



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Holocaust

Israel

Foreign Affairs

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

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Home Affairs

Westminster Hall Debate

Easter and Christian Culture

col 377WH **Nick Fletcher (Conservative):** ... Easter is one of the two most important dates in the Christian calendar ... The cross symbolises what Christ did for us on Good Friday ...

We celebrate on Easter Sunday the resurrection of Christ, giving us not just a God, but a living God to believe in, to worship, to help us and to make us right with Him, with the promise of eternal life. ...

What is our British way of life? ... this is what Google said:

“The culture of the United Kingdom is influenced by its combined nations’ history; its historically Christian religious life, its interaction with the cultures of Europe, the individual cultures of England, Wales and Scotland and the impact of the British Empire.” ...

col 378WH These are some of the things that apparently make us British: the royal family, our cuisine, the English breakfast, our love of a curry and fish and chips, how we like to queue, the pub, our humour—mainly sarcasm and banter—a cup of tea, sport, the BBC, and so the list goes on. ...

But are they really our culture? ... No, I think our culture goes back to those three words I spoke about earlier—Christian religious life. ...

... not quite Christian religious life, but more our Christian way of life—the Christian way of

life that has enabled us to live in freedom in this wonderful country. ... It is about a life with Jesus and what that life offers, not just to the individual but to society as a whole. ...

col 379 Robin Millar (Conservative): ... In the UK, we are very fortunate to have giants in our history—people such as Josiah Wedgwood, Lord Shaftesbury and William Wilberforce—who improved the lives of thousands, millions potentially, of the poor, the oppressed and the enslaved, and who all claimed a strong Christian faith as a motivating factor. Does my hon. Friend agree that, as a country, we are freer, more equal and better off for the influence of those Christian figures in our history?

Nick Fletcher: I agree with every single word ... this is not just about society's relationship with Christianity; it is the individual's relationship with Christ that gives them the strength to do wonderful things for society as a whole. ...

Our need for something to believe in is always present and if it is not in the Christian teachings and God, what is it in? ...

The Bible is clear: it tells us that if we turn our back on God, He will give us up to our natural state. We become filled with all kinds of wickedness, evil and greed. ...

I remember many people calling anyone who believed in Christ a Bible-basher, a God botherer, and many laughed; I was called one myself. Then Christians were told, "It's okay that you believe, but don't ram it down my throat," so guess what? That happened. ... Many of us stopped talking about God for fear of being accused of ramming it down other people's throats ... What is worse is those who do not want a faith did appear to want others not to have a faith either. Christians have been ridiculed on the big stage across the country, and now many believers have been too quiet for too long.

col 380WH In the recent 2021 census, for the first time in England and Wales, less than half the population described themselves as Christian and 37.2% of people said they had no religion. Is there a connection with there being so much unhappiness, so many young and old dealing with mental health issues, and so many searching for hope often through sources that are not healthy in any manner of the word? ...

... something that is not necessarily filling the vacuum, but is taking a place in our society is the beliefs of other people who have made Britain their home—our next-door neighbours. Their way of living, their faith and their culture are growing, not through force—most, like us, are kind people—but because they have something to believe in and maybe because they see nothing else. ...

If we continue on that trajectory or fuel it with even more secular views, we will no doubt see the swift end of what many believe is British culture. When I google British culture, it might instead speak of multiculturalism, which many will say is good, but I am sure it will also be even more of a mix of nonsense ...

col 381WH Andrew Rosindell (Conservative): ... Although we cherish the principle of freedom of religion for all and respect for people of no faith and other faiths, it is nevertheless the Christian foundations that have allowed a free society to develop, where anyone can choose the life they lead. We should therefore defend that Christian heritage because if we undermine it, we undermine the entire free society that so many generations have built.

Nick Fletcher: ... If our Christian culture with its faith and families shines like the beacon of hope that it should, the ideologies and desires that are often negative will be starved of oxygen and will fall away one by one. The new people we welcome will see our culture and maybe even want to be a part of it, too. ...

col 382WH This Easter will our Government promote celebrating what Christ did for us on the cross on Good Friday, and His resurrection on Easter Sunday? Will they encourage the nation to go to church and embrace our Christian culture? If the people do so, and if they search and listen, they will find God, too. He is waiting with open arms. The angels are ready to sing for every sinner who repents and believes in our Lord.

If the Government get this right, we will all instinctively know what our British culture is.

God will not turn his back on us. He will hold and love us, and the culture wars will be no more. ...

col 383WH Edward Leigh (Conservative): ... So much of what has made us such a great nation and a wonderful place to live is embedded in Christianity. So many of our freedoms relate to Christianity.

Of course, people will criticise the history of Christianity and the way Christians treated and persecuted one another in the past. We all know that, but undoubtedly what has made this nation is the Christian faith. That is not to belittle other faiths ... It is no accident that the great religions of the world—whether that is Islam, Judaism or Christianity—all have the same kind of moral code. ...

... it is interesting that the successful Catholic churches in this country are those that are increasingly rooted in our ancient Catholic traditions. Many young people are flocking to the Catholic churches that are resurrecting the beautiful ancient mass. They seem to be self-confident. ... I think that there is a message there for our established Church. ...

col 384WH There is some criticism that in the Church of England, resources are being diverted away from the parishes ...

col 385WH To give one example, the diocese of York is advertising for a racial justice education adviser. The job specification elaborates that the role will cover unconscious bias and diversity training. The concept of “unconscious bias” has no evidential basis in scientific, psychological or medical research. ...

I know that the Minister cannot answer on behalf of the Church of England, but perhaps the Government have a role here. We see the Church, quangos, charities, civil society groups and corporations adopting this training. Perhaps the Government can take a lead in enlightening them not only that it is nonsense, but that it can often lead to the opposite of the intended result. ...

col 386WH Andrew Rosindell: ... Not everybody in these islands considers themselves to be Christian: many have no faith; many have different faiths; many are unsure where they stand. However, I believe that what most people stand strongly for is the upholding of the heritage that goes with the Christian faith—the culture; our customs; our way of life; our laws, which are founded on Christian teachings; our constitution; our monarchy; our flag. ...

We have an established Church, and I am glad we do, because having the Church of England as our established Church protects all other religions and denominations to worship freely in a free society without being persecuted, belittled, sidelined or attacked in any way. We have a society in which freedom of religion is cherished and protected under the rule of law. Having an established Church prevents sectarianism and prevents different religions from vying for power or domination, because everyone accepts that our King is the head of the Church, and that the Christian faith has made the foundations of our society. Everybody can worship freely under that framework. ...

col 387WH Christianity is everywhere around us. We may not be a Christian; there are people who are not Christians, but the Christian culture of British society is everywhere, and to remove that would undermine the foundations of our society. ...

The Bible has transformed the way our civilisation has operated, through law, governance, art, architecture and so many other areas of life. It has shaped the way all Britons—everybody in this country, including those with no religion—think about family, community and morality. ...

col 388WH Edward Leigh: ... It is very important that we should defend the right of people to speak their mind freely about religion. So, we should defend the right of Richard Dawkins, atheist, to attack religious people or religions in general. We have got to also defend the right of religious people to have their space, whether it is Orthodox Jews, or devout Muslims, or evangelical Christians. We must also defend the right of people, not just to attack religion or religious people in general, but also to criticise particular

religions. ...

Andrew Rosindell: ... It is of course right in a free society that anybody can criticise a religion for the teachings that it espouses, but equally, we have the right to believe something completely different and be tolerant to one another in a free society. ...

col 390WH Patrick Grady (SNP): ... It is not an accident that the two great feasts of the Christian calendar occur when they do. Christmas, which celebrates the birth of Jesus, who Christians consider to be the light of the world, comes just after the winter solstice, when the days begin to get longer and darkness is overcome. Easter, which marks the death and resurrection of Christ, follows the spring equinox, when new life begins to bloom in nature. The date of Easter is also linked to the Jewish observation of Passover, because the gospel tells us that the last supper, crucifixion and resurrection all took place around the time of Passover observations in Jerusalem. Just as Passover commemorates the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt, Christians mark Easter as the liberation of humanity from slavery to the trappings of this world, which would separate us from the love of God. ...

col 392WH I also want to acknowledge the work of our faith schools and their contribution to our communities. ... Last year, the new First Minister Humza Yousaf sent his first Easter message to those celebrating. He did so as the first Muslim leader of a Government on these islands and while he was himself observing the Ramadan fast. He said: "For Christians, Easter is an enormously important time of year. It's a time when family and friends come together to celebrate a story at the very heart of Christianity. A story of sacrifice, of hope, of renewal, that provides inspiration to people all around the world. ... It is also right to acknowledge that the Prime Minister, the first Hindu to lead a Government on these islands, has regularly recognised the contribution of Christianity to our heritage and to modern society, and has also sent messages of goodwill at Easter and Christmas. That all recognises and demonstrates the importance of strong interfaith relationships and the importance of interreligious dialogue, which is why a number of Members from across the House, myself included, and a number of my constituents are disappointed at the UK Government's decision to end funding for the Inter Faith Network. ...

col 395WH Liz Twist (Labour): ... As we have seen threats to community cohesion in recent months, it has been inspiring to see faith communities bringing people together. Such inter-faith dialogue is vital, not only for resolving differences, but for building strong and collaborative communities that can support people in times of need. The Government have a role to play in facilitating such co-operation, and I know Members across the House are concerned about the impact of the closure of the Inter Faith Network on that community cohesion work. ...

