cherry can be read at*

<https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1572-imminent-famine-in-gaza-map-reacts-to-ipc-food-security-figures>

*The Save the Children report referred to above by Amy Callaghan can be read at*

<https://www.savethechildren.net/news/israeli-siege-and-bombardment-threaten-gaza-risk-famine>

*The Haaretz article referred to above by John McDonnell can be read at*

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-03-07/ty-article/.premium/27-gaza-detainees-died-in-custody-at-israeli-army-facilities-since-the-start-of-the-war/0000018e-1322-d950-a18e-f3bbaa370000>

*A report of Janez Lenarčič's comments referred to above by Chris Law, which were made during a press conference, can be read at*

<https://www.reuters.com/world/no-evidence-israel-back-unrwa-accusations-says-eu-humanitarian-chief-2024-03-14/>

*Volker Türk's comments referred to above by Stella Creasy can be read at*

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/comment-un-high-commissioner-human-rights-volker-turk-risk-famine-gaza>

*The retweet by Andrew Mitchell that he referred to above can be read at*

<https://twitter.com/afalkhatib/status/1768355084172460215>

The UN comments referred to above by Olivia Blake can be read at

<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-142>

## House of Commons Written Answers

### Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

**John Healey (Labour)** [18371] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the RAF has made an assessment of the effectiveness of using aircraft to airdrop humanitarian aid into Gaza.

**James Heapey:** Defence continually carries out assessments on the delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza, including the effectiveness of using aircraft to conduct air drops. Defence stands ready to assist the FCDO in its delivery of humanitarian aid where military capabilities can best assist, to ensure that aid is delivered as rapidly, efficiently and safely as possible. The most effective way for aid to reach the people of Gaza is for Israel to open more land crossings.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18371>

### Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

**Dan Carden (Labour)** [18258] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the statement from the Canadian Government entitled Canada announces continued assistance for people in Gaza, published on 8 March 2024, whether his Department has received the interim report of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are aware that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services has released an interim report to the UN Secretary-General. We are pressing Catherine Colonna to produce a rapid interim report on the investigation into UNRWA's neutrality.

We are working with allies to try to bring this situation to a rapid conclusion - not least because UNRWA have a vital role to play in providing aid and services in Gaza, and the wider region. We want UNRWA to give detailed undertakings about changes in personnel, policy and precedents to ensure this can never happen again.

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18258>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2024/03/canada-announces-continued-assistance-for-people-in-gaza.html>

## House of Lords Written Answer

### Israel: RAF Akrotiri

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat)** [HL3069] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have instructed Israel not to land its F-35s at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus until hostilities in Gaza have concluded.

**The Earl of Minto:** No instruction has been provided because there are no standing agreements in place to use RAF Akrotiri. Permission for state-operated aircraft to utilise UK air bases is dependent on the nature and purpose of their activity, and each request is considered on a case by case basis.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-06/hl3069>



## UK Parliament Early Day Motion

**Richard Burgon (Labour) [532] Government legal advice on Israeli Government actions and international law** – This House notes the remarks by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on 19 March 2024 that the Israeli Government's restrictions on humanitarian aid for Gaza may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war, which is a war crime; is alarmed at the mounting evidence that the Israeli Government's actions in Gaza are in breach of international law; is deeply concerned by the UK Government's continued and ongoing refusal to make available to all MPs the legal advice it has received relating to Israel's conduct in Gaza and its implications for the UK's fulfilment of its legal obligations under international law; and, given the importance of the UK Government, Ministers and MPs not being complicit in any violations of international law by the Israeli Government, calls on the UK Government to immediately make this legal advice available to MPs.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62029>

## Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

### **Human rights priority countries: ministerial statement, January to June 2023**

... This statement provides an updated assessment of the 32 priority countries from 1 January to 30 June 2023, prioritising issues of concern but also reflecting positive developments where there has been progress. ...

The statement provides a snapshot of the most significant developments during the first half of 2023. The aftermath of the abhorrent terrorist attacks by Hamas on Israel, the subsequent Israeli military action and the severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza will be covered in the 2023 Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report, which will be published in 2024, and will cover human rights issues during the full calendar year in more detail. The UK is appalled at the shocking loss of civilian life, particularly women and children and the use of sexual violence as a method of warfare.

