



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Other Relevant Information

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

SCoJeC is incurring significant extra costs as a result of the war in Israel and Gaza, including producing expanded issues of this digest. Please help us maintain these resources by donating at

www.scojec.org/donate.html

Thank you very much for your support.



Home Affairs

House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Counter-extremism Centre of Excellence

Alicia Kearns (Conservative) [19976] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which Department the new counter-extremism centre of excellence will sit under.

Alicia Kearns (Conservative) [19976] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps the new counter-extremism centre of excellence will take to collaborate with the (a) Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and (b) Home Office on existing counter terrorism (i) programmes and (ii) operations.

Lee Rowley: The new counter-extremism centre of excellence will be housed within the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

DLUHC is working with the Home Office, as well as several other Government departments, to tackle extremism head-on. The new centre of excellence will act as a world-leading authority on best practice, data and research and provide leadership for departments' operationalisation and implementation of the new extremism definition, cross-government standards and extremism-related due diligence process. It will also become home to new counter-extremism assessment and analytical functions and capabilities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-21/19976>

and

BBC Arabic Service

Michael Ellis (Conservative) [19345] To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions she has held with the BBC on the appearance of Major General Wasef Eriqat on BBC Arabic.

Julia Lopez: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Ministerial team regularly meets with BBC leadership, including members of the Board, to discuss a range of issues.

The BBC has a duty to provide accurate and impartial news and information. In delivering that duty, the BBC is editorially and operationally independent and decisions around its editorial policies and guidelines are a matter for the BBC. Ofcom is the external independent regulator responsible for ensuring BBC coverage is duly impartial and accurate under the Broadcasting Code and BBC Charter.

The Secretary of State has repeatedly made clear that the BBC's accuracy and impartiality is critical to viewer trust. It is particularly important when it comes to coverage of highly sensitive events, such as the terrorist acts committed in Israel on 7 October and the ongoing conflict in Gaza. The Secretary of State has regularly stated that point in meetings with the BBC.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-19/19345>

TOP

Israel

See also Commons written answer 19345 "BBC Arabic Service" that is included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Israel and Gaza

col 1393 **The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Andrew Mitchell):** ... As the House knows, the United Kingdom has long been calling for an immediate humanitarian pause to allow for the safe release of hostages and more aid to reach Gaza, leading to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

Yesterday, the international community took a significant step towards achieving that. We welcome yesterday's United Nations Security Council resolution 2728, which reflected widespread international support for Britain's position and considerable efforts by our diplomats to secure a consensus. ...

We want to see an immediate, sustained humanitarian pause, which would allow for the safe release of hostages and more aid to reach Gaza. That is what yesterday's resolution called for, why the United Kingdom voted "yes" on that text, and why the Government are now focused on seeing the resolution implemented as quickly as possible. This resolution sets out the urgent demand for the "unconditional release of all hostages".

Hamas must act on this now. The kidnapping and violence on 7 October was appalling. It has been unconscionable to hold them in captivity for so long, and it is dreadful to hold them any longer. ...

Yesterday's resolution also sent a clear message on the need for all parties to the conflict to uphold international humanitarian law and for delivery of aid to be scaled up urgently.

This requires the lifting of all barriers impeding its delivery.

Palestinian civilians face a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. His Majesty's Government continue to reiterate these messages in their contacts with the Israeli Government, and the Government are exploring every avenue to deliver aid by land, sea and air. ...

We regret that this resolution did not condemn the abhorrent and brutal terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October. The UK condemns these attacks unequivocally. We have been forthright in speaking up for Israel's right to defend itself and ensure such an attack can never happen again. We want Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security. ...

col 1394 We continue to work on the other core elements required for such a process to succeed. We have supported the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the west bank and Gaza under the leadership of Prime Minister Mustafa. An international support package is vital for building on Prime Minister Mustafa's appointment. We also want to see the removal of Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel. Hamas can no longer remain in charge of Gaza. Finally, we need to offer a political horizon to the Palestinians that provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. ...

David Lammy (Labour): ... Yesterday, the UN Security Council finally passed resolution 2728 calling for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages and full humanitarian access in Gaza. That was incredibly welcome and overdue. ...