We must remember those who will be observing this Easter in the most desperate of circumstances—those facing destitution, fleeing persecution or sheltering from the violence of war. Since the outbreak of the war in Gaza, the Holy Family Catholic church has been a source of refuge for hundreds of displaced Palestinians. In December, an innocent mother and daughter were killed within its grounds and many others continue to suffer without water or food. ...

col 396WH The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): ... I share the convictions of my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley about the importance of faith as an essential pillar of our society, and I welcome the opportunity to celebrate the role that Christianity has played in shaping and nurturing the world we live in. ... The Government believe that people need to feel strong in their religious identities, and we are ensuring that the voices of people of faith are being heard.

Our country has been built on Christian values. They permeate every aspect of our lives. Values such as respect for others, public service and the rule of law are supported by the overwhelming majority of people in this country. Those values have evolved over time to

become an integral part of Britain today. For that, we all owe a debt of gratitude to the Church of England and the Church of Scotland—the two established churches in the UK. The Church has, from the first, been the bedrock of our Christian community. It underpins the spiritual wellbeing of individuals. The Church welcomes each of them into a sustaining community of faith, and it builds around them the cultural and institutional framework that promotes and protects their wellbeing. Those values are not unique to churches and their worshippers; they characterise the core beliefs of all our faith communities.

col 397WH ... at this time of the year, many religions are celebrating important events. We are in the holy month of Ramadan ... Passover is coming in late April, and I will be visiting a synagogue in my constituency at the weekend. Each of our religions, through the commitment they make to serve their worshippers and in their efforts to build our society, helps to deepen and enrich the lives of all of us. ...

I am proud of the United Kingdom as a place where people are free to practise their religion, faith or belief. We should all celebrate the diversity and richness of a society that has welcomed and supported those of all faiths and backgrounds. The latest census tells that the number of Christians living in this country has decreased, but Christianity remains the most prominent religion.

We may think of ours as an increasingly secular state, but the imprint and influence of Christianity on every aspect of our lives is unmistakable. It is expressed in the very fabric of our buildings—our great churches and cathedrals, the Hall that we stand in today. It shapes the defining landmarks of our calendar—Easter, Christmas, saints' days and holy days. It defines our working week, setting aside one day of each week to rest and worship; and it has long inspired our artists, composers, writers and poets, whose work enlightens and sustains our lives.

Christianity has shaped this country's history and we should take this opportunity to celebrate the impact that those inspired by its teachings have had on the work of our Parliament. ...

Faith and belief continue to motivate people to acts of public service and to serve their local communities. As a nation, we continue to be made stronger by the work of those inspired by their faith. ...

col 398WH Christian faith schools, like all other faith schools, also play an important role in our education system, providing high-quality school places for many children from all backgrounds, and choice for parents. ...

Edward Leigh: ... There has been a long campaign to abolish the so-called faith cap, which serves no purpose apart from limiting the ability of Catholic schools and academies to attract new pupils. ... can [the Minister] promise to raise this matter with Downing Street and with the Secretary of State for Education, who I know believes the faith cap should be removed?

Felicity Buchan: I will certainly follow up ...

Let me say again that as a Government we recognise the importance of faith and belief across our communities. ...

I want to make it very clear that freedom of speech, freedom of worship, democracy, the rule of law and equal rights are things that we all strive for and value. The rights that we enjoy in the UK extend to everyone. Any individual or group is free to express views and beliefs within the confines of the law, but we must all behave responsibly and respect one another's fundamental rights. ...

Regarding funding for places of worship, I want to be very transparent about the fact that such funding is relatively limited. Successive Governments have followed the principle that it is for faith communities themselves to be responsible for the management and upkeep of their places of worship. Nevertheless, there are some instances of Government support ...

col 399WH I want to talk briefly about the Inter Faith Network. ... I want to make it very clear that we value the contribution made by all organisations that are dedicated to bringing

our faith communities together in order to strengthen the ties that bind us ...

To return to the subject of the Inter Faith Network, the Department monitors all funded organisations throughout the lifecycle of their projects for the purposes of assessing delivery against workplan targets, compliance and evaluation, in line with best practice for the management of public funding. To ensure suitability, all partners are subject to clearance through our internal finance and due diligence processes. The Secretary of State made the decision to withdraw the offer of funding to the Inter Faith Network in view of a member of the Muslim Council of Britain being appointed to the IFN's board of trustees. Successive Governments have had a long-standing policy of non-engagement with the MCB. The potential closure of the Inter Faith Network is a matter for the IFN as an independent charity, not the Government. ...

col 402WH Nick Fletcher: ... I genuinely believe that a life in Christ is the most wonderful thing. Although Christmas and Easter shine a light on the Christian faith, I believe God is with me all the time and that He helps me. I am never alone because of my faith. There are so many lonely people out there, and it is our duty as Christians to go and see them and let them know what faith in Christ can do for them and for society as a whole. Please, if anyone wants to know more about Christ, come and knock on my door. I would love to tell as many people as possible about Him. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-21/debates/92364942-F627-4FAD-94E1-6622BA623180/EasterAndChristianCulture>

House of Commons Written Answers

Universities: Antisemitism and Islamophobia

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [18580] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help reduce cases of (a) anti-Semitism and (b) Islamophobia on university campuses.

Robert Halfon: This government condemns in the strongest possible terms any form of racial or religiously motivated harassment or violence. In the context of the conflict in the Middle East, there have been unprecedented rises in antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents, which are abhorrent on every level. Universities should be welcoming and inclusive environments and higher education (HE) providers have a responsibility to take a zero tolerance approach to any form of racial or religious harassment. They have clear responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to adopt robust policies and procedures that enable them to investigate and swiftly address reports of racism.

The Community Security Trust has reported an unprecedented rise in antisemitic incidents, which is totally unacceptable.

To support Jewish students, the Secretary of State for Education and I wrote to all universities on 11 October 2023, urging them to respond swiftly to hate-related incidents and actively reassure Jewish students that they can study without fear of harassment or intimidation. I wrote again to Vice Chancellors on 16 November 2023, emphasising that they must use disciplinary measures wherever appropriate, highlighting the importance of police engagement, and reiterating that student visas could be suspended where a foreign national is found to have committed or incited acts of racial hatred. This was one of the key actions set out in the five-point plan for tackling antisemitism in HE, which was published on 5 November 2023. The plan also involves:

- Calling for visas to be withdrawn from international students who incite racial hatred. Visas are a privilege, not a right, and the government will not hesitate to remove them from people who abuse them.

- Logging specific cases and sharing them with the Office for Students for their consideration.
- Continuing to make it clear in all discussions that acts that may be criminal should be referred to the police.
- Establishing a Tackling Antisemitism Quality Seal which will be an award available to universities who can demonstrate the highest standards in tackling antisemitism.

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

Anti-Muslim hatred is equally abhorrent and has no place in our society. No one should ever be a victim of hatred because of their religion or belief and the government is continuing to work with police and community partners to monitor and combat it.

This government is proud to have funded Tell MAMA, a service that supports victims of anti-Muslim hatred, with over £6 million since their inception in 2012. Tell MAMA's work has been recognised internationally as a good practice model in recording and monitoring anti-Muslim hate. The organisation has documented 2,010 Islamophobic incidents in the UK between 7 October 2023 and 7 February 2024. This represents a steep rise from the 600 it recorded for the same period the year previously. The government will not tolerate religious hatred towards Muslims and that is why the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities put in place an extra £4.9 million of protective security funding for Muslim mosques, faith schools and communities.

The new Protective Security for Mosques Scheme provides physical protective security measures (such as CCTV, intruder alarms and secure perimeter fencing) in both mosques and associated Muslim faith community centres. Protective security measures are also available to Muslim faith schools. Headteachers of eligible schools were contacted directly by the Home Office in January 2023 to register their interest.

Lastly, as my right hon. Friend, Minister Buchan stated on 4 March 2024, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities plan to appoint a new independent adviser on anti-Muslim hatred, and it will update the house shortly.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18580>

The CST report referred to above can be read at

https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic_Incidents_Report_2023.pdf

The 11 October letter referred to above can be read at

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

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

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

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

The Autumn Statement referred to above can be read at

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

The Tell Mama report referred to above can be read at

<https://tellmamauk.org/greatest-rise-in-reported-anti-muslim-hate-cases-to-tell-mama-since-oct-7th/>

Information about the protective security funding for Muslim mosques, faith schools and communities, referred to above, can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-commits-more-funding-to-protect-uk-muslims>

Information about the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme, referred to above, can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/places-of-worship-security-funding-scheme>

Minister Buchan's statement referred to above can be read at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-04/debates/25338D67-1AE6-4DDA-99CE-1D08B53EF20D/Islamophobia#contribution-2272FAED-A4E8-4583-92AA-1909B7FA88A1>

Department for Business and Trade: Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group

Anneliese Dodds (Labour) [16848] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the document entitled Draft terms of reference for the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, what updates her Department has provided on relevant developments in its area of work to that group since 2019.

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16848>

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

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

The answer referred to above can be read at

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

House of Lords Written Answers

The following three questions all received the same answer

Community Ownership Fund: Religious Buildings

The Lord Bishop of Bristol [HL3171] To ask His Majesty's Government how much funding has been awarded in total from the Community Ownership Fund to communities seeking to turn places of worship into assets of community value.

