



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Lords Committee Debate

#### Committee Stage, House of Lords:

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

col 272 **Lord Wallace of Saltaire (Liberal Democrat)**: ... After Second Reading and the Commons stages, during which there were a large number of sharp criticisms from Conservatives, as well as others, about the quality of the drafting and the coverage of the Bill, I would have expected the Government, between Second Reading and Committee, to have produced a number of government amendments to clarify some of the many imprecisions in the Bill and perhaps to have arranged to meet some of us who had spoken at Second Reading. I am sorry that that has not happened ...

The lack of engagement is troubling, and the absence of government amendments at this stage is extremely worrying. ...

col 273 We need to know what is meant by “influenced by moral or political disapproval”. My Amendment 1 suggests that it has to be very considerable in order to be a primary cause of the decision, not simply something that comes in as ... part of the reasons why the decision was taken. ...

Amendment 6 raises the question of whether it is not only the decision-maker who is going to be liable but “any person seeking to persuade the decision-maker”.

Does that mean that the *Guardian* journalist who writes an editorial suggesting that this should be done is going to be caught by it? Does it mean that the lobby group that sends things to the decision-maker is going to be caught by it? Does it have to be a more direct

approach? How do we identify that “any person”? ...

**Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (Liberal Democrat):** ... My Amendment 2 —purely adds one word: “materially”. This would raise the threshold that needs to be met before a decision is deemed to be in breach of this prohibition. ...

*col 275* **Lord Verdirame (Non-affiliated):** ... the core purpose is to ensure that public bodies, when taking procurement or investment decisions, do not impose a de facto sanctions regime or a de facto ban or boycott on a foreign state on the basis of their own judgments about a territorial dispute, the status of a foreign territory or the presence of a foreign Government in a particular territory. It seems to me that that objective can be achieved equally effectively by focusing the duty in Clause 1 on not having regard to territorial considerations, rather than in the current formulation of a duty not to be influenced by political or moral disapproval of foreign state conduct. Subject to the exceptions, it would still be the case that if a public authority were to have regard to a territorial consideration, it would probably do so because of disapproval of a moral or political kind of the foreign state’s conduct in the territory. But it would be better if we can get to the result that the Government are pursuing without that language of political or moral disapproval of foreign state conduct. ...

*col 276* **Baroness Noakes (Conservative):** ... Lord Verdirame ... is trying to find a way through by removing the reference to “political or moral disapproval”, but ... I am not sure what the restriction to “that territory” in his Amendment 4 will do. Let us suppose that the territorial consideration is Ukraine, because it has to relate to a particular foreign territory by virtue of subsection (3). Does that mean that the decision-maker must have no regard to what is happening in Ukraine itself? It seems to me that “that territory” can be related only to the territorial consideration referenced in subsection (2). In that case, it would be Ukraine. If, say, Russia is the foreign state you have a problem with, it seems that you can take account of its activities only in Ukraine. You could not take account of activities that were not in Ukraine—for example, attacks from other places, such as the Black Sea, or whether it takes children from Ukraine back to Russia. If you thought that Russia was the territory—still restricting it to one territory—you have the problem the other way around; you could take activities only in Russia, but not in Ukraine, which is the fundamental problem. That creates an interpretive problem.

While these distinctions might not matter if we are talking about Russia and Ukraine, if you try and then relate it to a council or other public body trying to boycott Israel, and relate that to the complexities of the different parts of the territory around the State of Israel, you may end up finding some odd conclusions on how the reformulation might work in practice. ...

*col 277* **Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated):** ... It was clear from Second Reading that most of the people who have since tabled these amendments and are speaking now are not in any way defending BDS ... These boycott schemes are censorious and illiberal, and very often ... the seeding ground for anti-Semitism in public life. In that sense, I oppose them; I am just not clear how the Bill will actually tackle them.

As we speak, just to use an example, the Rio Cinema in London has just cancelled its Eurovision party on the basis that it will not hold it while Israel still has somebody in the Eurovision Song Contest. I do not know whether this is self-declared BDS; it is a charity, and I am not quite sure how the Bill would apply. ... I feel that the Bill will miss where a lot of the anti-Semitic censorship is occurring, around the periphery, rather than just in terms of divestment and investment, and so on. ...

... if we are to win the hearts and minds of many of the young people who go along with BDS campaigns, we will have to show our political and moral disapproval, and win them over and seek to persuade them. ... it is not clear how the language in the section to which these amendments refer will help us to tackle the problem that the Bill seeks to address.

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat):** ... Many councillors get into politics because they

have moral and political views—they want to change the world and do something about things in their own area. I would welcome clarity ... on how it is to be established whether a decision-maker has been “influenced by political or moral disapproval of foreign state conduct”. What means might be used to actually determine this, in the event of needing to enforce action against it? ...

*col 278* How will the possibility of liability for enforcement action and a potential monetary penalty affect the need for open and frank discussion ... and advice to people taking decisions in pension committees? Is there a risk that advisers will be unwilling to risk liability and councillors will be unwilling to serve on such a body if they risk their reputation, and penalties, including monetary penalties?

I would also welcome clarity from the Minister on the concept of “a reasonable observer”. ...

**Lord Mann (Non-affiliated):** ... My question is about the word “decision”, and what the statutory understanding of that word is. My understanding is clarified by Clause 2(2), which says: “A ‘procurement decision’ is a decision about a contract for the supply of goods, services or works to the decision-maker.”

That seems to me absolutely clear. I want to clarify if that is also the Minister’s understanding of what a decision in this context is.

I ask that because of an example from the University of Essex student union, which has a policy passed 15 or 16 years ago, described as a BDS policy, which is specifically targeted against the state of Israel. On the student union website that policy is deemed to be an educational policy to stimulate discussion and debate. But the student union, in applying the policy, has chosen specifically to address the purchasing of kosher food products, including those from Israel, in the student union shop.

... it would be helpful to know whether I am right in my understanding that the University of Essex student union policy, which has not been turned into a procurement decision, as defined in Clause 2(2), would not be covered by the Bill, because it is merely an educational policy, as opposed to a procurement and economic activity decision. ...

*col 280* **Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour):** ... this is not about how we address BDS strategies. The impact of the clause is far wider and encompasses a whole host of things that the Government may not have really intended. ... Clause 1 does not define “political” or “moral”. It is extremely wide-ranging and could cover any decision or consideration that suggests a negative view of an existing, previous or potential policy action or inaction, or other behaviour associated with a Government or any public authority in another country. ...

The legislation does not require the reasonable person to be someone who is familiar with the subject matter and decision-making processes. Clause 1(4) and 1(6) do not define a public authority in a foreign territory, so it could include state-run companies in some countries. This could result in additional uncertainty where the conduct of a public authority differs from the official policy of a foreign state, and that is a threat to actions in support of persecuted people across the world. ...

*col 281* A point I want to focus on is that the UK Government have committed to implementing international standards, including the UN guiding principles on business and human rights—the UNGPs—as well as the commitment made in terms of the environment in the Paris agreement. Carrying out effective due diligence is central to public bodies, as state institutions, being able to fulfil their human rights obligations, implement UNGPs and make ethical procurement and investment decisions. However, because the terminology, such as “political and moral disapproval”, is undefined, this will create problems for public authorities when carrying out their due diligence. ...

I am extremely worried that it will suddenly stop people thinking openly and having a dialogue or a debate. I worry that it will stop people thinking about what the right thing to do is and stop them making any decision or taking any of those things into account. ...

**col 282 The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Baroness Neville- Rolfe):** ... Clause 1 sets out three tests that must be met to trigger the ban. First, the ban is narrow. It applies only to procurement or investment decisions. Secondly, the public body must have considered a specific territory or country as part of making its decision. Thirdly, that consideration must reflect political or moral disapproval of the conduct of a foreign state. ... Lord Verdirame[‘s] amendments would alter the scope of the clause. Amendments 3 and 5 would prohibit public authorities from being influenced in any way by foreign state conduct. This would widen the prohibition in Clause 1 to include considerations that relate specifically or mainly to a country or territory in a way that is influenced by approval of foreign state conduct. The current drafting prohibits only disapproval of foreign state conduct, and the inclusion of moral and political disapproval is necessary to ensure that the Bill does not capture legitimate territorial considerations that are not about boycotts and divestment campaigns ...

Amendment 4, on the other hand, would narrow the prohibition so that it applied only in the case of disapproval of a foreign state’s conduct within its own territory. ...

**col 283** ... Amendment 6 ... would permit public authorities to engage in boycotts and divestment campaigns as long as they were only a result of pressure from a third party, such as a student union, rather than a result of the public authority’s own moral or political disapproval. Subsection (7) is a necessary element of the Bill, as public authorities such as universities and local authorities are frequently pressured to engage in boycotts or divestment campaigns. For example, student unions at Warwick University and Sussex University have passed motions calling for their universities to divest from Israeli companies. If a university conducted a boycott or divestment campaign because of such pressure, rather than because of its own view of a foreign state, we would want that campaign to be caught. ...

... Amendments 1 and 2 ... would narrow the scope of the prohibition in Clause 1 so that it prohibited public authorities from taking account of territorial considerations only where moral or political disapproval of foreign state conduct is the “primary or sole” factor in the decision. ...

I do not agree with weakening the effect of the Bill in this way. Public authorities buying goods or services, or making investments, should not be influenced by moral or political disapproval of foreign state conduct to any degree, unless—and this is important—one of the exemptions, such as environmental or labour misconduct, applies. ...

**col 284** ... Lord Wallace of Saltaire, commented on the perceived lack of evidence for the Bill, but boycotts have been attempted by several public authorities in recent years. In 2014, Leicester City Council passed a motion boycotting goods from Israeli settlements, as far as the law allows. Several other local authorities have passed boycotting or condemnatory motions, including Swansea Council, Gwynedd Council ... West Dunbartonshire Council and Stirling Council, and in 2021 Lancaster City Council passed a motion in support of the wider BDS movement. ...

**Lord Collins of Highbury:** ... If there is a discussion about goods from and investments in the Occupied Territories, [the Minister] needs to explain why she has evidenced that and how it is supported by the FCDO’s own advice and the Government’s support for United Nations resolutions on that subject.

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe:** I can certainly provide more detail of the boycotts, if that is helpful.

**Lord Collins of Highbury:** No, that is not what I am asking. The first example that the Minister gave was in relation to the Occupied Territories. I really think it is important that we understand why she has referenced that.

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe:** ... I will certainly come back on that question. ...

**col 285** I should also like to cite, from September 2023, Islington Council passing a motion in opposition to this Bill, expressing its support for BDS campaigns—which everybody has

said that they are very unhappy about—and resolving to: “Continue to ensure that our own ethical procurement strategy doesn’t include procuring goods and services produced by oppressive regimes”.

I have not covered all the BDS activity in public bodies, but I hope that this demonstrates to the noble Lord that there is a considerable evidence base.