Labour welcomes, too, the fact that the Government were able to support the resolution. It represents a major shift in Government policy, which previously called only for an immediate pause rather than an immediate ceasefire. ... what steps are the Government taking to ensure that the UN resolution is implemented in full, putting pressure on Hamas—who reportedly rejected the latest compromise—and Israel to reach agreement on a ceasefire now? ...

Aid needs to get into Gaza at scale, and it also needs to be distributed. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency is unmatched in its ability to distribute aid. With just a few weeks until the new financial year, can the Minister tell us whether the UK's funding to UNRWA will resume?

The UN motion also said that all parties must "comply with their obligations under international law". In that context, I will raise a specific incident with the Minister. On 18 January, an International Rescue Committee and Medical Aid for Palestinians compound was struck in a near-fatal airstrike by the Israeli military. The co-ordinates were known to Israel and formally de-conflicted. A British medical team and local staff were inside, who, since then, have received six explanations for that shocking incident, but the truth is still unclear. Will the Government support a full and independent investigation to deliver accountability and reiterate that attacks on humanitarian workers are outrageous and must not happen?

col 1395 The Foreign Secretary ... is required to provide legal advice to the Business Secretary on arms exports. The law is clear that the Government cannot grant a licence if there is a clear risk that the items could be used in violation of international humanitarian law. The war in Gaza has seen numerous allegations made of serious breaches of humanitarian law by Israeli forces ...

... has the Foreign Secretary received legal advice saying that there is a clear risk that items licensed by the UK might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law? The answer is a simple yes or no.

Andrew Mitchell: ... the House may rest assured that we will be doing everything we can to ensure that [the resolution] is indeed implemented in full. ...

... yesterday's resolution represents a tremendous success for British diplomacy. It means that the European Union, the United Nations and the United States now take our position on the priorities. ...

The right hon. Member asks me about UNRWA. I can tell him that the interim report by the former French Foreign Minister, Catherine Colonna—the final report is not due until 20 April—is now with the Secretary-General in New York ...

The right hon. Member refers to a specific strike, which the House has already heard about, and I agree with him entirely that we expect a full, total and definitive explanation for what happened from the Israeli Government. He asks me about arms export licensing. Let me give him a very clear response to that: we have a robust arms export licensing regime. All exports are regularly assessed against clear criteria. We regularly review Israel's adherence to international humanitarian law and act in accordance with that. ...

col 1396 Alicia Kearns (Conservative): Yesterday the UN Security Council passed a resolution for a Ramadan ceasefire—in effect, a pause. Intrinsic to that pause was the release of hostages. Can the deputy Foreign Secretary please update us on progress to get those hostages home to safety, because the resolution was very clear that that should happen immediately? Who is enforcing the immediate release of hostages? Can he also clarify whether the Government agree with the US statement this morning that the UN Security Council resolution is non-binding? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we regret that the resolution has not condemned terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October, but I want to re-emphasise that all the things that Britain has previously been calling for are now accepted and were recorded in that resolution. ...

Brendan O'Hara (SNP): ... We very much welcome the UN Security Council resolution, which demands an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan. ...

That this motion specifically demands a ceasefire makes it legally binding, and it obliges all combatants to adhere to it, yet already there is significant concern that Israel does not intend to comply with the demands. ...

Israel, as we know, has form for ignoring binding resolutions of the United Nations, but rarely can it have done so in such a blatant manner and with such a complete disregard for the rules on which we all rely to keep us safe.

col 1397 Given that Israel has signalled its intention to ignore the demand for a ceasefire, and rather than waiting for the inevitable to happen before acting, can the Minister assure the House that, if and when Israel launches its proposed offensive on Rafah, the work will already have been done to impose immediate sanctions, including, most importantly, the banning of arms sales to Israel, and that Tel Aviv will be under no illusion as to the consequences of its actions should it ignore this resolution? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... the Government want to try to bring people together. We want to end the violence as soon as we can, ensure that the hostages get out and aid gets in, and lift people's eyes to a political track once this catastrophe is over. ...

In respect of military action in Rafah, the hon. Member will have heard what the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister and I have said about the importance of respecting international humanitarian law and the position of civilians caught out in the open there, and I hope that he will agree with that.

Michael Ellis (Conservative): The terrorist attack of 7 October on Israel has provoked widespread antisemitism in this country and around the world. The latest manifestation of that was at Manchester airport yesterday when Border Force guards made it apparent that they do not want Israeli Jews to enter this country. Two innocent victims of the music festival slaughter were berated and told: "We have to make sure that you are not going to do what you are doing in Gaza over here."