The Lord Bishop of Bristol [HL3172] To ask His Majesty's Government which places of worship have received support from the Community Ownership Fund.

The Lord Bishop of Bristol [HL3173] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to enable local communities to safeguard places of worship through the Community Ownership Fund.

Baroness Swinburne: The £150 million Community Ownership Fund helps communities across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to take ownership of assets at risk of closure.

Current and former places of worship and their attached community hubs are one of the many asset types that the fund supports, though not specifically recorded as such. We recognise the important role these places have in building our social fabric and boosting pride in place by bringing people together. Some of the great projects we have already supported include The Light Church Bradford, The Open House in Sheffield, and The Old Synagogue in Belfast – all of which are providing valuable services to their community.

A full list of successful projects is available on GOV.UK at: [Community Ownership Fund: successful bidders](#)

[Community Ownership Fund](#)

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-11/hl3171>
and
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-11/hl3172>
and
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-11/hl3173>

War Memorials: Muslims

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL3106] To ask His Majesty's Government why the National Muslim War Memorial will not be situated in Westminster.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: On 6 March the Chancellor announced funding of up to £1million for a new war memorial to recognise the sacrifice and duty of Muslim soldiers who fought and died for this country in both world wars.

It will be a visible reminder of the important contributions of Muslims to British history, and will promote shared values amongst people of all backgrounds through building a better understanding of faith groups' contribution to wider society. Further information will be provided in due course.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/hl3106>

TOP

Holocaust

House of Lords Debate

Second Reading, House of Lords: Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

col 444 **Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws (Labour):** My Lords, I am grateful for the opportunity to propose, for your Lordships' consideration, a statutory mandate for the prevention of and response to genocide and atrocity crimes. Instances of mass atrocity violence—war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing—are not just rising but are spiralling around the world. ...

col 445 Of today's major and emerging foreign policy crises, the vast majority—from Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, Israel and Palestine to Myanmar and Xinjiang—are driven by violent targeting of civilian groups based on their identities. If left unchecked, the global propellants of prejudice and inequality, climate collapse, the retreat from liberal democracy, and the great changes in technology, as we see in social media and so on, mean that identity-based mass atrocity crimes will multiply over the next decade. ...

At the same time, growing disregard for international law, for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and our collective responsibilities to prevent and protect, has ushered in an age of impunity. We have failed, time and again, in the face of these grave crimes, and as a consequence our world—indeed, our nation—is less safe and becoming less so. Impunity begets impunity.

Regrettably, these crimes have deep consequences. Perpetrators commit genocide and crimes against humanity because they work; they fulfil the dreadful political objectives of their architects. ...

It is commonly said that armed conflicts are a precursor to the commission of mass atrocity crimes, but in fact it is not always that way round. Indeed, during the many human rights crises of the modern age, mass atrocities often came first and caused armed conflict to break out. ... The current conflict between Hamas and Israel follows decades of terrible conduct, by both the IDF and Hamas, before, during and after 7 October. We are now seeing the consequence of that in the current crisis in Gaza. ...

There has been a strong sense of outrage, but it is not sufficient. Outrage does not help to

protect innocent civilians from deliberate attack, arbitrary detention, summary execution, sexual violence and torture, or forced starvation.

This Bill seeks to address this fact head on and focuses on what can be done. ...

col 446 This Bill's first purpose would provide a statutory basis to elevate and leverage the important work of the mass atrocity prevention hub. It also includes the monitoring of the steps that take people, and Governments, on a trajectory towards genocide. ...

The second provision of the Bill addresses and seeks to enshrine the need for senior political leadership and ownership of the UK's moral and legal obligations to prevent and protect. ...

Thirdly, the Bill addresses the urgent need to support and train embassies and country teams on the dynamics and warning signs of modern atrocities, and the trajectory towards genocide in some cases. ...

col 447 **Lord Polak (Conservative):** ... If the Government are to implement their duty to prevent genocide, they must have comprehensive mechanisms to enable them to monitor early-warning signs and risk factors of atrocities to come. The issue of early-warning signs and risk factors of atrocities to come has been discussed in this House on many occasions. Time after time, we have raised the issue that the Holocaust did not start with the gas chambers—a message that should be ingrained in HMG's laws and policies on genocide and atrocity crimes. However, sometimes this message is ignored, so I shall repeat it again: the Holocaust did not start with gas chambers. It started with hate speech; it started with dehumanising of Jews; it started with policies and laws that discriminated against Jews. It started with attacks on Jews—their places of worship, shops and places of work. It started with impunity for such acts. It started with all these warning signs and risk factors that may have been seen as irrelevant, but they were not—early-warning signs are never irrelevant.

How shocking it is that, today, on Friday 22 March 2024, we see on page 13 of the *Daily Mail* the following two headlines. The first is, "Jewish Boy mistreated by pro-Palestine nurses on NHS hospital ward in Manchester". Secondly, next to a picture, is the caption: "Was this terrifying house blaze in east London an anti-Semitic attack?". I repeat that this was on 22 March 2024.

Let us look at the harm that misinformation can bring about. Sadly, social media and mainstream news outlets, including elements of the UK Government, could be complicit because of the spread of lies about what is happening in Gaza. I shudder to think what Joseph Goebbels would have done with social media. ...

col 448 I end by referring to the late, great Lord Sacks. As many noble Lords will know, we will celebrate Purim tomorrow night. Purim was to be the first genocide; the whole Jewish population was to be murdered. In looking for what I wanted to say, I found a "Thought for the Day" on BBC Radio 4 from 22 February 2002 by Jonathan Sacks. If I may, I will share his teachings about Purim with the House:

"It's a joyous day. We have a festive meal; we send presents to our friends; and gifts to the poor, so that no one should feel excluded. Anyone joining us on Purim would think it commemorates one of the great moments in Jewish history, like the Exodus from slavery or the Revelation at Mount Sinai. Actually though, the truth is quite different. Purim is the day we remember the story told in the book of Esther, set in Persia in pre-Christian times. It tells of how a senior member of the Persian court, Haman, got angry that one man, Mordechai, refused to bow down to him. Discovering that Mordechai was a Jew, he decided to take revenge on all Jews and persuaded the King to issue a decree that they should all—young and old, men, women and children—should be annihilated on a single day".

That is the day of Purim that we celebrate. He went on: "Only the fact that Esther, Mordechai's cousin, was the King's favourite allowed her to intercede on behalf of her people and defeat the plan. Purim is, in other words, the festival of survival in the face of attempted genocide. It wasn't until way into adult life that I realised that what we celebrate

on Purim is simply the fact that we're alive; that our ancestors weren't murdered after all. Like many of my generation born after the Holocaust, I thought antisemitism was dead; that a hate so irrational, so murderous, had finally been laid to rest. So, it has come as a shock"—this was in 2002—"To realise in recent months that it's still strong in many parts of the world, and that even in Britain yesterday a cleric appeared in court charged with distributing a tape calling on his followers to kill Jews. What is it about Jews—or black people, or Roma, or foreigners—that causes them to be hated? The oldest explanation is probably the simplest: because we don't like the unlike. As Haman"—the wicked figure in the story—"put it, 'Their customs are different from those of other people.' And that's why racial or religious hate isn't just dangerous. It's a betrayal of the human condition. We *are* different. Every individual, every culture, every ethnicity, every faith, gives something unique to humanity. Religious and racial diversity are as essential to our world as biodiversity. And therefore, I pray that we have the courage to fight prejudice, of which antisemitism is simply the oldest of them all. Because a world that can't live with difference is a world that lacks room for humanity itself".

col 449 Baroness D'Souza (Crossbench): ... having ratified the UN convention against genocide, the UK has a treaty obligation to prevent genocide wherever and whenever it is threatened. However, too often this does not happen. ...

It is, to say the least, disingenuous to believe that Governments are unaware of the potential for genocide or the early warning signs. Going back to the Rwanda massacres in April 1994 and Srebrenica in July 1995, there were clear indications. For example, in the case of Rwanda, the widely popular Mille Collines radio station virtually spelt out its genocidal plans in lightly coded messages, including references to the Hutus as "cockroaches". Furthermore, genocidal tribal attacks had occurred with depressing regularity in that region of Africa. In Srebrenica, the rounding up of 750,000 Muslim men and boys and the sudden departure of the UN forces made massacres inevitable, but events leading up to this terrible development were obvious. ...

col 450 Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Conservative): ... I hope the Minister can be persuaded that this small but significant piece of legislation—small in length and minimal in cost—will help provide a massive boost to the prevention of atrocities and genocide. ... In the US, there is a similar provision. ... the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 ...

col 451 We should be encouraging and promoting the Bill. It is in our country's and the world's interests that we do something on this. ...

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (Crossbench): ... The Bill before us does not attempt to name any genocides, either those already perpetrated or those at risk of being so. ... The term "genocide" is at some risk of being sprayed around indiscriminately, at the cost of being devalued and even discredited. ...

One possible impediment—the often deployed and long-discredited argument that it is for only courts and not Governments to identify and name genocides—is no longer the obstacle it was. Otherwise, how could the Government—rightly, if belatedly—have decided to join the International Court of Justice case brought by Gambia against Myanmar in respect of the Rohingya Muslims before the court has ruled on the matter? ...

col 452 Britain cannot on its own prevent an act of genocide, of course. It can act only as part of an international collective effort to do so. The Bill, which largely replicates what is already being done by the US and which also could be followed, if we give a lead, by the EU and its member states, would be a significant step in that direction. ...

Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench): ... I also thank the noble Lord, Lord Polak, for reminding us of the late Lord Sacks. I was privileged once to chair a lecture he gave in Liverpool. During the course of it, he said that no one should ask, "Where was God at Auschwitz?"; they should ask, "Where was man?". It is about what men and women can do to prevent these atrocities occurring.

The noble Lord, Lord Polak, who comes from Liverpool, cited the experience of Esther at the time of Purim. She is one of the great figures in the Bible. She is told, “You have come into this world for such a time as this”. It reminds us that sometimes unlikely people who have no great power can do extraordinary things. ...

As the noble Lord said, the word “genocide” should not be used as a slogan or devalued. It is different from war crimes and crimes against humanity. The duty to prevent genocide is one of the most neglected duties under international law. ...

col 455 **Baroness Smith of Newnham (Liberal Democrat):** ... We have heard many times that the Government are not able to act because the issue of genocide is for courts to determine—yet, as the present Bill and the Library briefing both make clear, under the genocide convention the Government have a duty to prevent genocide. It is not simply that we need to say, “We are not happy with this”; we have a duty to prevent and punish the crime of genocide. ...

We have heard from the noble Lord, Lord Polak, a reminder that the Holocaust did not start with the gas chambers. The same has been true of other genocides. Something does not happen at the point where hundreds of thousands or millions of people are being killed or potentially fleeing for their lives; there is a much more insidious process. ...

col 456 **Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour):** My Lords, my noble friend’s Bill introduces mechanisms to ensure that the United Kingdom’s Government are better equipped to prevent and respond to genocide and other atrocities. ... the problem with the current generic responsibility across all embassies of examining where genocide might be in the offing is that it often results in a situation where, when everyone is doing it, no one is doing it. That is clearly a problem.

The solution in the Bill is absolutely vital. It is to put on a statutory footing this special hub within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which will monitor and evaluate processes and keep in touch with developments taking place and research being done. ...

col 457 We share the Government’s view that determinations of genocide must result from a legal rather than a political process ... That does not mean that we shy away from saying that matters need to be investigated if there is sufficient evidence to require an investigation, but we certainly agree that determinations of genocide must result from a legal rather than a political process. ...

... current events in Gaza ... clearly continue to cause grave concern. We are clear about the need to avoid a Rafah offensive, and instead to secure an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. I know what efforts we have taken at the United Nations; I hope the Minister can give us an up-to-date report. We discussed this week that Gaza is on the brink of famine, and I have repeatedly stressed that Israel must comply with the ICJ’s interim measures. I hope the Minister can provide us with an update on the status of the negotiations that we know are carrying on at the moment. ...

We cannot prevent every atrocity or genocide, but, as has been made clear in this debate, we absolutely must do more to mitigate atrocity and genocide risks around the world, and to integrate this work into our foreign policy, making it a clear priority. ...

col 458 **The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon):** ... My Lords, I join others in thanking the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy, for tabling this Bill. ...

I think there are many across your Lordships’ House who genuinely put the importance of human rights at the heart of their work, in our diplomacy and development activities. That is an important attribute to continue. I shall be honest in saying that it is a challenge, particularly when we look at the global world as it is today, but we should not give up this important flame of hope and humanity. ...

My noble friend Lord Polak struck a very poignant note about Purim, and the history behind it. I totally appreciate and associate myself with the important principle of survival. It is

something to celebrate. ...

col 459 The UK Government remain absolutely committed to preventing and responding to genocide and other atrocities taking place around the world. ...

For anyone who has been to Srebrenica, or to Auschwitz-Birkenau, as I have, the chilling effect of what you see remains with you and, I think, strengthens your own conviction in these areas. ...

The provisions of this Bill are highly commendable, and many of them are very much aligned with the activities of the Government that we are planning or which are already in place. ...

I also miss Lord Sacks. Anyone who met him could not but be inspired by his example. Perhaps when we look across the world, and particularly at the Middle East, we are reminded that his engagement and involvement are very much missed at this important time. ...

... the Government agree with many of the provisions of the Bill—the question is how best to take them forward. ... while I cannot give it total endorsement and agreement, I want to very much examine the provisions of the Elie Wiesel Act to see how we can best adapt. I am going to be very up front in saying that there are issues of training and cost within the provisions of the Bill that need to be considered: those are two of the main considerations for the Government.

col 460 For example, the Bill proposes to establish a genocide monitoring team. We recognise, as all noble Lords have said, that robust early warning and monitoring mechanisms and early response are key to preventing atrocities. ...

The Bill would also provide for training for civil servants. ... I am very keen to understand how we can strengthen that training. This is an open invitation to the noble Baroness and others to see how we can integrate more professionalised training and more insights that are country-specific, to enhance the training that our civil servants and those being deployed into conflict zones receive, and to ensure that it is tailored to the country in question.

The enhanced offer that we are developing will also enable staff to recognise the very early warning systems that my noble friend Lord Polak and the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, talked about, and understand the levers available when preventing and responding to atrocities ...

The Bill also calls for the Government to report to Parliament on atrocity risks. ... at times, information can be highly sensitive. That said, we have, based on the contributions I have heard and the advocacy of the noble Lord, Lord Alton, the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy, and others, defined within our *Human Rights and Democracy Report* a specific element on atrocity prevention and human rights. It has been expanded to now include the responsibility to protect. Again, I encourage suggestions and recommendations on how we can improve that further, with that ambition. ...

col 461 The outstanding provisions would also appoint a Minister for genocide prevention and response. I like that idea, specifically as it is described, rather than encompassed within my current role as Human Rights Minister. ...

col 462 The noble Lord, Lord Collins, asked for an update on the situation in Gaza. I assure the House that our priorities remain that the fighting must stop now. This is the only way that we will get the return of the hostages. I met the families of the hostages again this week, as did the Foreign Secretary. Irrespective of their view on this conflict, no one can fail to be moved by the devastating nature of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza.

The latest update is that there has been a lot of diplomacy. Secretary Blinken has embarked on a tour of the Middle East, partly in conjunction and in parallel with UN Security Council resolutions. As I came into this Chamber, a lot of work had been done overnight to get countries in the right place. Unfortunately, the resolution by the United States calling for an immediate ceasefire was vetoed by Russia and China. We must continue to find a way to get agreement in this space. Noble Lords will be aware of

Secretary Blinken being in Cairo. He is in Israel today. I will be travelling to Egypt next week as part of our continuing diplomatic efforts not only to bring an end to the immediate conflict but for a resolution based on peace, justice and equity for Israelis and Palestinians alike. All noble Lords have expressed views on the importance of the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine side by side in peace and justice. ...

col 464 Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: ... I felt the general sense about the Bill was that putting this on a statutory footing has support. ... One thing that was mentioned repeatedly was that whole business of the logjam that there was about genocide—of always saying that it is a matter for courts and not for Parliaments to decide whether a genocide is happening. ...

The noble Lord, Lord Polak, described so well, as did the noble Lord, Lord Bourne, the way in which atrocity crimes start with lesser horrors and then rise in the significance and then the gravity of what takes place. That takes us along the road of atrocity crime on a trajectory that goes towards genocide, and a full understanding of that within our embassies and those who assess our security internationally is so important. ...

To read the full transcript see

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-22/debates/387CB458-D958-4F67-8A51-D932A73974C2/Genocide\(PreventionAndResponse\)Bill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-22/debates/387CB458-D958-4F67-8A51-D932A73974C2/Genocide(PreventionAndResponse)Bill(HL))

The Daily Mail articles referred to above by Lord Polak can be read at

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13224083/Jewish-boy-hospital-bed-sit-floor-NHS-nurses-wearing-pro-Palestine-badges.html>

and

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13224029/house-flames-suspected-hate-crime-arson-east-London-anti-Semitism-probe.html>

The Appeal Court judgement in the case referred to by Lord Sacks and quoted above by Lord Polak can be read at

<https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Crim/2004/456.html>

The Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 referred to above by Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth can be read at

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-115publ441/pdf/PLAW-115publ441.pdf>

The ICJ provisional measures (Order) referred to above by Lord Collins of Highbury can be read at

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

The most recent Human Rights and Democracy Report, referred to above by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, can be read at

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64afcae3c033c1000d806244/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2022-foreign-commonwealth-and-development-office-report.pdf>

TOP

Israel

See also the Westminster Hall debate on “Easter and Christian Culture” that is included in the Home Affairs section above, and

the Lords Second Reading debate on the Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill that is included in the Holocaust section above, and

Commons written answers 19074 “International Law: Arms trade”, and 19074, 19075, 19076, and 19077 “Arms Trade: Export Controls” that are included in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

Patrick Grady (SNP): Lots of us, myself included, have constituents who are worried sick about their friends or family who are caught up in the conflict in Gaza. Can a Minister come to the House urgently for a debate or statement on the need for a more widely drawn family reunion or humanitarian visa process for people who are fleeing the violence in Israel and Gaza?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I hope he is in touch with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's consular services, which are working very hard with other Government Departments to ensure that anyone who needs assistance has it. If the hon. Gentleman has any difficulty in accessing those services, my office will assist.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-21/debates/453E470A-1229-4788-A6D1-E50C5A65A16E/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-7E12F2E9-7025-44C3-8A51-145A40A6BAAB>

Business of the House

Michael Ellis (Conservative): All loss of life in conflict in Israel, Gaza or elsewhere is a tragedy. It is very important that the UK Government are working with the right figures, for aid purposes and many other reasons. On that point, has my right hon. Friend seen that a leading academic statistician from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania has calculated that the Hamas casualty figures are statistically impossible and obviously fraudulent? That should not be a surprise, coming from a terrorist organisation, but Government and Opposition Front Benchers seem to be relying on them. Can we have a debate in those circumstances on the accuracy of statistics used by His Majesty's Government?