We will continue to closely monitor the conflict and developments in Israel and Gaza. Israel suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas. Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We want the fighting to stop now.

The UK is committed to making progress towards a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution. In support of this, we continue to fund peacebuilding projects focused on Israel and the OPTs.

The UK has also significantly stepped up our humanitarian efforts. We have trebled our aid commitment to the OPTs, bringing the total spend to over £100 million for the financial year 2023-24. ...

### **Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs)**

This entry covers human rights developments in the OPTs between 1 January and 30 June. The aftermath of the abhorrent terrorist attacks by Hamas on Israel and the severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza will be covered in the 2023 Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report, which will be published in 2024, and will cover human rights issues during the full calendar year in more detail.

From January to June, reports of human rights abuses by Hamas, the de facto administration of Gaza, and by the Palestine Authority increased, while reports of violations by the Government of Israel of human rights and international humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation intensified.

From 9 to 13 May, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militant factions fired 1,748 rockets at Israel, of which 290 landed inside Gaza. There were 2 deaths on the Israeli side: an 80-year-old, and a Palestinian Gazan working in Israel. Gaza Ministry of Health reported that

33 Palestinian militants and civilians – including 6 children and 3 women – were killed, and 147 were injured. In Gaza, Hamas continued to exercise repressive control over civil society and political opposition, restricted women’s rights and arbitrarily summoned and arrested journalists and activists.

According to OCHA, between January and June 2023, 132 Palestinians, including 23 children, were killed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank, the highest number of fatalities since OCHA records began in 2005. OCHA also reported 591 incidents of settler violence against Palestinians and their property in the same period, the highest since records began in 2006<sup>[footnote 47]</sup>. Israel must work to prevent acts of violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians in the OPTs, and to hold those responsible to account. We will continue to call upon the Government of Israel to fully respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of Palestinians.

Israel continued its policy of illegal settlement expansion, a breach of international humanitarian law. During the first 6 months of 2023, Israel announced construction of 12,855 settlement units in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem<sup>[footnote 48]</sup>.

The UK firmly opposes settlement expansion. The Prime Minister, the then Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, and Minister of State for the Middle East and Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, have all raised the UK’s opposition to illegal Israeli settlements with their Israeli counterparts and emphasised that they undermine the viability of a two-state solution. ...

**To read the full statement see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-priority-countries-ministerial-statement-january-to-june-2023/human-rights-priority-countries-ministerial-statement-january-to-june-2023>

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### **Largest UK aid delivery enters Gaza to feed 275,000 people**

The UK’s largest delivery of aid to Gaza has crossed the border and is being distributed by the United Nations to families in need, the Foreign Secretary has confirmed.

More than 2,000 tonnes of food aid, funded by the government, is being distributed by the World Food Programme (WFP) on the ground.

This adds to the [150 tonnes of UK funded relief items](#) including blankets and tents, which arrived last Wednesday 13 March, and will be distributed by UNICEF. A full UK field hospital run by UK-Med has also arrived in Gaza and is now operational and providing life-saving care.

The delivery includes fortified wheat flour for use in bakeries, hot meals and well as ready-to-eat (RTE) food parcels. The food parcels will be used to feed more than 275,000 people in Gaza. Each food parcel is designed for family of 5 and consists of canned vegetables, meat and fish, and date bars. The parcel can meet half of the daily calorie needs of the family for 15 days.

This comes in the week that a [report from Integrated Food Security Phase Classification \(IPC\)](#) warned that famine is imminent in the northern Gaza Strip and the south faces a risk of famine if conditions continue to worsen.

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said: It’s crucial that we keep the flow of aid moving into Gaza to end the suffering, and that’s why this latest delivery of aid by WFP is so vitally important.

The IPC’s report warns of imminent famine. We need sustained humanitarian access by road to get more aid in. We continue to push Israel to allow more crossings to open and for longer, and for healthcare, water and sanitation to be restored.

The latest delivery was again facilitated by Jordan, who have been instrumental in supporting the UK’s humanitarian response. ...