That was to two victims of the Nova music festival slaughter. Blaming all Jews for the actions of their country is obviously antisemitic. These are people in uniform acting for this country as Border Force officers. It is a disgrace beyond all proportion. The detention of those victims for several hours was clearly unlawful.

col 1398 They are being offered free legal representation, which I would urge them to take

up. Can the deputy Foreign Secretary confirm that Jews and Israelis are still welcome to enter this country?

Andrew Mitchell: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his extremely robust comments on an absolutely outrageous, shocking and disgraceful incident, which is now being personally investigated by the Home Secretary. I think everyone will condemn without reservation the extraordinary events that appear to have taken place at Manchester, which were made even worse by the details that my right hon. and learned Friend gave of the detention that took place.

Sarah Champion (Labour): I feel very uncomfortable about the Minister's comments about taking credit for the UN Security Council resolution when the UK abstained twice in the process. ... Given the rapidly deteriorating situation in Gaza, does he agree that it is vital that the Cabinet Minister responsible for overseas aid makes himself available to this House for scrutiny? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... She asks about the member of the Cabinet responsible for British aid and development policy: that is me. Both I and the Foreign Secretary speak with one voice.

Alec Shelbrooke (Conservative): A lot of points will be made today arguing that responsibility for the ceasefire lies purely with Israel, but that is simply not true. A ceasefire must take place on all sides. Those who want Israel to lay down its arms but do not insist on Hamas laying down theirs are basically saying that Israel does not have the right to ensure that its security is in place. Until Hamas dismantle their terrorist organisation, which threatens the lives of Jewish people, who they do not think should exist—they do not think the state of Israel should exist—we must ensure that any ceasefire is observed by both sides of this coin.

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. ... He will recall that, when asked about a ceasefire, Hamas made it absolutely clear that their intention was not only to not have a ceasefire, but to replicate once again the terrible events that took place on 7 October.

col 1399 **Andy McDonald (Labour):** The Minister has said on numerous occasions that the UK has a robust export licensing regime. ... Will he finally tell us what the legal advice is on whether this country is in compliance with our obligations under international humanitarian law to ensure that those arms are not used to commit offences in Gaza?

Andrew Mitchell: ... On the arms export licensing and the application of international humanitarian law, I set out the Government's position clearly ... I have nothing further to add ...

Matthew Offord (Conservative): The UN resolution has undermined efforts to secure the release of the hostages held by Hamas, with a collapse in negotiations only today. Hamas have reiterated their hard-line positions, which were previously criticised by the United Kingdom. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the resolution will not only embolden Hamas, who hope to achieve a ceasefire without releasing the hostages, but enable them to maintain their grip on the people of Gaza?

Andrew Mitchell: ... I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the explanation of vote that was published at the same time as Britain supported the resolution yesterday. We said: "We regret that this resolution has not condemned the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on the 7th of October. The UK condemns these attacks unequivocally." ...

Julie Elliott (Labour): What is the Government's response to Israel shutting off north Gaza to UNRWA, the only aid organisation with the ability to deliver aid at scale? When will the Government reinstate funding to UNRWA to stop and alleviate the starvation of Gazans?

Andrew Mitchell: We have made it clear that we will look at the interim report from Catherine Colonna, and the United Nations reports. We hope that reforms will be made in such a way that we can reinstate funding, but I should emphasise to the hon. Lady that no funding is due from Britain until the end of April. In respect of her

point about the spread of UNRWA, it is the only organisation that has the assets in place—the warehouses, the vehicles, the logistical support—so it is essential that those logistical elements are available if aid is to be distributed effectively in Gaza.

col 1400 **Theresa Villiers (Conservative):** Constituents have been in touch to tell me that they feel badly let down by the vote at the UN yesterday. I just do not understand how the Minister and the Foreign Secretary can say that nothing has changed in policy terms when the UK has just voted for a resolution that does not condemn the Hamas atrocity of 7 October, and de-links a ceasefire with the release of hostages. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... The resolution sets out the urgent demand for the unconditional release of all hostages. ... [we] regret that the resolution did not once again condemn the terrorist attack, but she has heard us say repeatedly from the Dispatch Box that we do condemn it.