Penny Mordaunt: My right hon. and learned Friend raises an important point. He should be reassured that those figures from the Ministry of Health in Gaza, which is run by Hamas, are only one data point that we use to assess the scale of the conflict and its implications for civilians. We need to ensure that we have the most accurate data, and we are collecting that from satellite imagery of building damage, information from our humanitarian partners on the ground and robust data on living conditions. Those are all fed into our assessment. It is a tragedy that is unfolding, and that is why we want to see a pause in fighting to get that aid in and to get hostages out.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-21/debates/453E470A-1229-4788-A6D1-E50C5A65A16E/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-6AC724FE-0C7D-4A87-A944-CE317E1F74E3>

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Arms Trade

Anum Qaisar (SNP) [18625] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the statement by Amnesty International UK and other NGOs entitled UK Groups say Government's Public Position on Weapons Licences to Israel is at odds with what the Government has Admitted in Litigation, and Calls for an Explanation, as Rafah Braces for Further Atrocities, published on 28 February 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government operates a robust and thorough assessment of licence applications against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, and we will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with those Criteria. We

regularly publish data on export licensing decisions on the dedicated gov.uk site:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-export-controls-licensing-data>
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18625>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/28/uk-governments-public-position-weapons-licences-israel-inconsistent-explanation>

Arms Trade: Israel

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [19485] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether there are pending applications for arms export licences for arms to Israel as of 19 March 2024.

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

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

The most recent Official Statistics cover the period 1 April - 30 June 2023.

Information regarding export licensing decisions made between 1 July – 30 September 2023 will be published after April 2024 and information regarding export licensing decisions made between 1 October – 31 March 2024 will be published later this year.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-19/19485>

UNRWA: Finance

Beth Winter (Labour) [18310] 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, column 133, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the capacity of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to sustain the population of Gaza through delivery of aid at current volumes until the UK's next payment to the agency is due in April.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK provided £35 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) this financial year, including an uplift of £16 million for the Gaza humanitarian response since 7 October, all of which was disbursed before the recent allegations came to light. No more UK funding is due this financial year. Our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response. We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands. The Foreign Secretary announced a further £10 million in aid funding for the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) on 13 March, bringing the total spend to over £100 million this financial year. Together with partners we are working to get aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18310>

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-34583222-7856-45A3-850A-B80061C4DB47>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

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

UNRWA: Finance

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [18514] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign,

Commonwealth and Development Office, what criteria he will use to decide whether to resume funding to UNRWA.

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.

Any future funding decisions will be taken after UNRWA's review has concluded. 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 and the wider region.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18514>

Gaza: Malnutrition

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [18272] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent steps his Department has taken to help tackle starvation and malnutrition on the Gaza strip.

Andrew Mitchell: Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis. It is crucial that we keep the flow of aid moving into Gaza to end the suffering. The Foreign Secretary has announced a further £10 million in aid funding for the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), bringing the total spend to over £100 million this financial year.

We are working with our partners to get aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air. This includes supporting the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza; air-dropping life-saving food and medicines directly to the Tal Al-Hawa hospital in northern Gaza in conjunction with Jordan; and, with Cyprus, the US, UAE and others, we will support the delivery of humanitarian aid by sea to a new temporary US military pier in Gaza, via a maritime corridor from Cyprus. As well as 150 tonnes of UK aid that entered Gaza 13th March, which included tents and hygiene supplies.

We are calling on Israel to increase access for aid through land routes and fully open Ashdod Port, scale up the Jordan corridor with a streamlined screening and delivery process, open a crossing in northern Gaza (Karni, Erez or a new crossing point), fully open Ashdod Port for aid delivery and increase screening capacity at Kerem Shalom and Nitzana to seven days a week and extended hours.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18272>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

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

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [18560] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to help ensure the safety of (a) international and (b) UK staff operating the UK-funded field hospital in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have underlined the need for Israel to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

We need a humanitarian pause now to allow humanitarian actors and Gazans to operate and move safely, and enable hostages to be released.

We need Israel to ensure effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys, humanitarian operations and IDP returns, and facilitate access.

Israel must ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, ensure there are effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys and humanitarian operations, and

ensure the UN has the people, vehicles, equipment and fuel to distribute aid safely across Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18560>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [18559] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how the UK's (a) field hospital and (b) other aid to Gaza will be coordinated with (i) local authorities and (ii) international organisations to ensure effective (A) delivery and (B) operation.

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [18561] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to monitor the effectiveness of the (a) UK-funded field hospital and (b) aid delivery in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: A full UK field hospital run by UK-Med has also arrived in Gaza and is now operational and providing life-saving care.

This facility can be adapted according to needs on the ground and usually includes a pharmacy, triage area, major injuries and resuscitation unit, and maternity care tent. This facility will be able to treat more than 100 patients a day. It will be staffed by both local health workers and international medics, including many from the UK, on the UK-Med Register.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18559>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18561>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [18562] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how his Department plans to use the additional £10 million in aid funding for the Occupied Palestinian Territories to help tackle immediate humanitarian needs in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The additional £10 million of funding for the Occupied Palestinian Territories announced by the Foreign Secretary on 13 March includes £5 million to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) Pooled Fund, core relief items, including 3,300 tents, and £3.5 million to UNICEF. This brings total UK support to over £100 million this financial year, including 150 tonnes of UK aid, including more than 13,000 blankets and 840 family-sized tents, which entered Gaza on the 13 March, and a full field hospital, provided by UK Aid funding to UK-Med, which is arriving in Gaza from Manchester.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-13/18562>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

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

Egypt: Gaza

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [18208] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with aid agencies on the Rafah crossing border with Egypt.

Andrew Mitchell: The FCDO is actively engaging with international partners and those operating on the ground to do all we can to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We are working to get aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air, funding multiple implementing partners including UN agencies and international and UK NGOs.

There is ongoing ministerial engagement with partners. The Foreign Secretary has also appointed a 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.

The Foreign Secretary has discussed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza with Prime Minister Netanyahu. He reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza, for Nitzana and Kerem Shalom to be open for longer, and for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18208>

Middle East: Armed Conflict

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [18207] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with Qatar on ending hostilities in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.

Andrew Mitchell: 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. This remains the focus of all our diplomatic effort.

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.

We remain in close contact with Qatari partners on all aspects of the conflict. The Foreign Secretary spoke to HE Dr. Mohammed Bin Abdulaziz Al-Khulaifi, Qatari Minister of state on 13 March in Cyprus to discuss advancing aid to Gaza, and also met with the HE Qatari Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani on 7 March to discuss the conflict in Gaza. The Foreign secretary also met HE Sheikh Mohammed and the Qatari Minister of International Cooperation HE Lolwah Rashid Al-Khater during his visit to Doha on 25 January and announced the first UK-Qatar joint consignment of aid to Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-12/18207>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Israel and Gaza

[The answer to a Commons Urgent Question](#) was read in the Lords.

Israel suffered the worst terrorist attack in its history on 7 October last year. The scenes that we saw on that day were appalling, and Hamas's disregard for civilian welfare continues today, more than five months later. We remember all the time those who are still being held hostage and their families, and we call once again for their immediate release. However, we naturally remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the impact of the conflict on all Palestinian civilians. ...

We are totally committed to getting humanitarian aid to all those people in Gaza who desperately need it, doing so either ourselves or through UN agencies and British or other

charities. ...

We have made it clear, however, that air and sea deliveries cannot be a substitute for the delivery of aid through land routes. Only through those routes can the demand for the volume of aid that is now required be met. We continue to press Israel to open more land crossings for longer, and with fewer screening requirements. ...

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, the Minister has told the House that the United Kingdom has stressed to the Israeli Government the importance of complying with the ICJ decision on provisional measures, making the point that it is central to the issue of humanitarian aid. Both the Minister and the Foreign Secretary have also stressed the importance of UNRWA in distributing aid, so why have we not accepted the recommendation of the OIOS inquiry's interim report to recommence payments to ensure that the aid, which is increasing, is properly distributed? What are we doing to speed up the broader review of UNRWA's activities and neutrality by Catherine Colonna? It would be good to hear that we are actively engaged in that, to ensure that we can get into Gaza the aid that is so desperately needed.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon): My Lords, I am sure I speak for everyone in your Lordships' House when I say that, following the 7 October attacks, we were all shocked and appalled by the allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in those attacks. Like many other countries—the US, Germany, Italy, Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands—we suspended funding. However, the noble Lord is right to raise the importance of the reports. We have spoken repeatedly—as has my noble friend—about the important role that UNRWA has played in providing aid and services. We have continued our support through other agencies, and the Foreign Secretary and I have been advocating very strongly for the opening up of new land access points to Gaza, which is showing progress. For example, we saw 185 trucks get through the Kerem Shalom crossing. ...