Separately, I note the points made by the noble Lord, Lord Mann, about student unions and the provision of kosher foods in universities. ...

**Lord Mann:** ... a significant number of people in the Jewish community have said to me that they anticipate one of the key benefits of this Bill being that student unions will not be able to debate and pass BDS resolutions. My understanding of how the Bill is written and how it has been framed is that what the University of Essex student union has done, whereby it deemed its policy to be an educational tool rather than a procurement decision, explicitly would not be covered by the Bill. That is important, because the expectation is coming from multiple sources within the Jewish community that that is what would happen. Can the Minister clarify whether I am wrong on this, because my reading of the Bill suggests that I am right that—whether one calls it a good thing or a loophole—it would not be covered by the Bill?

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe:** The noble Lord is right—student unions are not covered ...

To come back on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, obviously the Government recognise the risks associated with economic and financial activities in those settlements. We do not support boycotts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Such boycotts are inherently divisive and could lead inadvertently to negative effects on Palestinians as well as undermining the aim of this Bill, which is to ensure that the UK speaks with one voice internationally. That does not change existing government guidance on doing business in those territories. The Government do not recognise the settlements as part of Israel ... and we have already moved to ban those responsible for violence in the West Bank from the UK ...

*col 287* **Baroness Chapman of Darlington (Labour):** ... This amendment is to seek clarity on when an individual is considered to be the decision maker for the purposes of this bill. ...

I am not sure whether the Government want, in Clause 1, to include members of a governing body or councillors serving on a particular committee ... Often, people serve in these capacities as volunteers or as inexpert lay members. Are the Government really trying to say that they want those individuals to be held to account in a way that, in other parts of the Bill, they seem to be suggesting the body itself is to be affected? ...

We would like to understand in what circumstances individuals will be given notices and then fines. ... How will the enforcement agency decide? Is there to be discretion as to whether it is holding an individual responsible as the decision-maker, or is the organisation the decision-maker? How will it assess that? Will it look at the individual behaviour of particularly influential senior managers, members of staff or elected representatives? Would the chancellor of a university, for example, be held to account, or the wider organisation; and how will that judgment be made? ...

*col 288* When does this corporate liability, if I can put it that way, become an individual liability? ...

It is interesting that in relation to Clause 4 ... the Explanatory Notes are quite clear ... The Explanatory Notes say on Clause 4: “It only affects individuals when they are a public authority (for example a Minister of the Crown) or when they make statements or take action on behalf of public authorities. Even when an individual is speaking on behalf of a public authority, the ban only applies to the public authority itself and there is no personal liability for the individual”.

That is helpful and clear, but we do not get that in relation to Clause 1. ...

*col 289* **Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative):** ... Universities are often very



decentralised in their structures, and power can be distributed quite far and wide. It is not always concentrated in the vice-chancellor's office; nor is the governance of universities often as clear-cut as it might be. ... Do we mean specifically decisions taken by the executive management team of an institution, principally the vice-chancellor? Do we mean, for example, student unions?

I noted that in my noble friend the Minister's response to the noble Lord, Lord Mann, that student unions were ... out of scope, because they are private bodies. This confuses me a little, because I thought the whole purpose of the Bill, from a political point of view, was to address precisely this issue: student unions getting on their soapboxes and making statements about BDS, and all the rest of it. If they are out of scope of the Bill, I really wonder why universities as a whole are still in scope. ...

*col 290* The final point on which I would like some clarity ... is whether a decision-maker will also be deemed to be an individual academic, who may manage a research budget. Will the use of that research budget by the individual academic be part of the decision-making process captured by the Bill? If so, how will that be squared with the legal duties on the OfS, among others, to promote academic freedom and freedom of speech in our higher education institutions? ...

*col 291* **Baroness Fox of Buckley:** ... I can understand in the broader sense why universities have been included, because very often it has been universities that have been at the cutting edge of popularising boycotts. ... it could be denying people research, not letting Israeli academics come over to speak or whatever. ... My problem is that it is not clear to me how a Bill like this can do anything other than attack academic freedom, which I am interested in defending. I think we have to deal with what is happening on university campuses in a different way.

*col 292* Regardless of that, the reason it is frustrating ... is that, if you have a conversation with anyone outside this Chamber, if they are like me, they are worried about BDS and anti-Semitic campaigns against Israeli academics. Something has just happened at King's College London in fact, where an event has been called off, and there is a University of Leeds chaplain in hiding ... Ironically, if anything, this Bill is too narrow to deal with what is really happening. ...

For the Minister to say "Oh, no, it wouldn't count, student unions", would be utterly ludicrous. From the Government's point of view, even if I go with you, why would it not be student unions? That would be mad. They are part of what the public authority of the university is about, along with research councils and everyone else. ...

*col 293* **Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat):** ... From the point of view of local government, in local councils there are very many ways of taking decisions that can be individual or corporate. The tiers of responsibility and the trails that decisions make throughout a large organisation would need to be explored if enforcement action was to be taken.

In addition, councillors, committees or even pension committees, as we heard earlier, are advised by experts and independent advisers, so it is not clear where the line of accountability is and who is responsible, who is to be identified for enforcement action. ...

*col 294* **Baroness Neville-Rolfe:** ... A public authority will generally delegate responsibility for decision-making on procurement and investment decisions to individuals within the public authority. The individuals who make the decision on behalf of the public authority will do so in accordance with the public authority's internal policies and structures. To address the noble Baroness's question on enforcement, even when an individual is making decisions or speaking on behalf of a public authority, the ban applies only to the public authority itself. There is no personal liability for the individual. Individuals will therefore not personally be responsible for any fines that may be imposed on public authorities for a breach of the ban in Clauses 1 or 4. ...

... there are some limited cases where individuals are the public authority in their own right.

... I suppose that examples would be UK Government Ministers, Ministers from devolved Administrations and police and crime commissioners. They could also be individuals such as mayors if they exercise public functions in their own right. Any individual who is a public authority in their own right is already subject to far-reaching and fundamental duties under the Human Rights Act 1998. They could be subject to court action if they restrict others' human rights, and the duties in the Human Rights Act are much more wide-ranging than the prohibitions in this Bill. ...

*col 295* I should briefly address why universities need to be in the scope of the legislation ... the fact is that universities are a frequent target of the BDS movement, and some student unions—to come back to that point—have passed motions pressurising their universities to divest from Israeli companies. The Bill will ensure that universities cannot implement such policies in response to pressure from their student unions, as that would be divisive and could potentially contribute to rising anti-Semitism on university campuses, which is a concern. ...

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington (Labour):** The Minister raised it—can she give us one example of where a university has ever succumbed to such pressure from its student union?

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe:** ... On student unions, I will add a point that perhaps I should have made earlier. Student unions are usually charities and can undertake political activity only if it can be shown to support their charitable purposes, in line with Charity Commission guidance. ...

*col 296* **Lord Davies of Brixton (Labour):** The Minister used the word “pressurised”. Did she do so advisedly—“pressurised” as opposed to “called on” or “suggested”? Is “pressurised” defined in the Bill?

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe:** I think I used the word “pressure”. ...

I have a couple of examples of student union pressure, which I mentioned earlier. Warwick student union held an all-student vote in 2020 to pressure the University of Warwick to fully divest from all unethical industries and release all investments. That included divesting from companies in support of a boycott of Israel, and divesting from international companies that are complicit in violations of Palestinian rights. There was also the example of Sussex University, which I mentioned a little earlier.

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** The thing is, though, as we are teasing out, is it not right that the Bill would not stop Warwick University student union from passing a motion in that regard? It would stop the university from acting on it, but no university has ever acted on these things. ...

**Baroness Fox of Buckley:** On the Warwick University point, for clarification, the other important thing that happened there was that Warwick University academics refused to sit on a panel discussing the issue of Israel, and so on. That was led by academics. It would not be affected by the Bill. The Minister can say, “Oh, that’s okay, it won’t be affected by this Bill” but that has had a much more damaging impact on the debate around Israel in Warwick University than anything that a few people at the student union did and that the university authorities did not act upon. What the university did not do was support those Jewish students and the organisation that organised that debate, and it let the academics carry on. ...

**Baroness Deech (Crossbench):** ... there have been very many occasions where violence used by anti-Israel students has forced the university to cancel speakers or to charge Israeli and Jewish societies for their own security when an Israeli or a pro-Israeli speaker comes. There are manifold examples of this ...

*col 297* What the Bill really means to do is clamp down on anti-Semitism in local authorities and universities, but it cannot say so in direct terms; therefore, it goes much more broadly than it needs to, because it is academically dancing around the subject. If I could rip it up and start again, I would have a couple of clauses saying that anti-Israel activity—anti-

Zionist activity, if you want to call it that, or anti-Semitic activity—is prohibited in universities and public authorities, because there are no examples of universities and public authorities acting against Australia, to give a fanciful example. Is anyone banning Australian wine because of what happened to the Aborigines? Is anyone banning New Zealand lamb because of the way the Māoris were treated? Is anyone, anywhere, ceasing to use Chinese products? ...

**Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative):** ... In March 2015, [Southampton] university procured the services of a speaker to host a debate questioning the right of Israel to exist. I do not know whether that would be caught by the Bill. I would hope that it is, but I suspect that it is not. I wrote to the vice-chancellor at the time ... and asked, going to the point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, whether there had been any conference at Southampton University questioning the right to exist of any other country. He wrote back and said there had not. Eventually, the conference was cancelled ... only because the university claimed it could not go ahead on health and safety grounds. But that was a very thin excuse, and for a university to host a conference dedicated to questioning the right of the State of Israel to exist, and to procure the services of people to run it, is, I hope noble Lords would agree, what we should be addressing. ...

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe:** ... obviously, the Bill will make this boycotting activity by student unions almost pointless. ...

*col 298* **Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** ... The idea that people who want to campaign on these issues will suddenly stop doing so as a consequence of the legislation is fanciful because, as the noble Lord, Lord Mann, said in his Second Reading speech, they will just change the target from public authorities to others. It will not deal with some of the unpleasantness and the atmosphere on campus. That will not be assisted in any way, and the way the Bill is drafted might actually make things worse. It will not deal with campaigns to prevent certain events or not to have certain speakers. Those things are completely outside the scope of the Bill. We are focusing on universities to make this point, but similar things could be said about local government. ...

**Lord Mann:** ... I am an unpaid adviser to His Majesty's Government on anti-Semitism, and ... previously in the other House I was, for 14 years, the chair of the all-party group on combating anti-Semitism.

In that time and over recent years, I visited virtually every university in the country, looking at and discussing anti-Semitism. ... there were no examples from that time of when a student union was capable of influencing a university in terms of BDS campaigns. ...

The fundamental issue and problem that has been raised consistently is attempts at academic boycotts. In the last six months, there has without question been a growth in the pressure in universities and on academics not to carry out co-operation or research work that links directly into Israeli universities. That is a fact. How it manifests is not so much complex as complex to legislate on, because the most common way is peer group pressure. ...