The UK is committed to ensuring aid reaches those who need it most, as Palestinians

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

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/largest-uk-aid-delivery-enters-gaza-to-feed-275000-people>

## Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

### Gaza (Humanitarian Assistance)

**Kevin Stewart (SNP) [S6O-03216]** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what action it has taken to support the provision of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza.

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Kaukab Stewart):** In November, we provided £750,000 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to ease the suffering of innocent civilians in Gaza. That was in response to a flash appeal and was a one-off contribution.

Famine is now imminent in Gaza, primarily because of restrictions on aid access. The First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister in December, asking him to make it clear to Israeli ministers that they and Israeli military commanders will be held accountable for deaths from starvation and disease as a result of their restrictions on access for humanitarian aid. It is now urgent that that message is conveyed directly to Prime Minister Netanyahu. The restrictions must be lifted immediately.

**Kevin Stewart:** Given the continuing deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Gaza, it is clear that we need to redouble international efforts to secure an immediate ceasefire to allow aid to get through. We cannot and must not stand by while thousands of innocent men, women and children are killed and while even more are starving and going without medicines. Does the minister agree that the United Kingdom Government should be taking concrete steps to secure an immediate ceasefire, including ending arms sales to Israel and using its position on the United Nations Security Council to demand one? Can she provide any update on the Scottish Government's latest engagement with the UK Government in that regard?

**Kaukab Stewart:** The Scottish Government has been engaging with the UK Government since the outset of the conflict to highlight our position. I agree with Kevin Stewart's remarks. We will continue to engage through our connections with the UK Government. We have made it clear that it is incumbent on the UK Government to do everything that lies within its power to secure an immediate ceasefire by all sides to prevent further devastation in Gaza, including by using its influence in the international sphere and with the Government of Israel to achieve that.

In the light of Israel's statement that its armed forces will attack Rafah, which is the final refuge of more than 1.5 million civilians in Gaza, the First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister, calling on him to introduce an immediate ban on licensed arms exports from the UK to Israel. The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture has also written to the UK Government, but we have had no response to date. ...

**Foyso Choudhury (Labour):** I recently met the charity Medical Aid for Palestinians, which outlined the dire situation with high rates of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity in Palestine. Can the minister please advise what steps the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that the aid that Scotland sends is available to reach new

and expectant mothers in Gaza?

**Kaukab Stewart:** I thank Foysol Choudhury for his question and refer him to my previous comments on what the Scottish Government is doing. I am acutely aware of the plight of new and expectant mothers, and I mentioned it during my opening contribution to the debate on international women's day.

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15772&i=134580#ScotParlOR>

## United Nations

### **Note to Correspondents – on the Independent Review of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East**

The independent review group that is assessing whether the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is doing everything within its power to ensure neutrality and to respond to allegations of serious breaches when they are made, will submit its interim report officially to the Secretary-General later today.

The Secretary-General, in consultation with the Commissioner-General of UNRWA Philippe Lazzarini announced the review on 5 February 2024, led by Catherine Colonna, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, working with three research organizations: the Raoul Wallenberg Institute in Sweden, the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway and the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

The Review follows serious allegations regarding the alleged involvement of UNRWA staff in the 7 October attack on Israel by Hamas. These allegations are under investigation by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS).

Yesterday, the group presented the Interim Report findings and recommendations to the Secretary-General. It has found that UNRWA has in place a significant number of mechanisms and procedures to ensure compliance with the Humanitarian Principle of neutrality, and the group has also identified critical areas that still need to be addressed.

The review group will now develop concrete and realistic recommendations on how to address these critical areas to strengthen and improve UNRWA.

The group will present the final report on the 20 April and that report will be made public.

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2024-03-20/note-correspondents-%C2%A0-the-independent-review-of-the-united-nations-relief-and-works-agency-for-palestine-refugees-the-near-east>

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### **Children of Gaza spread joy for Ramadan, despite the war**

While ceasefire talks failed to end the five-month-long conflict that has killed nearly 32,000 Palestinians – most of them women and children – the goal of some youngsters living in the makeshift camp was simple.

The children of Deir Al-Balah decided to lift their spirits in the face of ongoing war and celebrate the holy month of Ramadan, despite all the difficulties. ...

One of the children in the camp, Shahad said she was having fun carrying lanterns for Ramadan.