On the two reports ...we are following this very closely, but there are important measures and mitigations that need to be put in place. While we recognise the important role of UNRWA, we must ensure that any resumption of new funding to UNRWA from the United Kingdom is based on those mitigations being in place.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, the Minister is aware that I asked the Foreign Secretary last week about concerns over potential breaches of international humanitarian law. The Department for Business and Trade instigated a change of circumstances review for export licences for military equipment in December, and the significance of the concerns has only grown since then. Can the Minister confirm that this is probably the appropriate time for that review to err on the side of caution and for the UK to follow Canada in pausing the export licences for military equipment to the Government of Israel?

Secondly, given the concerns about two of the Ministers within the Netanyahu coalition—Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, against whom these Benches have called for actions to be taken—can the Minister update the House on discussions between the UK Government and the Israeli Government on a free trade agreement? Does he agree that it is probably not appropriate to continue discussions about a free trade agreement with those two Ministers at this time?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, the noble Lord will be fully aware that, as the Minister responsible, I called out the statements made by the two Ministers he named as inflammatory and not reflective of a majority of progressively minded and right-minded people and citizens of Israel across all communities who do not adhere to the statements made by those Ministers; we have rejected those words. The more substantive issue of IHL is important; we regularly review our assessment and we have previously assessed that Israel is complying with IHL. The noble Lord will have heard the words of my noble friend the Foreign Secretary about the

importance of this and, while we will not give a running commentary, we have to go through specific processes in this regard, and I assure him that we are seized of this.

Lord Pannick (Crossbench): My Lords, I thank the Minister for the support that he, the Foreign Secretary and the Government have given to the families of the hostages in Gaza. Will he please reconfirm that the Government are doing all they can to release these unfortunate people? Can he also make special efforts to try to secure the release of the remains of those hostages who have died in Gaza so that their families can give them a decent burial?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I can give the noble Lord both those assurances. This week my noble friend the Foreign Secretary has spoken directly to hostage families. I also met, for a second time, one of the mothers of the hostage families; he is not in his place, but I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Levy, for arranging that. It is important, and I assure the noble Lord and your Lordships' House that this is a key priority. That is why we need the fighting to stop now so that we can get the hostages returned and aid in. To his point on remains, I remember a very poignant meeting, together with my right honourable friend the Prime Minister, at which one of the relatives looked at me quite directly and said that irrespective of our faiths—I speak as a Muslim and she was of the Jewish faith—we all recognise the importance of closure, and we need to bring closure to the families of those tragically killed.

Viscount Hailsham (Conservative): My Lords, will my noble friend impress on his counterparts in the Israeli Government that, difficult though the two-state, or confederal, solution may be, it is by far the least bad of those that are available—not least because if the political aspirations of the Palestinian people are not met by such an approach, there will be no lasting peace?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I totally agree with my noble friend, and that is why we have impressed, and my noble friend the Foreign Secretary has made clear, that a key component of the key deliverables for a sustainable peace is a political horizon towards the two-state solution, which includes—as the Saudi Foreign Minister rightly said—irreversible steps to that solution. There is a real willingness and recognition of the need—I know that many in your Lordships' House who know the Palestinians and Israelis would agree—to ensure security, stability and peace between both peoples, and that can be delivered only through a viable two-state solution.

Baroness Blackstone (Labour): My Lords, I return to the funding of UNRWA. I found the Minister's response to my noble friend Lord Collins a little disappointing, given the concern that he and the Foreign Secretary have justifiably expressed about the urgency of getting humanitarian aid into Gaza and distributing it. Is he aware of just how much experience and expertise UNRWA has in this—far greater than any other group he could name? There are UNRWA people on the ground who can do the distribution. Is he also aware that our allies, Canada, Spain and others, who suspended funding to UNRWA have now restored it? What is preventing the UK Government restoring it and consistently pushing policies that will do something about the humanitarian disaster in Gaza?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I assure the noble Baroness that we are fully seized of our engagement with UNRWA. I have spoken several times to Philippe Lazzarini, the director of UNRWA, as has the Development Minister, and we will continue to engage directly on the importance of mitigations, as I outlined to the noble Lord, Lord Collins. I fully agree with the noble Baroness—I said it again today—about the important role that UNRWA has played; I have said from the Dispatch Box that it has been the backbone of the humanitarian operation in Gaza and continues to provide important support.

I will make two points, though. We have not suspended humanitarian support in

Gaza: additional money, now more than £100 million, continues to flow in. We have delivered over land, and the noble Baroness will know that we have also delivered through air and maritime routes. But we have been pressing the Israeli Government, with a degree of success and through working with the World Food Programme, for example, to ensure that aid is delivered, and we are working with other key partners on that. The important thing, as the UN and the Secretary-General recognise, is that those concerns, raised by the United Kingdom and others, allow UNRWA to move forward in a progressive way, with those important mitigations in place so that this chapter cannot be repeated.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (Crossbench): My Lords, the Minister helpfully referred to the report being made to the Security Council today by the Secretary-General's representative, Catherine Colonna. Will he share the report with Members of the House, perhaps in writing, when it becomes available to him? Given the imminence of the Easter Recess, will he tell the House before we go into recess what the Government's response to that report is?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As the noble Lord will know from his own time as an ambassador to the UN, the report being shared today is an interim report by the former Foreign Minister of France, Catherine Colonna. It is a UN product. Ultimately, as she has said, it is a report to the Secretary-General, and how its details are shared and briefed will be a matter for the Secretary-General.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-21/debates/41D8127F-10E7-4E1F-9F2D-BBBCF2DF7C10/IsraelAndGaza>

The International Court of Justice provisional measures (Order) referred to above can be read at
<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

Lord Purvis of Tweed's earlier question, referred to above, can be read at
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-12/debates/9A72BCFC-FE5F-4279-BD14-D3BEDC5F2E6B/GazaHumanitarianAid#contribution-E413518B-492B-4998-98A6-6C73CABF19AE>

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon's comments about Israeli Ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, referred to above, can be read at
<https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1742643978145800386>

Catherine Colonna's interim report, referred to above, has not been made public.

House of Lords Written Answers

Arms Trade: Israel

Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat) [HL3067] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have made any further assessment of the legality of licensing military equipment destined for Israel since the provisional measures order was issued by the International Court of Justice on 26 January.

Lord Johnson of Lainston: All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the UK's Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, including with regard to international humanitarian law.

The Government can and does respond quickly and flexibly to changing international circumstances. All licences are kept under careful and continual review as standard. We are able to amend, suspend or revoke extant licences and refuse new licence applications as circumstances require.

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade receives legal advice as appropriate, on all matters related to export licensing, as part of advice from officials.

Any legal advice received is subject to legal professional privilege and as such we

do not comment on legal advice that may or may not have been sought or received.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-06/hl3067>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Arms Trade: Israel

Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat) [HL3068] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they are considering suspending the licensing of military equipment to Israel if it conducts a ground offensive in Rafah.

Lord Johnson of Lainston: The Government takes its defence export responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world.

We continue to monitor closely the situation in Israel and Gaza, and if extant licences are found to be no longer consistent with the UK's Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, then those licences can be revoked, suspended or amended.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-06/hl3068>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Arms Trade: Israel

Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat) [HL3116] To ask His Majesty's Government, in the light of the recent decisions by the governments of Belgium, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands suspending the licensing of arms and military equipment to Israel, whether they will review the United Kingdom's Strategic Export Licensing Criteria and suspend the licensing of arms and military equipment to Israel.

Lord Offord of Garvel: The Government takes its defence export responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world.

The Government continue to monitor closely the situation in Israel and Gaza, and if extant licences are found to be no longer consistent with the UK Strategic Export Licensing Criteria (the SELC), then those licences can be revoked, suspended or amended.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/hl3116>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Gaza: Israel

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL3155] To ask His Majesty's Government, following the deaths of people in Gaza waiting for an aid convoy on 29 February, and the public statement on 1 March by the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs calling for "an urgent investigation and accountability", how many Gazans (1) died, or (2) were injured; and whether such an investigation is under way.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As the Foreign Secretary has said, the deaths of people in Gaza waiting for an aid convoy on 29 February were horrific. We have been clear that an urgent investigation and accountability are needed, and that this must not happen again.

We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law to be respected and civilians to be protected. A shocking number of civilians have been killed. The Foreign Secretary raised the above issues with Israeli Minister Benny Gantz on 6 March.

We are calling on Israel to increase access for aid through land routes and fully open Ashdod Port, scale up the Jordan corridor with a streamlined screening and delivery process, open a crossing in northern Gaza (Karni, Erez or a new crossing

point), fully open Ashdod Port for aid delivery and increase screening capacity at Kerem Shalom and Nitzana to seven days a week and extended hours.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-08/hl3155>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-statement-the-deaths-of-people-in-gaza-waiting-for-an-aid-convoy>

Gaza: Aid Workers

The Earl of Sandwich (Crossbench) [HL3128] To ask His Majesty's Government how many aid workers from UNRWA and other agencies have (1) died, and (2) been injured, in the course of aid distribution and the provision of essential services in Gaza to date.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: A shocking number of Palestinian civilians have been killed or injured. We want Israel to stop harming civilians and destroying homes.

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 need the fighting to stop immediately to allow humanitarian actors and Gazans to operate and move safely, and enable hostages to be released.