Sometimes it is explicit; the arguments and the language are explicit. It seems to me that here there is potential scope for legislation ... Sometimes it is not. It is unspoken; it simply happened. ... the purpose of this amendment would be to give not just a message but a specific legislative tool that would prohibit the explicit refusal to an individual academic of any status, including postgraduates, for example, specifically to work with a university that somebody did not like for political or whatever reasons.

These cases are about Israeli universities. It is widespread across Israeli universities in terms of people saying, "That should not happen", "We don't do that here" or "You should not do that. Your research should not include that". That puts immense pressure on individuals. Imagine that you are a postgraduate student and you are told by your supervisor, "No, I don't think you should be researching into what is happening in Israel in relation to the specific subject of your postgraduate studies". That is exactly the pressure



that has happened. Or, “We as a university are not going to have a relationship”. The excuse given might be, “We don’t have the budget for this particular university” —Haifa university, let us say—“but we do have a budget for another university somewhere else in the world”. ...

Where it could be demonstrated that that is done for racist reasons, when the academic has a specific interest, a particular desire, a particular motivation to work with an Israeli university or with an Israeli academic, that becomes the problem that we should be dealing with. That is the real problem of anti-Semitism having a pernicious impact in our universities and in our university life. ...

So having something in the Bill that addresses that specific problem is far more relevant than the theoretics of investment decisions elsewhere, where the evidence base does not say that is the nub of the problem. ... The people who have said, “Yes, we welcome this Bill”, expect it to be about student unions and student union debates. ...

*col 300* My stance on BDS protests and campaigns is that, frankly, if anyone here chooses to buy this or that product, it is perfectly valid. If one decides not to buy Jaffa oranges because one does not like Israel or the Israeli Government, that is a choice one is free to make and should be free to make. If someone chooses particularly to buy Jaffa oranges, that is a perfectly valid case. If, like me, one is partial to both Palestinian dates and Jaffa oranges, one can say that that is a healthy choice to make on both counts, and perhaps even a little bit politically balanced—I am doing so because the food is rather good. If one chooses, as I do, not to buy Ben & Jerry’s, perhaps one might observe that that is doing me some good. Whether one calls that a political or moral decision, or an absurd decision, it does not matter; that is my free choice.

However, if one then stops a shop—let us say, in a student union or university, or in a local authority—stocking Jaffa oranges, that means that people who wish to buy them cannot do so. It is particularly invidious, when a religion, and there are several, has specific dietary rules and laws—in the case of Judaism, it is kosher food—specifically to isolate the ability of individuals to choose to follow religious norms and rules on diet and ban their right to do so. That is much more invidious, because it is impacting one’s way of life. Therefore, the principle is far greater. Having additional legislation that specifically makes that illegal has a much more powerful impact, because it is affecting a way of life. With the so-called BDS campaign, we are seeing increasingly Jewish kosher foods, which may be Israeli or not, being specifically targeted by racists, whether in supermarkets or Jewish-owned stores, inhibiting the rights of those who choose to be kosher-adherent to be so. That fundamental freedom is being restricted. ...

*col 301* **Lord Pickles (Conservative):** ... What the noble Lord said illustrates that this is not just about who is in charge, or about the comfort of people attending universities and speaking in student union debates; it is about who is welcome and who is not. It is about how comfortable people feel when politics from another country spills over and affects the domestic life of this country. It is about how we underpin, and celebrate, a multicultural society, while ensuring that we can also celebrate our common Britishness.

The noble Lord, Lord Mann, has done a lot of work on getting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism adopted in universities. It is a non-legally binding definition, and is there as a marker for discussions. As with all such things, there is a bit of a fashion, and people go around and adopt things. The question that the noble Lord asked, and that I ask, is: “Congratulations on adopting it, but what have you done with it?”

The very minimum we would expect, in a university, say, is the creation of a safe space for Jewish students to be able to study. But this also means creating a safe space to do the sorts of things that would keep their parents up at night worrying about them—to be able to enjoy being at university, to enjoy life and to be able to go around the campus with signs of their Jewishness, without fear that they will be picked on. The point that the noble Lord, Lord Mann, is making is that we should not seek to do things that exclude people. If people

have a particular view of the kind of food they can eat, that should be available. Student shops on campuses should not remove kosher food, because that excludes people. I speak from practical experience of this. In the late 1980s and early 1990s I was the leader of Bradford Council, and, with the co-operation of the Labour Party, we introduced halal meat into school meals. That does not sound all that exciting—we see it all the time—but we were the first council in the country to do it. There was an enormous backlash from the population, and from the animal rights people, because of the nature of religious-compliant slaughter.

Why was that important? We had a large number of Muslims in Bradford, many of them on very low incomes, and it was one guaranteed way of ensuring that once a day, the children got a hot, nutritious meal that met their needs. We were also saying something really important to the population of Bradford, which was, as we say in Bradford, “You’re ratepayers—so you’re entitled to get back what you’re putting in. You’re entitled to receive respect”. When we try to get people to work together as a wider community, we should not seek to exclude them because they cannot come to receptions or parties or other social events because we do not provide things that they can enjoy.

*col 302* We should also ensure that if people want to pray, that should be available, because this is about bringing people together. ...

*col 303 Lord Wolfson of Tredegar (Conservative):* ... The focus of this amendment is that food is sometimes used to drive a wedge between communities. This might be a strange thing for me to say, but I want to pay tribute to Zarah Sultana MP, with whom I probably agree on absolutely nothing but who, with Charlotte Nichols MP, ran a long-standing campaign in Parliament to have kosher and halal food available here. They found a supplier called 1070, which has both kosher and halal certification to provide that food. As a result, I have had conversations over food with people who I might not otherwise have had those conversations with and I found those discussions extremely helpful. I use this, probably very wrongly, to suggest to the authorities that this kosher and halal food be continued, so that we can not only eat together but discuss and speak together as well. ...

*col 304 Baroness Neville-Rolfe:* ... The prohibition in the Bill already covers higher education providers in their public functions, including when their procurement and investment decisions form part of a research collaboration. Decisions relating to a commercial partnership are, however, likely to constitute a private function—for example, a decision relating to a research partnership to develop a new product funded by a pharmaceutical company. ...

*col 305* We have been clear in the Explanatory Notes that Clause 1 is not intended to prevent a higher education provider deciding to terminate a collaboration with a foreign university on the grounds of academic freedom, if they deem it necessary in line with their statutory duties in Part A1 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 or other legislation. ...

The Jewish community in the UK is widely supportive of the Bill as drafted. Russell Langer, head of policy at the Jewish Leadership Council, provided the following statement in support of the Bill’s restriction on universities’ economic activities: “Higher education institutions continue to come under pressure to adopt BDS policies ... This legislation will be a valuable tool in assisting our higher education in rejecting this effort”.

The Bill will sit alongside other measures that the Government are taking to protect academic freedom. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 will ensure that freedom of speech is protected and promoted within higher education in England, and it will strengthen existing freedom of speech duties and directly address gaps in the existing law. Without action to counter attempts to discourage or even silence unpopular views, intellectual life on campus for staff and students may be unfairly narrowed or diminished, which is why there was a commitment in the 2019 manifesto to strengthen this. ...

*col 306 Baroness Deech:* ... what we need to silence is hate speech. The law is

reasonably clear. It is not wholly clear—there is a blur between unpopular views and hate speech—but it has been settled for a long time that hate speech is not allowed. My test for this is when you hear something and it uses the word “Zionist” or “Jew”, if you remove that word and replace it with, let us say, “black” or “Asian”, it is then usually pretty clear that what you are dealing with is hate speech or racist speech.

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe:** ... The ban established by the Bill applies to all procurement decisions, including the procurement of food where this is part of a public function. Therefore, if a public authority made a decision not to procure kosher food and that decision was influenced by moral or political disapproval of the conduct of the State of Israel, the Bill would already prohibit this. However, I reassure noble Lords that nothing in the Bill would stop a public authority providing food that accommodated the religious beliefs of its employees or its service users. For example, it would not stop a public authority specifying in a tender that it was procuring halal products. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-20/debates/3E132FE1-7784-4862-A088-5371D2DB27D5/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies\(OverseasMatters\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-20/debates/3E132FE1-7784-4862-A088-5371D2DB27D5/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies(OverseasMatters)Bill)

*The amendments discussed above can be read at*

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54716/documents/4588>

## House of Commons Oral Answers

### Faith-based Discrimination and Harassment

**Fleur Anderson (Labour)** [902129] What steps [the Minister] is taking with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to help reduce faith-based discrimination and harassment.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan):** All forms of religious hatred have absolutely no place in our communities, and we work with police and community partners to monitor and combat it. We are taking a broad approach to tackling religious hatred, and are engaging extensively with experts to explore how religious hatred is experienced by British communities and how it affects different faiths and individuals.

**Fleur Anderson:** There has been an appalling surge of antisemitism and Islamophobia in recent months, but the anti-Muslim hatred working group has been suspended since March 2020, and the hate crime strategy is four years old; we clearly need a new one to tackle the hate crime in our communities. Will the Minister commit to restarting the anti-Muslim hatred working group and bringing forward a new hate crime strategy?

**Felicity Buchan:** ... we will appoint a new adviser on anti-Muslim hatred. We are engaging with the Muslim community at senior levels. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities have recently met Tell MAMA, which plays a very important role in tackling hate crime. This Government are completely behind our Muslim communities, and we will absolutely do the right thing for them. ...

**Kirsten Oswald (SNP):** ... The increase in antisemitism and Islamophobia is eye-watering. It should be of serious concern to us all. Urgent action is needed on both fronts, and community cohesion and dialogue must be a priority. In recent months, there has been a 335% increase in Islamophobic hate cases in the UK. None the less, and despite our just having had the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, the UK Government have not convened the anti-Muslim hatred working group in more than four years. Now that the next anti-Muslim hatred adviser has quit over extremist threats, we need concrete answers. When will the Government take tackling Islamophobia seriously?

**Felicity Buchan:** On behalf of the Government, I pass on my condolences. We have made it incredibly clear that the Government are completely committed to tackling anti-Muslim hatred. We have upped the amount of money going towards the protection of mosques and Muslim faith schools. We are about to appoint a new anti-Muslim hatred adviser. This is an effort across Government. I completely agree that the levels of both anti-Muslim hatred and antisemitism that we see at the moment are not acceptable. That is why we are dealing with it.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/C075E419-E166-4A07-8757-9A4AB3E90698/Faith-BasedDiscriminationAndHarassment>

### **Islamophobia: Definition**

**Debbie Abrahams (Labour)** [902123] What recent discussions [the Minister] has had with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on implementing a definition of Islamophobia.