Afzal Khan (Labour): Over the past week, we have seen Israel continue to commit atrocities across Gaza, with the Al-Shifa Hospital besieged for several days. Medical staff from inside the hospital reported gun battles, workers being beaten, patients dying on the floor, and even execution-style killings. ...

Andrew Mitchell: The House will not recognise all of the things that the hon. Gentleman has just said. Let me make it absolutely clear once again: Israel does have the right of self-defence, but she must abide by international humanitarian law.

Tobias Ellwood (Conservative): ... Does the deputy Foreign Secretary agree that it is concerning that vital UK aid has to be airdropped into Gaza by the Royal Air Force, effectively bypassing Israel? Should the new port being built off Gaza to operate the new maritime corridor become a permanent operation with inspections, allowing the international community to ensure that the scale of aid required gets into Gaza?

Andrew Mitchell: ... He is right that the best way to get aid into Gaza is by truck—by road—and that is what Britain has consistently pressed for. We know that there were 500 trucks a day before the catastrophe of 7 October. There has been an increase in March, but we are now looking at something like 150 a day. ... We anticipate that further airdrops will be necessary because of the situation he has outlined.

col 1401 **Munira Wilson (Liberal Democrat):** ... the reality is that northern Gaza is on the brink of famine, with children dying of malnutrition, and tens of thousands of children are being killed or maimed by Israeli forces' bombardment. Does the Minister believe that Netanyahu's Government are complying with the International Court of Justice's provisional order, which states that Israel must ensure with immediate effect that its forces do not commit any of the acts prohibited by the genocide convention? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we respect the role and independence of the ICJ, but we do not believe, and have never believed, that the case launched now will be helpful in bringing the two parties together. She will know that the court has called for the immediate release of the hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza, and we strongly agree with that. ...

David Jones (Conservative): ... In northern Gaza, it is estimated that some 70% of the population are suffering the most appalling food shortages and are resorting to eating animal feed, bird seed and grass. Does the Minister not recognise that respected international partners such as Australia, Canada, Sweden and Denmark have now restored full funding to UNRWA ... Does he not think that the United Kingdom should also do so as quickly as possible ...?

Andrew Mitchell: At the moment, Britain does not have a requirement to provide extra money, because we have fully funded UNRWA through our commitment to that organisation up until the next financial year ...

col 1402 **Beth Winter (Labour):** ... In the past hour, news agencies have reported that the Israeli National Security Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, has told Israeli Army Radio that, "We

must enter Rafah now". Surely this announcement that a military assault will be undertaken on an area of 1.7 million displaced people is a breach of a binding UN Security Council resolution and of international law. The Minister must urgently set out what action he will consider to prevent the Israeli armed forces taking such action. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... She has quoted a specific Israeli Minister, but she will know that there are many voices in Israel at this time. Israel is a pluralist democracy—the only one in the region—and we are hearing many different voices. ...

Greg Smith (Conservative): ... only a few weeks ago, the UK explained at the UN that it could not vote for a resolution that does not condemn the atrocities Hamas committed, and that simply calling for a ceasefire would not make one happen. It even said last month that such a resolution "could endanger the hostage negotiations".

As night follows day, the resolution was passed yesterday, and the Israelis have had to withdraw their negotiators due to what they have described as "delusional demands" from Hamas. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... The British position has always been very clear: we want a pause that enables the hostages to come out and enables food and vital humanitarian supplies to come in. ...

Jess Phillips (Labour): The deputy Foreign Secretary stated earlier that he will expect a full explanation from Israel of the incident that was highlighted by [David Lammy]. That incident happened on 18 January, and ... Alicia Kearns and I raised it with the Minister around eight weeks ago. I have also been to the UN in the past few weeks and raised it with diplomats there. When can we expect an explanation of why British aid agencies have been bombed by Israel, potentially using weapons provided in part by us? ...

col 1403 Andrew Mitchell: ... we require an explanation from the Israeli Government of the actions that took place. ...

Bob Blackman (Conservative): The immediate impact of this resolution appears to be that Hamas have hardened their stance on the release of hostages, and the Israelis have said that they will not move until hostages are released. Apparently, the negotiations in Qatar were limited to being about only 40 of the hostages, namely the most weak and vulnerable. What is left out of the resolution is the requirement for immediate access to those hostages for the International Committee of the Red Cross, so that it can assess their condition and, indeed, whether they can travel at all. Will my right hon. Friend take action to demand immediate access to those hostages for the Red Cross, so that that assessment can take place?