We need Israel to ensure effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys, humanitarian operations and IDP [internally displaced person] returns, and facilitate access.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-07/hl3128>

Bassem Abudagga

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL3157] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking in the case of the Palestinian academic Bassem Abudagga, currently studying for his PhD at York St John University, to expedite the visa application process so that his wife and two young children can come from Gaza to the UK.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: We strive to conclude cases within the published guidance and information on study processing times and service standards can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visa-decision-waiting-times-applications-outside-the-uk#faster>

Unfortunately, UKVI cannot comment on individual cases or provide information regarding UK visa applications via this channel.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-08/hl3157>

Norwegian Refugee Council: Finance

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL3147] To ask His Majesty's Government how much they donated to the Norwegian Refugee Council in 2022 and 2023, and how much they expect to provide to the Council in 2024, for its work in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK currently provides funding to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) for projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territories including in the West Bank and East Jerusalem through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The CSSF is a National Security Council led approach to UK effort in fragile and conflict-affected states. We are not currently supporting NRC work in Gaza.

The UK has committed the following funding to the NRC in the financial years below:

FY 22-23 - £3.07 million

FY 23-24 - £ 3.68 million

FY 24-25 - £ 2.7 million

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-08/hl3147>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We voted yes on the need for an immediate and sustained ceasefire to protect civilians in Gaza: UK statement at the UN Security Council

... The United Kingdom voted yes on the text before us this morning.

We voted yes on the need for an immediate and sustained ceasefire to protect civilians, allow humanitarian aid in and alleviate suffering.

We voted yes on the call for international humanitarian law to be upheld. For the release of hostages. To reject forced displacement. And to urge against a ground offensive into Rafah.

President, Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis which will not improve until more aid can get into Gaza.

So, we are deeply disappointed that Russia and China were unable to support this Council to clearly and unequivocally state the need for an immediate and sustained ceasefire to that end.

Through this resolution the Security Council would have rightly, and for the first time, unequivocally condemned Hamas' terrorist attacks.

We are disappointed that the Council was not able to send this important message, due to the vetoes cast by Russia and China.

We welcome the patient and constructive consultation by the United States on this text.

For our part, we will continue to do everything we can to get aid into Gaza, as quickly as possible, by land, sea, and air.

But an immediate stop in the fighting is the only way to get the aid into Gaza that is so desperately needed and make progress towards a permanent, sustainable ceasefire.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-voted-yes-on-the-need-for-an-immediate-and-sustained-ceasefire-to-protect-civilians-in-gaza-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

David Cameron and Gaza expert answer your questions on Israel and Gaza crisis [video]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKIWqMH3FAU> Research and statistics calendar'

Trades Union Congress (TUC)

UK government must stop trade talks with Israel to support peace in the Middle East

On 18 March, the TUC wrote to Business and Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch in response to the [news](#) that the UK continues to be in active trade talks with Israel.

The government concluded the latest round at the end of February.

The TUC believes trade negotiations must be used to ensure respect for human rights and international law.

We have longstanding policy on [Palestinian rights](#).

Since the UK launched trade talks on an updated trade agreement with Israel in March 2022, the TUC has [consistently](#) stated it does not believe the government should engage in these negotiations, given Israel's persistent violation of international law, UN resolutions and systematic violations of Palestinian labour and human rights.

In light of the Israeli government's military operations in Gaza in recent months where these violations have intensified, our letter calls for the government to:

- end trade talks with Israel
- end arms sales and military collaboration
- end the UK's trade in goods from the Occupied Palestinian Territories

On 26 January the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found it 'plausible' that Israel's acts could amount to genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza and issued binding

provisional measures.

The UK government has an obligation as a party to the Genocide Convention to take measures to prevent genocide. It is therefore incumbent on the government to ensure Israel acts in accordance with the ICJ ruling.

Our letter follows the [TUC's General Council statement](#) unequivocally condemning the shocking attacks on Israeli civilians by Hamas, calling for the immediate, unconditional release of all hostages unharmed, and calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

In February the TUC [wrote to](#) the Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron calling for an immediate ceasefire accompanied by a political process. It expressed disappointment the UK government had so far failed to support such a ceasefire.

The TUC calls on the government to support genuine efforts towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace that is consistent with international law, and is based on a two-state solution, which promotes equality, democracy and respect for human and labour rights.

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/uk-government-must-stop-trade-talks-israel-support-peace-middle-east>

United Nations

Security Council Fails to Adopt Resolution on Imperative of Immediate, Sustained Ceasefire in Gaza, Owing to Vetoes Cast by China, Russian Federation

... The Security Council ... failed to adopt a resolution that would have determined the imperative of an immediate and sustained ceasefire in Gaza due to a veto cast by two permanent members of the Council — China and the Russian Federation — while some speakers criticized the text for being ambiguous and lacking attribution to the Israeli authorities in several key areas.

If adopted, the resolution — presented by the United States — would have also urged all parties to allow and facilitate the rapid and unhindered passage of humanitarian relief to all civilians in need.

By other terms, it would have emphasized its concern that a ground offensive into Rafah would result in further harm to civilians and their further displacement. Also, it would have rejected any attempt at demographic or territorial change in Gaza. ...

“It would be a historic mistake for this Council not to adopt this text (which) does much more than call for a ceasefire, it helps to make a ceasefire possible,” stated **the representative of the United States** before the vote. ... By adopting the text, the international community can put pressure on Hamas to accept the deal on the table, she said, adding that every day without a deal — without a ceasefire — leads to more needless suffering. “We want to see an immediate and sustained ceasefire as part of a deal that leads to the release of all hostages being held by Hamas and other groups and which will allow much more humanitarian aid into Gaza,” she asserted.

The speaker for the Russian Federation countered that the United States, four times “in cold blood”, cast a veto in the Security Council, with repeated justifications. “Now the US representative — without blinking — has been asserting that Washington has finally begun to recognize the need for a ceasefire,” he stated — a sluggish thought process that has cost the lives of 32,000 peaceful Palestinians. ... However, to save the lives of peaceful Palestinian civilians, “this is not enough”, he stressed. ...

Those voting in favour would “cover (themselves) in disgrace,” he stated. If adopted, the resolution would definitively close the door on discussions about the need for a ceasefire in Gaza. ...

Speaking after the vote, **the representative of the United States** ... stressed that, while those States will attempt to explain their obstruction, they voted against the draft for two cynical reasons — “whether or not they will admit it”. The first is that they could not bring

themselves to condemn Hamas' 7 October attacks, and the second — “not just cynical, but petty” — is that they did not want to vote for a resolution penned by the United States. ...

The speaker for China observed that the United States introduced its own draft resolution after vetoing on 20 February the overwhelming consensus among Council members for an immediate ceasefire. Over the past month, the draft has undergone several iterations, yet the final text remains ambiguous and does not demand an immediate ceasefire — nor does it even answer the question of realizing a ceasefire — a clear deviation from the consensus of Council members. ...

Numerous Council Members supported the text.

Among them was **the speaker for France who** — calling for the unconditional release of all hostages and an immediate, lasting ceasefire — stressed that the Council must act as the “catastrophic” humanitarian situation in Gaza worsens by the day. Citing respect for international law as an “absolute requirement”, he opposed any Israeli offensive in Rafah, which can only lead to a humanitarian disaster. ...

Also recognizing the need for an immediate and sustained ceasefire, **his counterpart from the United Kingdom** said ... Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis, which will not improve until more aid can get into Gaza. ... [\[click here to read this speech in greater detail\]](#)

“It is regrettable that another opportunity for this Council to forge a favourable response has failed to draw a consensus,” said **the speaker for the Republic of Korea** ... The draft resolution includes positive elements that can plant the seeds for more sustainable peace in Palestine and Israel, including support for the ongoing negotiations to achieve the release of hostages and an immediate ceasefire. ...

The speaker for Malta expressed regret that the use of the veto prevented today's adoption, which would have represented “another important step in the right direction” ... An immediate, permanent ceasefire is the only way to prevent further deterioration and begin addressing the impacts of the Israel-Hamas war. ... Underscoring that the Council “cannot be perceived to authorize any ongoing or future Israeli military operations in Rafah in any way”, she said that the draft should have had “stronger and more reassuring language” on this matter. ...

Switzerland's delegate said that “right up until the last minute” her delegation called for the text to be brought closer to an explicit request for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. ...

The representative of Japan ... spoke ... to observe that Gaza is on the brink of famine and that a looming Israeli military operation in Rafah only threatens to deepen the humanitarian catastrophe. “This should not proceed under any circumstances,” he underscored. ... A deal must be concluded as soon as possible, he said, stressing: “Those in Gaza and beyond cannot wait another day.”

For his part, **Israel's delegate** expressed gratitude to the United States and its determination to “condemn the Hamas monsters” and its conviction that the release of the hostages “is not something that can be postponed” ... The resolution, had it passed, would have marked a moment of morality for the UN, the very first time that the Council or any UN body had condemned Hamas and its brutal massacre. “Yet sadly, for purely political reasons, this resolution did not pass and terrorists can continue benefiting from this Council whitewashing their crimes,” he stated. The Council's decision to not condemn Hamas “is a stain that will never be forgotten”. He noted that the numbers of civilian casualties supplied by the terrorists “are quoted as if they are the word of God” — yet these numbers are merely the lies of Hamas that the UN is so quick to parrot.