**Alex Cunningham (Labour)** [902135] What recent discussions [the Minister] has had with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on the work of the anti-Muslim hatred working group.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan):** We will not tolerate anti-Muslim hatred in any form, and we will seek to stamp it out wherever it occurs. We are appointing an independent adviser to tackle the scourge of anti-Muslim hatred, to join our independent adviser on antisemitism. We have a programme for tackling anti-Muslim hatred, which includes the consideration of definitions. It also includes £117 million of funding to protect Muslim places of worship and faith schools until 2028.

**Debbie Abrahams:** Despite what the Minister says, many believe that the Government's two-year delay in coming up with a definition on Islamophobia—the Conservatives are the only political party in the UK to have taken so long—reflects their indifference to the fear, discrimination and hatred that thousands of Muslims experience. Why has it taken so long?

**Felicity Buchan:** We do not agree with the all-party group on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia; we believe the most appropriate term is "anti-Muslim hatred". Let me explain why. In this country, there is freedom of religion, and also freedom to criticise a religion. What someone cannot do is discriminate against or show hatred to me because of my religion. ...

**Anneliese Dodds (Labour Co-op):** A senior Conservative who went on to become Prime Minister said that Muslim women "look like letter boxes". A Conservative candidate for London Mayor said that she wants to defeat her Muslim opponent to make things safer "for our Jewish community". A former Conservative deputy chairman said that Islamists have "got control" of the Mayor of London. Are those incidents of anti-Muslim hatred the kind of incidents that the Minister just said will not be tolerated?

**Felicity Buchan:** We have made it very clear that a number of these comments we just do not accept—we think they are wrong—but before the hon. Lady throws abuse at Conservative Members, she should take a look at what is happening on the Labour Benches. Hers is the only party that has been sanctioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission for institutional racism. Her party has now given the Whip back to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), even though the Labour party said that his comments were deeply offensive. The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has also had the Whip suspended because of antisemitism.

**Anneliese Dodds:** It is important that we do not trade abuse about these very serious issues. ... A definition was promised, and an adviser was appointed to develop one five years ago ... but today there is still no definition. There is no adviser now, no active anti-Muslim hate crime working group, no hate crime strategy, and minimal action on tackling



online hate. When are the Government going to wake up to this problem?

**Felicity Buchan:** As I said, this Government are completely committed to supporting our Muslim communities. We have said that we will appoint an independent adviser. We have made more money available to protect mosques and Muslim faith schools. I am visiting my local mosque, al-Manaar, this afternoon/early evening to attend an Iftar. If one looks at the composition of the Conservative Front Bench and at how diverse the people there are, one can see clearly that our party is committed to diversity and equality.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/8B7B3A0D-8BE2-4CB8-BA3E-B5AF2A062611/IslamophobiaDefinition>

*Information about the All Party Group definition referred to above can be read at*

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>

## House of Commons Written Answer

### Conditions of Employment: Freedom of Speech

**Jim Shannon (DUP)** [18168] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps she is taking to ensure that the (a) employment rights and (b) freedom of speech of people of faith are protected (i) in the workplace and (ii) during the recruitment process.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** People of faith are protected by the existing legal framework. They have the same employment rights and protections as anyone else, including during the recruitment process. Where they feel those rights have not been respected, they can contact Acas or EASS (Equality Advisory and Support Service) for advice, and ultimately, seek redress through an employment tribunal.

In addition, the Equality Act 2010 provides protection from religious discrimination to anyone with a religious belief as well as to those who lack a religion or belief. The definition of a religion or belief in these provisions is deliberately broad and includes those religions widely recognised in the UK, as well as denominations or sects within a religion such as Catholics or Protestants within Christianity.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18168>

## Scottish Parliament Debate

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

**16.56 The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur):** The United Kingdom Government's Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill engages the legislative consent process because it would limit the executive competence of the Scottish ministers in relation to devolved matters.

We must, of course, be mindful of the context in which the bill is being introduced. The Parliament has made its views clear on the terrible situation in Israel and Gaza. However, although that might sharpen the mind in relation to the implications of the bill, it is important that we realise that the bill, and its impact on the Scottish ministers, is of broader application than just in relation to current events. ...

The bill would limit the executive competence of the Scottish ministers by preventing them from taking moral or political disapproval of any foreign state conduct into account in devolved procurement and investment decisions.

Not only that, but the bill would make it unlawful for the Scottish ministers to publish a statement saying that they intended to take such matters into consideration—or even that they would intend to take such matters into consideration, were it not unlawful to do so.

The bill places the policing and enforcement of that into the hands of the UK ministers. The secretary of state is given sweeping powers to compel the Scottish ministers—and other public bodies—to provide information; to issue compliance notices setting out the actions that the Scottish ministers should take or refrain from taking; and to fine the Scottish ministers, subject to interest, should he or she conclude that the terms of a compliance notice had been breached.

Remember that all of that is in relation to decisions that the Scottish ministers may take about otherwise entirely devolved matters. That displays a complete disregard for devolution, for this institution and, frankly, for democracy, limiting as it does the actions of Scotland's elected Government. ...

The UK Government argues that it is necessary to include the Scottish ministers in the scope of the bill to mitigate the threat of boycotts, which, it says, undermines UK foreign policy, but what evidence does it have to support such claims? Public procurement is a devolved matter. ...

Procurement and investment decisions must always be taken in compliance with international obligations, but that does not mean that they should be taken in an ethical or moral vacuum. ... It would be unacceptable if the bill were to prevent the Parliament, the Scottish Government and Scottish public bodies from doing what is morally right ...

*I move, That the Parliament notes the legislative consent memorandum lodged by the Scottish Government on 19 July 2023; agrees not to give consent to the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill; believes that the Bill would represent a wholly unnecessary and unwelcome limitation of the Scottish Ministers' executive competence, and would act to stifle democracy, and calls on the UK Government to amend the Bill to remove the Scottish Ministers from its scope.*

**15.03 Murdo Fraser (Conservative):** ... The fundamental point is that matters of foreign policy and trade are reserved to Westminster. Therefore, it is not a matter for councils or public bodies to run an alternative foreign or trade policy. ...

There are many oppressive regimes and states in the world, many with appalling human rights records towards their own citizens and others. There are numerous examples that I could give to the chamber: state sponsorship of terrorism by Iran in the middle east and elsewhere; Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya population; and China's treatment of the Uyghurs and its atrocities in Kashmir and Tibet. There are many more.

I am not aware of any organised campaigns to boycott, divest or sanction any of those countries or any of their regimes. There is only one country that is subject to campaigns to boycott, divest and sanction, and that is Israel. Criticism of the current Israeli Government is perfectly legitimate, but Israel still has a track record of human rights that is far better than those of any of its neighbours. For those who follow minority religions, for women and for those of the LGBT community, Israel is streets ahead—centuries ahead—of any other country in the middle east, and Israel is the only fully functioning democracy in the region, yet only Israel is singled out for boycott, divest and sanction campaigns. Why? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that it is directly linked to the ethnicity of the majority of the population of Israel—in other words, the Jewish people. This is the world's oldest hatred rearing its hideous head once again. There is no other reasonable explanation for Israel alone being singled out compared with other countries.

We might be the only party in the chamber that is prepared to point out the double standards of the boycott, divest and sanction movement, but we make no apology for doing so. ...

**Tom Arthur:** Israel is already party to relevant agreements that give bidders from Israel the relevant protections in domestic procurement law in Scotland. ...

**Murdo Fraser:** I do not understand why the minister does not recognise the concerns in the Jewish community in Scotland ... Since 7 October 2023, there has been a significant and well-reported rise in antisemitic incidents in Scotland. We have reports of Jewish

people in Scotland feeling unsafe in their own country. We should do nothing here that increases those fears.

In the words of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, “it is a cause for concern to the Jewish Community that the decision to issue special procurement advice about Israel alone may indirectly encourage antisemitism from those who conflate the local Jewish community with the State of Israel.”

I will quote directly the conclusion of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, which is important. It says: “While undoubtedly welcome, ministerial comments that Jewish people in Scotland should not be a proxy target for those who dislike Israel or Israeli government policy—or that dislike of Israel should not be an acceptable excuse for antisemitism—pious sentiments do not change behaviours. Legislation does, and we therefore urge the Scottish Parliament to take note of the vulnerability and anxiety of many Jewish people in Scotland as demonstrated by the large majority view among the Scottish Jewish community in support of the Westminster Bill, and so reject the Scottish Government Legislative Consent Memorandum to the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill, so as to permit the UK Parliament to legislate for Scotland on this occasion.” We would do well to listen to that plea and avoid giving succour, however unintended, to those in Scotland who would attack the Jewish community—and reject the motion before us.

**17.10 Daniel Johnson (Labour):** I will begin by agreeing with the minister ... It is right to acknowledge and repeat that what happened on 7 October was an act of terrorism; it was barbaric and horrific. Similarly, what has happened subsequently in Gaza is nothing short of a humanitarian disaster. We must make every effort to stop the killing and get the support that is required in place, and to ensure that there are no further acts of terrorism. ... We must have no complacency about antisemitism. Let me also be very clear that any procurement policy that singled Israel out specifically would be an act of antisemitism under the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance guidelines. ...

... the issue goes much further, because it is about stifling local government. ... the position that local government has taken on key global issues has been important. ... the campaigns that were undertaken by local government were instrumental at a time when the national Government did not want to concede the issues regarding South Africa. ...

... it is important that democratic bodies such as local government reflect the values of the people who elect them. ... It is only right that local government is able to exercise its economic judgment, using its procurement powers, to ensure that its procurement is falling in line with its value judgments. ...

What does it say about the state of the Government’s foreign policy that it is so weak that it is undermined by the procurement positions of local government? ... What is worse is that the bill goes further and applies to bodies such as universities, which are supposed to be independent. ...

**17.16 Tom Arthur:** ... It is clear that, although the effects of the bill are felt in relation to decisions that might be taken about relatively technical public procurement and investment matters, it provokes a range of views about issues of the utmost importance, including the current situation in the middle east. ... although we might recognise that there is a range of views on those matters, a recognition that there might be a range of views is precisely what the bill fails to achieve. It would, by force of law, prevent the Scottish ministers from even publishing a statement saying that it would do things differently were it not for this UK Government bill. ... It would also allow the secretary of state to investigate, issue compliance notices and even levy fines on the Scottish ministers if they did not comply. That cannot be acceptable. ...

The Scottish ministers would be allowed to take disapproval of foreign state conduct into account in procurement and investment decisions, such as we have done in relation to Russia, only if the UK Government had first permitted that by way of regulations. ...

However, that is not the point. The point is that, on devolved matters such as public

procurement, devolved ministers must be able to make the decisions that they see fit, albeit always in compliance with international obligations and international law. The bill will row back devolution, and we must stand firm against that. ...