“We agreed to change the atmosphere of war and decorate the camp,” she explained, with a smile on her face and enthusiasm filling her voice. ...

Amira, displaced from northern Gaza “from built houses to tents on the dirt”, cherished the happiness as the youngsters sang in a small square between the tents.

“The children’s joy is our joy,” she said. ...

As lifesaving deliveries into the besieged enclave are alarmingly insufficient to meet rapidly

escalating needs of almost the entire population who depend on food aid, [famine](#) warnings came on Monday, with [a new report](#) revealing that half the population in Gaza – 1.1 million people – have completely exhausted their food supplies and are suffering from catastrophic hunger and starvation.

“Ramadan is upon us, and we are in the worst situation,” warned Ahmed Abd Rabbo Musleh, who was displaced from Beit Hanoun in the north.

People are trying hard to find something to support their families, especially during Ramadan, with a simple meal costing about 40 shekels (about \$11), he said, adding that “we cannot live at these prices.”

Despite the circumstances, Ahmed said he was able to provide food and drink for his family, but “there are those who cannot afford even bread.” ...

Others agreed, including Ahmed Thabet, who said no one can afford the “exorbitantly high prices” to buy what little food is available. ...

A displaced woman from the Shujaiya neighborhood east of Gaza City said vegetables for a whole week used to cost about \$5, but not anymore.

“We were deprived of everything,” she stressed, saying the situation is getting worse every day.

One man said he did not have any money, forcing him to get breakfast from one of the hospices and lamenting that “the situation this Ramadan is unprecedentedly tragic.” ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147726>

## UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

### **Comment by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk on the risk of famine in Gaza**

The projected imminent famine in Gaza can and must be prevented.

The alarm bells sounded over the past months by the UN, including my Office, have not been heeded. This catastrophe is human-made and was entirely preventable.

The situation of hunger, starvation and famine is a result of Israel’s extensive restrictions on the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid and commercial goods, displacement of most of the population, as well as the destruction of crucial civilian infrastructure.

Dangerous coping strategies are already emerging, in the face of starvation. Law and order is breaking down as people become increasingly desperate, and children have reportedly been sent to make the dangerous journey from northern to southern Gaza, unaccompanied in the desperate hope that they will find food and support among the 1.8 million people already displaced there.

Israel’s now 16-year-old blockade of Gaza has already had a severe impact on human rights for the civilian population, leaving the local economy devastated and creating a dependence on aid. The extent of Israel’s continued restrictions on the entry of aid into Gaza, together with the manner in which it continues to conduct hostilities, may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war, which is a war crime.

Israel, as the occupying power, has the obligation to ensure the provision of food and medical care to the population commensurate with their needs and to facilitate the work of humanitarian organisations to deliver that assistance. Israel must ensure that the population can access this aid in a safe and dignified manner. International human rights law imposes a similar obligation.

The clock is ticking. Everyone, especially those with influence, must insist that Israel acts to facilitate the unimpeded entry and distribution of needed humanitarian assistance and commercial goods to end starvation and avert all risk of famine.

There needs to be full restoration of essential services, including the supply of food, water, electricity and fuel.

And there needs to be an immediate ceasefire, as well as the unconditional release of hostages still held in Gaza.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/comment-un-high-commissioner-human-rights-volker-turk-risk-famine-gaza>

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## Foreign Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answer

#### Armed Conflict: Children

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [18510]** To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make representations to his international counterparts on the need for renewed international obligations to protect children from conflict.

**Leo Docherty:** The UK recognises that protecting children from the effects of armed conflict is a moral, legal and strategic imperative, and essential in breaking the cycle of violence.

We use our permanent seat at the UN Security Council (UNSC) to ensure conflict-related child protection issues remain a key part of UNSC discussions.

The UK remains firmly committed to protecting all children affected by armed conflict and holding all parties accountable for violations against children through our membership of the UN Security Council CAAC Working Group.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18510>

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

### UK Parliament

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

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

#### Criminal Justice Bill

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

#### Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

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

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

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

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

## **Genocide Determination Bill**

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

## **Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill**

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

## **Holocaust Memorial Bill**

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

## **International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill**

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

## **Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill**

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

## **Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill**

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

## **Scottish Parliament**

### **Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill**

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

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