He stated that Hamas knows that it cannot defeat Israel militarily, so its goal is to annihilate Israel by terrorizing its civilians while weaponizing the international community, using Gazans as human shields to maximize civilian casualties. “Please remember: for Israel, every civilian death is a tragedy; for Hamas, civilian deaths are a strategy,” he stated —

and sadly the Council is “playing into Hamas’ strategy exactly as they predicted”. Israel is a law-abiding democracy, making every effort to minimize collateral damage, taking steps that no other military in any other conflict has ever taken. The conflict bears the lowest civilian-to-combatant ratio in the history of urban warfare, he said, condemning the “libelous narrative of famine in Gaza” and affirming there is no limit to humanitarian aid allowed into Gaza. No country seeks to avoid an operation in Rafah more than Israel, but “you cannot put out a fire by extinguishing most of it” ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15637.doc.htm>

Secretary-General's press encounter with the Foreign Minister of Egypt

... Egypt is a global pillar of peace – and today I had the opportunity to discuss a number of vital issues with both President Sisi and the Foreign Minister Shoukry.

This includes the dire conditions in Gaza, but also the volatile situation in the occupied West Bank, and issues affecting the broader Middle East, Sudan and beyond. ...

And immense sadness came when we were having our Iftar close to the Nile, to know that many, probably the majority, of the people in Gaza were not able to have a proper Iftar.

Yesterday I travelled to the Rafah crossing to put a global spotlight on the plight of Palestinian children, women and men struggling to survive the nightmare in Gaza.

The whole world recognizes that it’s past time to silence the guns and to ensure an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

I also had an unforgettable visit with injured Palestinians from Gaza at the Al Arish hospital who are recovering from wounds from the brutal war – and I thank Egypt’s generosity here as well.

Let me be clear. Nothing justifies the abhorrent October 7 Hamas attacks and hostage-taking in Israel.

But nothing justifies the collective punishment of the Palestinian people. ...

Al Arish airport and the Rafah crossing are essential arteries for life-saving aid into Gaza.

But those arteries are clogged.

On one side of the border there are blocked humanitarian trucks as far as the eye can see.

On the other, we have a real-time humanitarian catastrophe stretching even farther.

Looking at Gaza, it almost appears that the four horsemen of war, famine, conquest and death are galloping across it.

That is why the time for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire is now.

And in the Ramadan spirit of compassion, I also urge the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

The suffering must end.

Palestinians in Gaza desperately need what has been promised -- a flood of aid.

Not trickles. Not drops.

Some progress has been made, but much more needs to be done.

Making that happen takes very practical steps.

It requires Israel removing the remaining obstacles and chokepoints to relief.

It requires more crossings and access points. All alternative routes are – of course - welcome. But the only efficient and effective way to move heavy goods is by road.

It requires an exponential increase in commercial goods.

And, I repeat, it requires an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

The current horrors in Gaza serve no one – and are having an impact around the globe.

The daily assault on the human dignity of Palestinians is creating a crisis of credibility for the international community.

It is challenging the values we proclaim as universal.

It is challenging international law.

It is challenging core humanitarian principles.
It is challenging our basic humanity. ...

To read the full transcript

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2024-03-24/secretary-generals-press-encounter-the-foreign-minister-of-egypt-qa-follow>

Gaza: UN aid team reaches stricken north, confirms ‘shocking’ disease and hunger

Amid reports of ongoing bombardment across Gaza on Friday, UN humanitarians highlighted “shocking levels of disease and hunger” after visiting an overwhelmed hospital in the north of the enclave.

The UN’s top aid official in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jamie McGoldrick, reached Kamal Adwan hospital in Beit Lahia on Thursday, where children with the most severe and life-threatening hunger are being treated at a new World Health Organization-supported specialised feeding facility.

“Without swift treatment, these children are at imminent risk of death,” UN aid coordination office, OCHA, [said](#), in a call for all parties to the conflict to respect the laws of war and international humanitarian law. “Civilians and the infrastructure they rely on – including hospitals – must be protected,” the UN agency insisted.

Fuel and medical supplies were delivered to Kamal Adwan hospital, “but aid is just a trickle”, said the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA. “Food needs to reach the north NOW to avert famine,” ...

In a related development, media reports indicated that the Israeli military raid at Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City was continuing for a fifth straight day.

Al Shifa – which is Gaza’s largest health centre - only recently restored “minimal” services, OCHA said, adding that “hostilities in and around the facility” have put patients, medical teams and treatment in jeopardy.

“People in Gaza – particularly in the north – are experiencing shocking levels of disease and hunger. We and our humanitarian partners continue to do everything we can to meet the overwhelming needs of the civilian population,” OCHA insisted.

In a [video](#) on X, OCHA Head of Sub-Office in Gaza, Georgios Petropoulos, underscored the difficulties of accessing northern Gaza with food or medical supplies, because of ongoing aid constraints.

To reach the north from the south, aid teams have to pass through Israeli military checkpoints that cut the Strip in two.

“One of the biggest problems we have in Gaza is the inability to get between north and south Gaza,” Mr; Petropoulos said, describing how on a recent mission finding 75 to 80-year-old man alone and “covered with dust”, sitting down in the road. “We picked him up, we gave him some water, we put him in the back of our car and just drove him a few hundred metres up the road until we found a family of people that were on the street.”

“We’re calling on everyone to respect civilians trying to flee war,” Mr. Petropoulos said.

Echoing that message, OCHA reiterated that aid teams continue to be “repeatedly prevented from doing our job, especially in the besieged north”.

Ongoing violence “unceasing bombardments” and the collapse of civil order in addition to access constraints “continue to impede the humanitarian response”, the UN aid coordination office insisted. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147861>

TOP

International Law: Arms Trade

Brendan O'Hara (SNP) [19074] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a scrutiny body within his Department that is tasked with assessing the consequences of individual arms licences on the Government's international legal obligations.

Leo Docherty: The Government takes its defence export responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world. We examine each new application on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. The Criteria maintain the UK's high standards on counter proliferation and give effect to the UK's international obligations and commitments.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-18/19074>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Arms Trade: Export Controls

Brendan O'Hara (SNP) [19075] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what account of ongoing geopolitical fragility his Department takes in considering applications for licences for the export of arms to states in sensitive areas.

Leo Docherty: The Strategic Export Licensing Criteria provide a thorough risk assessment framework for export licence applications and require us to think hard about the impact of providing equipment and its capabilities. We consider a range of factors, including examining the political and security conditions in the destination country, the nature of the equipment to be exported, the organisation or unit which will ultimately be the user of the equipment, and all available information about how similar equipment has been used in the past and how it is likely to be used in the future. We can and do respond quickly and flexibly to changing or fluid international situations. We take the principles of responsible export control set out in the Criteria incredibly seriously.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-18/19075>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Arms Trade: Export Controls

Brendan O'Hara (SNP) [19076] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what account of the risk of atrocity crimes being committed by states his Department takes in considering applications for licences for the export of arms to such states.

Leo Docherty: All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. The Criteria provide a thorough risk assessment framework. All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, which includes Criterion 2, covering respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country of final destination, as well as respect by that country for international humanitarian law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-18/19076>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Arms Trade: Export Controls

Brendan O'Hara (SNP) [19077] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department (a) makes an assessment of the potential impact on observance of international humanitarian law and (b) communicates that assessment to the Department for Business and Trade before the grant of an arms licence.

Leo Docherty: The Government operates a robust and thorough assessment of licence applications against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria and we will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with that Criteria. The FCDO advises DBT on the situation in country and the risks this poses with respect to the UK's export control responsibilities and specifically on criterion two which includes respect by that country for international humanitarian law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-18/19077>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Arms Trade: Export Controls

Brendan O'Hara (SNP) [19078] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has discussions with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade on the risk of a state not complying with orders from international courts in the decision process for the grant of an arms licence.

Leo Docherty: The Government takes its defence export responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world. Licence applications are assessed against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria and we will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with that Criteria.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-18/19078>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

Iain Duncan Smith (Conservative) [18633] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for what reason the Government has not proscribed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps; and what discussions he has had with his US counterpart on that issue.

Tom Tugendhat: While the UK Government keeps the list of proscribed organisations under review, we do not routinely comment on whether an organisation is or is not being considered for proscription.

The UK Government has long been clear about our concerns over the malign activity of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The UK maintains sanctions on over 400 Iranian individuals and entities covering human rights abuses and nuclear proliferation. The Government has also imposed sanctions on the IRGC in its entirety and on several senior security and political figures in Iran, including senior commanders within the IRGC and its Basij force.

The UK Government, working with the US, has engaged closely with European partners on Iranian transnational threats and we will continue to hold Iran and the IRGC to account. On 24 January 2024, we took coordinated action with the US and imposed sanctions on several members of the IRGC for their involvement in plots to assassinate individuals on UK soil.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-14/18633>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

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

**** Criminal Justice Bill**

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

Amendment paper

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0155/amend/criminal_rm_rep_0325.pdf

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

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

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

Amendment papers

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54766/documents/4595>

and

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54820/documents/4604>

and

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54868/documents/4614>

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>

Second Reading, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-22/debates/387CB458-D958-4F67-8A51-D932A73974C2/Genocide\(PreventionAndResponse\)Bill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-22/debates/387CB458-D958-4F67-8A51-D932A73974C2/Genocide(PreventionAndResponse)Bill(HL))

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>

TOP

Consultations

** new or updated today

** European Commission: 1st progress report of the EU antisemitism strategy

(closing date 19 April 2024)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14204-1st-progress-report-of-the-EU-antisemitism-strategy_en

TOP

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