*For 88, Against 27, Abstentions 0*

*Motion agreed*

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15772&i=134601#ScotParlOR>

## Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

### **First Minister's Questions: Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021**

**Douglas Ross (Conservative):** ...The Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 will come into effect from 1 April. ... David Kennedy, the general secretary of the Scottish Police Federation, has said that officers “were only receiving a two-hour online training package”. Is that really enough training on such a complex and controversial piece of legislation?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** ... A lot of disinformation about the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 has been spread on social media, in inaccurate media reporting and by our political opponents. ...

Because decisions on training for the police are an operational matter, I leave it to the chief constable to determine what training is appropriate. Just this week, Police Scotland put out a statement to challenge—in its words—“inaccurate media reporting” about the act. I have absolute confidence that Police Scotland will ensure that appropriate training is in place.

Let me remind Douglas Ross that stirring-up offences are not new in Scotland. As a person of colour, I have been protected from people stirring up hatred against me because of my race virtually all my life, since 1986. In fact, all of us are protected by the provision against stirring up hatred. The question is this: if I have protection against people stirring up hatred because of my race, as has been the case since 1986, why on earth should such protection not exist for people based on their sexuality, disability or religion?

The fact is, as we know, that there is a very high threshold for a new stirring-up offence to be committed—it is even higher than the threshold for a racial stirring-up offence. I say to Douglas Ross that it is incredibly important that we all, in memory of people like Henry Wuga, on whom he started his question, unite in standing up to and opposing hatred in all its forms. A strong legislative framework to protect people is incredibly important. I urge the Conservatives and Douglas Ross to realise that it would be far better for him to put more effort into tackling hatred than into opposing the hate crime act.

**Douglas Ross:** ... We opposed the legislation at the time that it was passed, and we still oppose it, because of the impact that it has on free speech for people across this country. I am merely reiterating points that have been made by the Scottish Police Federation, which is the representative body of our police officers across Scotland. The SPF said that its officers can barely deal with existing crimes, let alone this new law, and they have described the hate crime act as “a recipe for disaster”.

Humza Yousaf has reduced officer numbers to the lowest level since Police Scotland was formed. Now, officers are being told not to investigate actual crimes but will instead have to look for the hate monster or to police free speech. Criminals will be let off while innocent people are prosecuted. Is Humza Yousaf not setting the police up for failure and undermining public trust in policing?

**The First Minister:** ... Let us take the points that Douglas Ross raised about the



act and freedom of expression. ... There is a triple lock on freedom of expression in the act; protection of freedom of expression is explicitly embedded in it. There is also a defence available of a person's behaviour being "reasonable", which safeguards people's rights.

Thirdly, the act is compatible with the European convention on human rights, including article 10, which includes and protects everybody's right to freedom. When it comes to stirring up hatred, stirring-up offences are so pervasive, so damaging and so dangerous in our society. Let me take Douglas Ross back to what Lord Bracadale said. Lord Bracadale reported on his independent review of hate crime, which led to development of the legislation. He said: "the stirring up of hatred can contribute to a social atmosphere in which prejudice and discrimination are accepted as normal."

In any society, the freedom to criticise, to insult and to offend exists and should be treasured, but there cannot be freedom to engage in behaviour that is threatening or abusive, or which is intended to stir up hatred. Everybody in the chamber engages with and talks often about our commitment to tackling hatred. People who experience hatred tell me that they want from their politicians not just warm words, but action. That is exactly what the act intends to provide.

**Douglas Ross:** People want action that is enforceable, and the Scottish Police Federation says that it has serious concerns. Its officers are receiving a two-hour online training module on the legislation. The First Minister keeps trying to say that those are my comments. They are not. I originally quoted the Scottish Police Federation. ...

Legal experts, including the dean of the Faculty of Advocates, Roddy Dunlop, have said that there is a danger of the police being swamped by completely malicious complaints. That is not my view; it is the view of the dean of the Faculty of Advocates. Days before the law comes into force, it is unclear how complaints will be dealt with by the police. People such as J K Rowling could have the police at their door every day for making perfectly reasonable statements. That could lead to huge numbers of members of the public being monitored or even criminalised by the police when they have done nothing wrong. Is Humza Yousaf not putting front-line officers in an impossible position by forcing them to police free speech?

**The First Minister:** No. We know that police officers themselves are, unfortunately, often the victims of hatred; they often face hatred in the course of their duties. Douglas Ross said that he has no idea how a stirring-up offence could possibly be enforceable. I am making the point that a stirring-up offence in relation to racial hatred has existed since 1986, with virtually zero controversy. I have absolute faith in Police Scotland's ability to police and enforce the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 in an appropriate way.

On the points that Roddy Dunlop—whom, of course, I respect greatly—made, the police are very well attuned and adept, and they have the ability to deal with vexatious complaints right across the legal framework within which they operate. I cannot say whether there will be vexatious complaints—that will, of course, depend on people's actions. However, I can say that the threshold of criminal liability is incredibly high. If Douglas Ross does not want to take my word for that, let us look at what another legal expert said. Professor Adam Tomkins is known to Douglas Ross. He is a former Conservative MSP whom I worked with on the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill, and he is a professor of public law. In The Herald today he writes: "Offensive speech is not criminalised by this legislation: the only speech relating to sexual orientation, transgender identity, age or disability outlawed here is speech which (1) a reasonable person (2) would consider to be threatening or abusive and which (3) was intended to stir up hatred and (4) was not reasonable in the circumstances."

He also said: "Just because you feel offended by what someone has said does not

make it a hate crime” and went on to say that “Under the Hate Crime Act the threshold of criminal liability is not that a victim feels offended (a subjective test), but that a reasonable person would consider the perpetrator’s action or speech to be threatening or abusive”.

Let us stick to the facts. The fact is this: we all purport to be concerned about the increases in hate crime that we have seen in our society over the years, but only some parties in the chamber are willing to take the necessary action to tackle hate crime. ...

**Douglas Ross:** ... There have been, and there continue to be, serious reservations about the act that was passed and how it will be implemented. ...

The Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 looks like another SNP law that will have to be discarded, just like the proposed named person legislation and the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012. We have said from the outset that the Government’s hate crime law was a disaster in the making. It criminalises free speech and it puts at risk a fundamental right. ...

**The First Minister:** What is dangerous is not the law; what is dangerous is hate crime in our society.

We debated the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill extensively when it went through Parliament many years ago. We had robust debate, which I thought was sometimes—indeed, often—in the best traditions of this Parliament. Compromises were made and amendments were accepted by the Government. We came out of that process with a good piece of legislation that fundamentally protects people’s freedom of expression and freedom of speech, but which also safeguards people’s right not to have hatred stirred up against them. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15774&i=134618#ScotParlOR>

*The Herald article referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/24198760.hate-crime-act-might-yet-success-focus-means/>

### **First Minister’s Questions: Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021**

**Pauline McNeill (Labour)** [S6F-02959] To ask the First Minister what resources the Scottish Government will be providing to Police Scotland for the investigation of complaints made under the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021.

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** We have worked with justice partners, including Police Scotland, to ensure that the legislation is effectively implemented when it commences, next month. The Scottish Police Authority’s budget for 2024-25 delivers record police funding of £1.55 billion, which is an increase of £92.7 million when compared with the current financial year.

It is for the SPA and the chief constable to allocate that budget according to their priorities and needs, and that should absolutely include the investigation of complaints that are made under the act. As I have said previously, I am aware that some commentary on the act is not accurate or reflective of the measures in the act, which was passed by a majority of this Parliament.

The act does not stop freedom of expression, but it makes unlawful the intention of stirring up hatred against a person or community for particular characteristics, as the law already does for race.

**Pauline McNeill:** The First Minister has reiterated several times that the act, which comes into force on 1 April, must deliver what Parliament intended and that people must not be criminalised for expressing their opinions. I agree. Some organisations are still concerned that the legislation will be used maliciously to silence legitimate opinion. It would be helpful for the Scottish Government to engage with those groups.

Does the First Minister agree that how the act is interpreted by the police and how the police are trained on it are key and that resources for that are crucial? Does the First Minister understand my concerns that the police are not properly resourced and, crucially, not properly and adequately trained to implement the act as it was intended? We agree that the act could risk criminalising innocent people and further stretching police resources. I ask the First Minister to make the act work and to make sure that there are full resources to ensure that what Parliament intended is delivered.

**The First Minister:** I know that Pauline McNeill takes the issue of tackling hatred very seriously. Over the years, she and I have worked on that issue in its many different guises. I will try to give some assurance to Pauline McNeill and to those on whose behalf she is raising concerns.

I make the point that I made to Douglas Ross—there are multiple freedom of expression safeguards in the law. There is an explicit freedom of expression safeguard in the legislation and there is a reasonable person defence. The legislation also has to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights, with article 10 being particularly important in this context. Therefore, there is already a triple lock of safeguards.

On how the police enforce the act, I will try to give Pauline McNeill some assurances. Since 1986—for virtually my whole life—police officers have been effectively policing and enforcing the law on crime in relation to the stirring up of hatred based on race. The threshold for the new offences is higher than the threshold for the racial stirring-up offence. The police have been doing that since 1986 with virtually zero controversy, so I have every confidence that they will be able to do so for the new offences that are being brought into law in a matter of weeks.

On resourcing, I reiterate the points that I have already made. We are providing record funding for Police Scotland in relation to next year's budget. On training, I refer to the points that have already been made by Police Scotland in the public domain. I have every confidence in its ability to train officers for the act when it comes into force.

I am very pleased that the act will be coming into force because I believe that it will give people the necessary protections at a time when hate crime is far too pervasive and prominent in our society and when hate being peddled by some with impunity ...

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15774&i=134618#ScotParlOR>

TOP

## Holocaust

### House of Commons Oral Answers

**Kirsten Oswald (SNP):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I will briefly pay tribute to my constituent Henry Wuga, whose funeral took place earlier today. Henry, who came to Glasgow on the Kindertransport, was a truly remarkable man. He and his late wife Ingrid made an enormous contribution to Scotland and the world through their work as Holocaust educators. His legacy is truly immense, and I am sure that the House will join me in sending our thoughts to Henry's family. May his memory be a blessing.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/C075E419-E166-4A07-8757-9A4AB3E90698/Faith-BasedDiscriminationAndHarassment#contribution-3A2AEF27-1185-49FA-AE92-AF93486D0DAF>

## House of Lords Written Answers

*The following four questions all received the same answer*

### **National Holocaust Memorial Centre and Learning Service**

**Baroness Deech (Crossbench)** [HL3102] To ask His Majesty's Government which genocides, other than Jewish, will be included in the Holocaust Learning Centre planned for Victoria Tower Gardens; on what criteria they have been selected; whether representatives of those affected communities have been consulted concerning their inclusion; and whether those communities have been asked to contribute to the cost of the Learning Centre.

**Baroness Deech (Crossbench)** [HL3103] To ask His Majesty's Government what will be the theme of each of the exhibition rooms constituting the Holocaust Learning Centre planned for Victoria Tower Gardens.

**Baroness Deech (Crossbench)** [HL3104] To ask His Majesty's Government what is their current estimate of the cost of building the planned Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens.

**Baroness Deech (Crossbench)** [HL3105] To ask His Majesty's Government what consultations they have carried out with UK Jewish communities which are not part of the United Synagogue concerning the planned Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens.

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** The Learning Centre, co-located with the Holocaust Memorial, will ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust are told with honesty and clarity; it will also address subsequent genocides. Information about the Learning Centre themes was presented at the planning inquiry and is available on the Westminster City Council website:

[cd 8.9 proof of evidence of stephen greenberg 1.pdf](#)

The scope and content of the Learning Centre exhibition will be developed by the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, drawing on a wide range of external advice and expertise.

The current forecast cost (£138.8 million, excluding contingency) for completion of the proposed Holocaust Memorial is set out in the Written Ministerial Statement of 28 June 2023 (UIN HLWS875). An independent charity, The Holocaust Memorial Charitable Trust, Chaired by Sir Gerald Ronson CBE, will lead the effort to secure pledges towards the fundraising campaign.

Extensive consultation on the proposals has been carried out over many years, with contributions from a wide range of individuals and communities across the country.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/hl3102>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/hl3103>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/hl3104>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/hl3105>

*The Statement referred to above can be read at*

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-06-28/hlws875>

## Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

**Douglas Ross (Conservative):** Just a few weeks ago, members in the chamber congratulated Henry Wuga on reaching his 100th birthday. It was therefore with great sadness that we learned of his passing, peacefully at home, with his daughters Hilary and



Gillian, last Friday. We send them our thoughts and condolences.

We also give thanks for the life of a remarkable man, who came from Nuremberg in 1939 to Glasgow via the Kindertransport, to a life of professional and family success here in Scotland that was capped by decades of service to Holocaust education.

Scotland will miss Henry's charm, his integrity and his resolution, but we will never forget his testimony. I believe that we can all commit to ensuring that his legacy will endure. He is now reunited with his beloved Ingrid. May his memory be a blessing. ...

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** First and foremost, I join Douglas Ross in paying tribute to Henry Wuga, the greatly respected Holocaust survivor who passed away at the age of 100 last week. It is hard to think that, only a few weeks ago, we stood up to wish him well on his 100th birthday but are now standing up once again to mourn his passing.

Henry was a truly remarkable man who made an enormous contribution to Scottish society. However, his impact, influence and legacy go far beyond Scotland, as he campaigned against antisemitism and reminded us never to forget the horrors of the Holocaust.

My thoughts are very much with Henry's family, his friends and all those who had the privilege of knowing him. I am sure that, in his memory, we will all continue to campaign against hatred in whatever form it rears its ugly head.

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15774&i=134618&c=2572351#ScotParlOR>

TOP

## Israel

*See also Lords Committee debate and Scottish Parliament debate "Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill" that are included in the Home Affairs section above, and*

*"Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: Joint statement to the OSCE" that is included in the Foreign Affairs section below.*

## House of Commons Oral Answers

### Prime Minister's Questions

**Mark Hendrick (Labour Co-op) [902143]** The EU High Representative for foreign policy, Josep Borrell, said on Monday that Israel is provoking famine in Gaza and using starvation as a weapon of war. President Biden has said that there should be no attack on Rafah without a plan to ensure the safety of the more than 1 million people living there. Does the Prime Minister agree with High Representative Borrell and President Biden? Because I do, and we need a ceasefire. If he does agree, will he say so here in the Chamber today?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have explained to the Opposition repeatedly that the findings from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative are gravely concerning. It is clear that the status quo is unsustainable, and we need urgent action now to avoid a famine. The UK is doing all it can to get more aid in and prevent a worsening crisis. Two thousand tonnes of UK-funded food aid, including flour and hot meals, is being distributed by the World Food Programme in Gaza today, as we speak, and it is enough to feed more than 275,000 people. We will continue to do everything we can to alleviate the suffering that people are experiencing.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/0924FDCC-6EB1-4CBE-8F78-5FA514926B68/Engagements#contribution-BE36BE42-5BCC-4FDE-8B40-5DFF6D73FA8D>

Josep Borrell's comments referred to above 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)

A summary of President Biden's comments referred to above can be read at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/03/18/readout-of-president-bidens-call-with-prime-minister-netanyahu-of-israel-13/>

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification findings 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)

### Prime Minister's Questions

**Andy Slaughter (Labour):** We know the Prime Minister has received advice about the legality of the Israel-Gaza war, that he has had time to consider it, and that Governments can and do publish such advice. Will he tell the House what steps he is taking to act on that advice in reviewing UK arms sales, in supporting the proceedings of the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court, and in exercising the UK's vote at the UN Security Council?

**The Prime Minister:** We continue to call for Israel to respect international humanitarian law and for civilians to be protected. Too many civilians have been killed and we want Israel to take greater care to limit its operations to military targets. Those are points that both I and the Foreign Secretary have made repeatedly to Prime Minister Netanyahu. We have previously assessed that Israel is committed and capable of complying with international humanitarian law, and of course we always keep that under review.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/57643638-A210-41B2-BEE0-94F67766EC77/Engagements#contribution-F40B204B-123F-46B5-B341-5298E54505E2>

### Prime Minister's Questions

**Tahir Ali (Labour):** Given that the Prime Minister's and his Government's days are numbered and that they will soon be in opposition, will he use the small amount of time available to him to join 138 United Nations member states in recognising the state of Palestine?

**The Prime Minister:** Our position has been consistently clear. We will recognise the state of Palestine when it makes the most beneficial sense for the overall peace process. Of course we are committed to an ultimate two-state solution, but in the here and now what we are calling for is an immediate, sustained humanitarian pause that would allow for the safe release of hostages, including British nationals, and would allow more aid to reach Gaza. We urge all sides to seize the opportunity, and continue negotiations to reach an agreement as soon as possible.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/57643638-A210-41B2-BEE0-94F67766EC77/Engagements#contribution-2DE30547-1CC3-4A38-8421-A3D0E4A7FC65>

### Israeli Victims of Sexual Abuse by Hamas

**Nicola Richards (Conservative)** [902125] What discussions [the Minister] has had with Cabinet colleagues on support for Israeli victims of sexual abuse by Hamas.

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch):** I thank my hon. Friend for her tireless campaigning on behalf of Israeli victims of Hamas. This Government are appalled by reports of sexual violence since 7 October in Israel and Gaza. I am working closely with Cabinet colleagues on the issue. It is important to continue to highlight the fact that many hostages, both male and female, have

still not been released, and they face the daily threat of rape, sexual assault and violence. Across Government, we have been meeting with their families. Just last week I met with the Hostage and Missing Families Forum, and I know that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have also done so in recent months.

**Nicola Richards:** A United Nations report recently confirmed that sexual violence was used against Israeli women on 7 October. Last week I raised concerns with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office that women did not feel that they could trust the UN enough to speak about their experiences. Victims of sexual violence deserve a voice and to be treated with respect, so what can my right hon. Friend do to encourage the international community to unite in calling out sexual violence and those who seek to deny that it happens?

**Kemi Badenoch:** I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the issue. She will be pleased to know that just last week, following calls from the UK, Lord Ahmad, the Minister in the other place, attended the UN Security Council to express deep concerns about the findings of the UN special representatives of the Secretary-General on their recent visit to the region. The UK is leading work internationally through our preventing sexual violence initiative, and through dedicated funding, totalling £60 million, to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and to strengthen justice and support for all survivors.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/2B85D39F-A44E-4FF4-B48C-75771B054EDE/IsraeliVictimsOfSexualAbuseByHamas>

*The report referred to above can be read at*

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

## House of Commons Written Answers

### Israel and Palestinians: Foreign Relations

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op)** [18513] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how many meetings he has had with the (a) Israeli and (b) Palestinian ambassador (i) since 7 October 2023 and (ii) in the last month.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The former Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, held a meeting with hostage families on 24 October 2023, which was also attended by Israel Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely. The current Foreign Secretary co-hosted with Ambassador Hotovely the Holocaust Memorial Day reception at the FCDO on 23 January 2024. The Minister of State, Lord Ahmad, met the Palestine Ambassador and Head of the Palestine Mission, Dr Husam Zomlot, 27 February and the Government intends to meet with the Israel Ambassador in the coming weeks.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18513>

### Arms Trade: Israel

**Claudia Webbe (Independent)** [18620] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to paragraphs 28 and 29 of the summary grounds of the Secretary of State provided in the High Court case between the King (on the application of Al-Haq) v the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, AC-2023-LON-003634, whether any of the arms export licences identified in the Change in Circumstances review have been revoked since January 2024.

**Greg Hands:** The Government is monitoring the situation in Israel and Gaza very closely.

The Government can and does respond quickly and flexibly to changing international circumstances. All licences are kept under careful and continual

review and are able to be amended, suspended, refused or revoked as circumstances require.

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

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18620>

*The summary grounds referred to above are not currently available online*

### **Arms Trade: Export Controls**

**Jon Trickett (Labour)** [18843] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps her Department is taking to ensure the Export Control Joint Unit reviews urgent trade sanctions licence applications in a timely manner.

**Nusrat Ghani:** In making decisions on whether to grant a licence to permit something otherwise prohibited by sanctions legislation & regulations, the Export Control Joint Unit (ECJU), comprised of subject matter experts and officials in the Department for Business and Trade, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the Ministry of Defence, acts on behalf of the Secretary of State. ECJU is obligated to consider applications on a case-by-case basis, determining whether granting a licence would be consistent with the stated purposes of the sanctions regime, licensing grounds, and United Nations or international law obligations. When assessing applications ECJU also consults and considers views from a range of other government departments.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-15/18843>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **Israel: Hamas**

**Caroline Lucas (Green)** [17856] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 7 March 2024 to Question 16084 on L3Harris: Export Controls, what the nature of his Department's assessments are of Israel's (a) capability and (b) commitment to International Humanitarian Law.

#### **Gaza: Israel**

**Beth Winter (Labour)** [18308] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the Minister of State's oral contribution of 12 March 2024, Official Report, columns 133-34, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the embedding of lawyers in the Israeli Defence Forces command on those forces' acceptance and honouring of international humanitarian law during the conflict in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We have previously assessed that Israel is committed and capable of complying with International Humanitarian Law. We regularly review our assessment.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-11/17856>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18308>

*The oral contribution referred to above can be read at*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/160FF623-F2D7-458B-9287-ECFCA97C5F65/HumanitarianSituationInGaza#contribution-85BD36EB-AF02-46E7-8CD4-1A2A9A16A5F9>

#### **Egypt: Gaza**

**Nadia Whittome (Labour)** [18822] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 2024 to Question 16922 on



Egypt: Gaza, if he will make representations to his Egyptian counterparts on (a) an investigation into the alleged demand for large sums of money from Palestinians seeking to exit Gaza and (b) an immediate end to any system in place that allows for this practice.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We continue to monitor the situation. We maintain a close dialogue with Egypt on a range of issues relating to the conflict in Gaza.

We also continue to work with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities to facilitate British Nationals and eligible dependents to leave Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-14/18822>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

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

#### **UNRWA: Staff**

**Dan Carden (Labour)** [18775] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) statement entitled, At least one UNRWA staff killed when Israeli Forces hit UNRWA centre used for food and lifesaving supplies, published on 13 March 2024.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are aware of this statement.

The Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have underlined the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, and to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

Israel must limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. All parties must act within International Humanitarian Law.

The safety of humanitarian personnel and healthcare workers in Gaza is critical to enable aid to reach those who need it most. Medics and aid agencies must be able to operate freely and reach people in need. We cannot separate this tragedy from the inadequate level of aid supplies. Israel must take action to allow more aid into Gaza, including:

- an immediate humanitarian pause
- increased capacity for aid distribution inside Gaza
- increased humanitarian access through land and maritime routes
- expanding the types of humanitarian assistance allowed into Gaza, such as shelter and items critical for infrastructure repair
- and, a resumption of electricity, water and telecommunications.

The Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have underlined the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, and to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities. We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law to be respected and civilians to be protected. Too many civilians have been killed. The Foreign Secretary raised the above issues with Israeli Minister Benny Gantz on 6 March.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-14/18775>

*The statement referred to above can be read at*

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

#### **UNRWA: Hamas**

**Michael Shanks (Labour)** [18626] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with the (a) UN Office of Internal Oversight and (b) Catherine Colonna of the independent Review Group appointed by the UN Secretary-General on when the rapid interim report will be made available.

**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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18626>

### UNRWA

**Michael Shanks (Labour)** [18335] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether the contents of the interim report of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services' review of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will be shared with Parliament.

**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. The UN has said that her final report will be made public.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18335>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

### UNRWA: Finance

**Michael Shanks (Labour)** [18336] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his (a) Swedish and (b) Canadian counterpart on the decision of those countries to resume funding for UNRWA.

**Michael Shanks (Labour)** [18337] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, when he plans to decide whether to reinstate funding for UNRWA.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are appalled by allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned.

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, including Sweden and Canada, to try and 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/2024-03-12/18336>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18337>

### Hamas: UNRWA

**Alan Brown (SNP)** [18736] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 1 March 2024 to Question 15935 on Hamas: UNRWA and with reference to his oral contribution of 27 February 2024 on Israel and Gaza, Official Report, column 155, what evidence his Department received from Israel on the allegations against the UN Relief and Works Agency; and if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of Israel's cooperation with UN investigations into those allegations.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are appalled by allegations that United Nations Relief and

Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the heinous 7 October attack against Israel.

We have urged Israel to cooperate fully with these investigations.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-14/18736>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/15935>

*The oral contribution referred to above can be read at*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-27/debates/D05B7810-FB34-40B8-8AA9-28CDC3F36270/IsraelAndGaza#contribution-23CDFED3-E9F2-45CF-96DE-F3445E598DAC>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **Gaza: Humanitarian Pauses**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [18263] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to help support international negotiations to achieve (a) an immediate ceasefire and (b) the unimpeded entry of aid into Gaza.

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [18275] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent progress his Department has made towards achieving an immediate stop to the fighting in Israel and Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We want the fighting to stop now. We are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

The vital elements for a lasting peace include: the release of all hostages; the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; and a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

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

The UK and our partners are stepping up our efforts to get aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air. We trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18263>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18275>

#### **Gaza: Humanitarian Pauses**

**Jonathan Djanogly (Conservative)** [18071] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of Hamas's engagement with discussions on a potential humanitarian pause in the conflict in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We will not provide a running commentary on negotiations, but the UK is using all diplomatic channels to support the international effort being facilitated through Egypt, Qatar and the US.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18071>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **Gaza: Israel**

**Beth Winter (Labour)** [18309] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and

Development Office, with reference to the Minister of State's oral contribution of 12 March 2024, Official Report, columns 133-34, what assessment he has made of Israel's observation of its requirements under Articles (a) 16, (b) 17 and (c) 18 of Geneva Convention (IV).

#### **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

**Beth Winter (Labour)** [18311] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the Minister of State's oral contributions of 12 March 2024, Official Report, columns 135 and 148, what assessment he has made of Israel's observation of its obligations under Article 23 of Geneva Convention (IV).

**Andrew Mitchell:** It is our position that Israel retains obligations as the Occupying Power in Gaza. Although after 2005 there was no permanent physical Israeli presence in Gaza, given the significant control Israel had over Gaza's borders, airspace and territorial waters, Israel retained obligations as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention. In situations of occupation, international humanitarian law expressly requires the occupier, to the fullest extent of the means available to it, to ensure the food and medical supplies of the population of the occupied territory. We expect Israel to fulfil its obligations and for all parties to adhere to international humanitarian law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18309>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18311>

*The oral contribution referred to above can be read at*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-12/debates/160FF623-F2D7-458B-9287-ECFCA97C5F65/HumanitarianSituationInGaza#contribution-85BD36EB-AF02-46E7-8CD4-1A2A9A16A5F9>

*Geneva Convention IV, referred to above, can be read at*

[https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.33\\_GC-IV-EN.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.33_GC-IV-EN.pdf)

*The following three questions all received the same answer*

#### **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

**Beth Winter (Labour)** [18312] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an estimate of the average daily number of (a) aid trucks and (b) tonnes of aid that entered Gaza in each of the last 12 months.

**Beth Winter (Labour)** [18313] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an estimate of the average daily number of (a) aid trucks and (b) tonnes of aid that were needed to meet demand for aid in Gaza in each of the last 12 months.

**Beth Winter (Labour)** [18314] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the difference between the average daily number of (a) aid trucks and (b) tonnes of aid that entered Gaza and the level of demand for that aid since October 2023.

**Andrew Mitchell:** There were 500 trucks entering Gaza per day before the conflict, now that number is around 150. There was a 31 per cent decrease in the average number of trucks entering Gaza daily between January (140 trucks) and February (97 trucks). The daily average for the first part of March has been around 165 trucks a day, although there is significant fluctuation from day to day.

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18312>



and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18313>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18314>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op)** [18209] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what estimate he has made of the level of humanitarian aid that will be delivered through the US temporary port into Gaza; and how much the UK plans to contribute to the delivery of that aid.

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op)** [18210] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to ensure that aid delivered to the US temporary port into Gaza reaches the intended destination.

**Andrew Mitchell:** Along with Cyprus, the US, UAE and others, the UK will help deliver humanitarian aid by sea to a new temporary US military pier in Gaza, via a maritime corridor from Cyprus. We have already shown that this is possible - in January, we worked with our Cypriot partners to pre-screen 87 tonnes of aid that was delivered by Royal Navy ship RFA Lyme Bay to the Egyptian Red Cross for the people of Gaza.

The corridor cannot substitute for land crossings and we continue to urge Israel to open more land crossings and allow more trucks into Gaza as the fastest way to get aid to those who need it.

We also continue to call on Israel to fully open Ashdod Port for aid delivery.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18209>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18210>

#### **Gaza: Ports**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [18274] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to support the US in constructing a second temporary pier in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** Along with Cyprus, the US, UAE and others, the UK will help deliver humanitarian aid by sea to a new temporary US military pier in Gaza, via a maritime corridor from Cyprus. We have already shown that this is possible - in January, we worked with our Cypriot partners to pre-screen 87 tonnes of aid that was delivered by Royal Navy ship RFA Lyme Bay to the Egyptian Red Cross for the people of Gaza.

We continue to urge Israel to allow more trucks into Gaza as the fastest way to get aid to those who need it. We also continue to call on Israel to fully open Ashdod Port for aid delivery.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18274>

#### **West Bank: Education and Health Services**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [18264] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that people living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory of the West Bank have access to (a) healthcare, (b) education and (c) aid.

**Andrew Mitchell:** As the occupying power in the West Bank, the Government is clear that Israel has a responsibility to ensure that humanitarian aid including food, water and shelter is available to the Palestinian people. The Government continues to stress these points in engagements with Israeli counterparts and partners. The UK also provides support to the West Bank through UK funding for programmes

which work in all parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, operating flexibly between different areas in order to have the most impact.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18264>

#### **West Bank: Detainees**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [18273] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has held with his counterpart in the Israeli government on the number of Palestinian detentions in the West Bank since 7 October 2023.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The Government is clear that administrative detention should only be used when it is justified in accordance with international law. Those under detention should either be charged or released. The UK is committed to working with Israel to secure improvements in its detention practices and repeatedly calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law. This has been repeatedly raised with Israeli counterparts, including the during the Attorney General's visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in February.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18273>

#### **West Bank: Terrorism**

**Jonathan Djanogly (Conservative)** [18072] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the activity of Iran-backed terror groups in the West Bank.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We discuss all aspects of the current conflict with the Government of Israel.

The Foreign Secretary has also raised Iran's long-term support for proscribed groups directly with the Iranian Foreign Minister on 17 January and the UK's new sanctions regime designed to target Iran and its proxies' hostile activity came into force on 14 December. Iran must use its influence to curb attacks and deescalate regional tensions.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18072>

## **House of Lords Written Answers**

#### **Israel: Terrorism**

**Lord Polak (Conservative)** [HL2998] To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the government of Israel on the terror attack on 16 February at Re'em Junction that killed two and left four injured.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** This terrorist attack serves as a reminder of the daily security challenges Israel faces. The Government condemns all violence against innocent civilians and, as the Government has stated previously, for there to be a lasting peace, Israel's security must be assured. We continue to monitor the situation closely, and we continue to have regular discussions with Israeli counterparts on all aspects of the conflict.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/hl2998>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **UNRWA: Hamas**

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat)** [HL3070] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have undertaken an independent inquiry into allegations by the government of Israel that UNRWA staff took part in the Hamas attack on Israeli citizens on 7 October 2023.

#### **UNRWA: Finance**

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat)** [HL3071] To ask His Majesty's Government what is

current position on funding UNWRA.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** Detailed questions on this investigation are a matter for the UN. We are appalled by allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned.

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

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-06/hl3070>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-06/hl3071>

## UK Parliament Petitions

*The following four petitions all received the same response*

### **Ceasefire in Gaza**

The petition of residents of the constituency of Manchester Gorton [P002905] Declares that an urgent, immediate and sustained ceasefire is needed in Gaza to prevent the humanitarian crisis from intensifying; further declares condemnation for the killing of the civilians, the bombing of public infrastructure, and the targeting of journalists; calls for the immediate release of Israeli hostages being held by Hamas; and notes that an immediate end to the violence is urgent to ensure the viability for a peaceful two-state solution.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to call on Israel and Hamas to implement an immediate ceasefire to prevent further bloodshed and damage so that a peaceful two-state solution may be achieved in Palestine and Israel.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[\[Presented by Afzal Khan, Official Report, 24 January 2024; Vol. 744, c. 406.\]](#)

### **Ceasefire and the State of Palestine**

The petition of residents of the constituency of Glasgow North [P002908], and

The petition of residents of the constituency of Glasgow East [P002911],

Declares that the attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7th October 2023 were acts of terror, and unequivocally condemns the taking of hostages and the loss of innocent lives in those attacks; further that the petitioners condemn the disproportionate response of the Israel Defence Forces, and affirms that there must be an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people; further declares for the urgent release of all hostages and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population; further declares support for the calls by the United Nations and many other international actors for an immediate ceasefire on all sides of the conflict and

supports the global consensus in support of a two-state solution with a sovereign, prosperous Palestinian state, living side by side with a safe and secure Israel; and notes the resolution of the House of Commons on 13th October 2014 calling on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to join with others in the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, and to call on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[—\[Presented by Patrick Grady, Official Report, 30 January 2024; Vol. 744, c. 832.\]](#)

and

[—\[Presented by David Linden, Official Report, 6 February 2024; Vol. 745, c. 220.\]](#)

### **Ceasefire in Palestine**

The petition of the residents of the constituency of Linlithgow and East Falkirk [P002917] Declares that the attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7th October 2023 were acts of terror, and unequivocally condemns the taking of hostages and the loss of innocent lives in those attacks; condemns the disproportionate response of the Israel Defence Forces, including acts which the International Court of Justice have said are plausibly genocide; mourns the growing death toll of women, men and children; further that the petitioners declare for the urgent release of all hostages and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population; and notes the calls by the United Nations for an immediate ceasefire on all sides of the conflict and the global consensus in support of a two-state solution.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to join with others in the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, so that the process of rebuilding and finding a lasting peace with a two-state solution can commence.

And the petitioners remain, etc. —[\[Presented by Martyn Day, Official Report, 21 February 2024; Vol. 745, c. 811.\]](#)

**Observations from the Minister of State for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We want the fighting to stop now. An agreement will allow for vital life-saving aid to be delivered to Gaza, hostages to be released and progress made towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.

Israel suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas.

Palestinian civilians are facing a dire, devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

We want the fighting to stop now. An agreement will allow for vital life-saving aid to be delivered to Gaza and get hostages out. It will also allow for progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

Vital elements for a lasting peace include the release of all hostages; the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the west bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; and a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Minister of State for the Middle East have reiterated these points in their contacts with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior Israeli political leaders, as well as with leaders in Qatar, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon in recent weeks.

We need to see an end to civilian casualties and a robust deconfliction mechanism.

All parties must act within international humanitarian law (IHL). Israel must limit its

operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. Palestinians are facing a devastating and shocking humanitarian crisis. We trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings. The UK and our partners are stepping up our efforts to get aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air.

The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

Israel must also take immediate steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza, opening more routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity. This must happen to prevent suffering and the projected starvation of civilians, particularly in northern Gaza.

The Foreign Secretary has appointed his Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, who is based in the region and is working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

We must give the people of the west bank and Gaza the political perspective of a credible route to a Palestinian state and a new future, and it needs to be irreversible. This is not entirely in our gift, but Britain and our partners can help by confirming our commitment to a sovereign, viable Palestine, and our focus for its composition. Crucially, we must state our clear intention to grant Palestine recognition, including at the United Nations. That cannot come at the start of the process, but it does not have to be the very end of the process.

We support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/24032046000123/CeasefireInGaza>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/24032046000122/CeasefireAndTheStateOfPalestine>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/24032046000121/CeasefireAndTheStateOfPalestine>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-20/debates/24032046000124/CeasefireInPalestine>

## UK Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee

### **Foreign Secretary: “enormous frustration” at arbitrary denials of aid by Israel**

The Foreign Affairs Committee has published correspondence from Foreign Secretary David Cameron on aid to Gaza.

The letter confirms that the United Nations has not requested that the Kerem Shalom crossing is closed on Saturdays, saying that it is the Foreign Office’s understanding that Israel closes it due to the Sabbath.

Foreign Secretary Cameron voices “enormous frustration” that UK aid for Gaza has been routinely held up waiting for Israeli permissions. The main blockers remain arbitrary denials by the Government of Israel and lengthy clearance procedures, including multiple screenings and narrow opening windows in daylight hours. The letter provides an example of some UK funded aid being stuck at the border for just under three weeks waiting for approval. The Foreign Secretary says he is gravely concerned that any aid – including UK



aid – has been stalled, delayed or rejected at the border.

The letter says that Israel has the ability to turn the taps back on and that they should do so. It says that the UK Government continues to press Israel to allow in the fuel supplies needed for water pumping and desalination and calls on Israel to restore water through the pipelines from Israel.

The letter also discusses the threats of unexploded ordnance and the potential for this to affect the delivery of humanitarian aid. It says that maritime corridors and air drops cannot substitute delivery through land routes.

Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Alicia Kearns MP, said: “We are watching one of the most desperate, distressing humanitarian disasters in recent memory unfold in front of our eyes.

The UK and our allies are willing to provide aid to innocent Gazans, many of whom are women and children, caught in the crossfires of this conflict.

Today’s letter confirms what we saw and heard on our visit to the border area – that Israel’s arbitrary denials and lengthy clearance processes are key factors in holding up the delivery of aid. It also confirms that Israel has the ability and power to turn the water back on in Gaza, and so far has chosen not to do so. If the famine continues along its current trajectory, thousands of Gazans will lose their lives. This is suffering on an unimaginable scale.

The new maritime highway is a poor substitute for land corridors, which remain the best way of delivering a large amount of aid in a short period. Israel needs to open Ashdod port and more border crossings to enable the much-needed aid to reach the people in Gaza.

I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for being so clear and candid; this is essential in times of crisis.”

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/78/foreign-affairs-committee/news/200588/foreign-secretary-enormous-frustration-at-arbitrary-denials-of-aid-by-israel/>

### **Letter from the Foreign Secretary to the Foreign Affairs Committee**

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/44011/documents/217998/default/>

## **Department for Business and Trade**

### **Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Israel**

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65f97674aa9b760011fbda50/israel-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2024-03-21.pdf>

### **Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Occupied Palestinian Territories**

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65f997459316f5001d64c2ef/occupied-palestinian-territories-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2024-03-21.pdf>

## **UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

### **Gaza: Halt the war now to save children from dying of imminent famine, UN Committee warns**

With children in North Gaza facing imminent famine and others across the Gaza Strip in danger of catastrophic food insecurity, [the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) today issued the following statement, repeating its call for an immediate ceasefire.

“Children in Gaza are starving to death.

They are cut off from food, even crumbs are not easy to find.

A little girl wept in front of the BBC’s camera, crying, “I miss bread.”

The occupying power has blocked or severely restricted food and other life-essential

supplies and aid.

To date, there have been 27 reported deaths of children due to malnutrition and dehydration in Gaza, according to the Gazan Health Ministry. The true death toll from starvation is likely to be significantly higher, and it is set to rise. Children in Gaza can no longer wait, as each passing minute risks another child dying of hunger as the world looks on.

One in three children under two years old in the Northern Gaza Strip suffer from acute malnutrition, a sharp increase from 15.6 per cent in January, a nutrition screening conducted by UNICEF and its partners showed.

Famine is imminent in the northern governorates and is expected to occur anytime between now and May 2024, experts from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) projected.

The IPC also estimated that half of the population of the Gaza Strip, approximately 1.11 million people, will face catastrophic conditions and the most severe level on the IPC's Acute Food Insecurity Scale in the four months leading up to mid-July if the conflict escalates, including through a ground offensive in Rafah.

The Committee has repeatedly urged for a ceasefire in Gaza. Since our [statement issued in February](#), the situation has deteriorated significantly. The killing continues unabated, and now, children are dying of preventable starvation.

Deliberate actions such as blocking and restricting humanitarian aid appear to be calculated to bring about the physical destruction of Palestinian children, and we refer in this regard to the [interim ruling of the International Court of Justice \(ICJ\)](#) on 26 January 2024, which found some rights claims by South Africa under the Genocide Convention to be "plausible".

We draw attention to the ICJ's order to Israel to "take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts within the scope of article II of the Convention", including killing members of the group; to "prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide"; and to "enable the provision of... humanitarian assistance".

Since the ICJ order on 26 January, and as of 19 March, an average of over 108 Palestinians have been killed and another 178 injured every day in Gaza, and children are amongst them. The looming invasion of Rafah will take the fragile situation to the breaking point, putting the lives of 600,000 children at immediate risk, and will rapidly reach the tipping point of famine.

While reiterating its calls for the remaining children held hostage to be released immediately, the Committee also calls on all parties, including the General Assembly and the Security Council, for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to protect hundreds of thousands of innocent children's lives. We call upon States to resume and strengthen funding for UNRWA and urge the opening of multiple land border crossings to allow for massively increased delivery of aid throughout the area, including to northern Gaza, as well as security assurances and unimpeded passage to ensure that the aid reaches all children, in all areas."

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/gaza-halt-war-now-save-children-dying-imminent-famine-un-committee-warns>

*The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification findings 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)*

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## Foreign Affairs

### Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

#### **Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: Joint statement to the OSCE**

... I am delivering this statement on behalf of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, and my own country, the United Kingdom.

In recent weeks and months, and in particular since the 7 October terrorist attacks by Hamas, we have seen a shocking increase in hatred and intolerance, including anti-Muslim hatred. This is completely unacceptable.

Our governments strongly condemn discrimination, intolerance, and incitement to hatred and violent extremism in all their forms. No one should ever be a victim of hatred because of their religion or belief, whether Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or other.

We call attention to people around the world who are harassed, detained, imprisoned, or even killed for identifying as Muslim, being perceived as Muslim, practicing Islam, or converting to Islam. ...

We will continue to advocate for and promote freedom of religion or belief for all. Protecting the individual is at the heart of human rights. The rights to freedom of religion and freedom of expression are equally important pillars of any pluralistic society. We will continue to speak out on behalf of those who have been denied the ability to do so and who have suffered intolerance, discrimination, and repression as a result. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/tolerance-and-non-discrimination-joint-statement-to-the-osce>

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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>

Committee Stage, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-20/debates/3E132FE1-7784-4862-A088-5371D2DB27D5/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies\(OverseasMatters\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-20/debates/3E132FE1-7784-4862-A088-5371D2DB27D5/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies(OverseasMatters)Bill)

Scottish Parliament Legislative Consent Motion debate

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15772&i=134601#ScotParlOR>

Legislative Consent: Scottish Parliament agreed not to consent to the Economic Activity

of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54847/documents/4607>

**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