Andrew Mitchell: Yes. We have been absolutely clear that the hostages must be released as swiftly as possible. ...

Marsha De Cordova (Labour): We can all see the devastation in Gaza, where more than 30,000 people have been killed. Two thirds of those people are women and children, and aid is still not getting in. While that is taking place, the situation on the west bank is, equally, worsening, so will the Minister condemn the recent announcement that 800 hectares of the west bank have been designated as Israeli state land?

Andrew Mitchell: ... she will know what we have consistently said about the illegality of these annexations, and I repeat that today. ...

Richard Graham (Conservative): ... the key to delivering enough aid to prevent famine is the use of Israel's land corridors, so could my right hon. Friend confirm whether Israel will provide enough access to prevent a potential famine, and whether both Israel and Hamas are committed to continuing talks during the remaining 15 days of Ramadan, with the aim of moving towards a sustained ceasefire afterwards?

col 1404 Andrew Mitchell: ... There has been some increase: 137 trucks got in on 24 March, and 81 trucks, mainly carrying food, were able to get in on the 25th. However, we urge the Israeli Government to do more about easing the restrictions on opening hours, to limit or stop the demonstrations at Nitzana, and to do more to grant visas ...

Imran Hussain (Labour): After six months of bloodshed, starvation and the deliberate blocking of essential aid to Gaza, the UN Security Council has finally demanded an immediate ceasefire for the rest of Ramadan. However, let us be clear in this House that 15 days is nowhere near long enough to deal with the humanitarian catastrophe across Gaza. We see no meaningful end to the violence today, the 16th day of Ramadan—almost two months after the ICJ warned of the plausible risk of genocide. Frankly, that leaves the resolution ringing extremely hollow. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... [The resolution] implemented the key things that Britain has been asking for, and secondly, it represents a unity that allows the issues that he and I care about so much to be advanced. ...

Chris Law (SNP): It is clear to many international partners that the UK Government must now accept that Israel is potentially committing war crimes and genocide. If there is even a chance that Israel is breaking international law by potentially committing war crimes and genocide, why will the UK Government not take all precautions to adhere to their obligations as a party to the genocide convention and the arms trade treaty, and immediately cease arms exports to Israel?

Andrew Mitchell: ... there is something uniquely repulsive about accusing Israel of genocide, given the events that took place on 7 October, when more Jewish people perished in a pogrom than at any time since the holocaust and the second world war.

col 1405 **Apsana Begum (Labour):** The UN Security Council has voted for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza for only the remainder of Ramadan. It is almost two months since the ICJ's plausible genocide ruling, yet the killing, the destruction and the weaponised starvation go on. ...

Andrew Mitchell: I do not precisely recognise the hon. Member's description of the ICJ interim ruling ...

Sammy Wilson (DUP): No matter which way we look at it, the Government's backing of the one-sided UN resolution yesterday represents an abject surrender to the demands of the Hamas propaganda machine and the cynical use of the Palestinian population as human shields. Can the Minister explain to us how such a resolution, which gives hope to the terrorists, will ever lead to the release of the hostages and ensure no repeat of the atrocity of 7 October, especially as it enables Hamas to preserve their units, regroup and re-establish their regime?

Andrew Mitchell: I simply do not recognise the right hon. Gentleman's description of resolution 2728. It is Hamas who are using the Palestinian people as a human shield in the grotesque way that we see in Rafah.

Kim Johnson (Labour): ... The Minister must now indicate what enforcement measures the Government will implement to escalate the pressure to stop Israel's military assault, uphold the ceasefire, and ensure that emergency assistance is provided through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to those being starved to death.

Andrew Mitchell: I thank the hon. Lady for her support for UN resolution 2728 ...

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour): The United Nations Security Council's vote for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages and full humanitarian access in Gaza must be received by the UK Government as an immediate push for that UN resolution to be enacted. ... will the Minister actually condemn from the Dispatch Box the recent announcement of 800 hectares of the west bank as Israeli state land? ...

col 1406 **Andrew Mitchell:** The position of the British Government, and I believe of the official Opposition, has always been clear on illegal settlements ...

Stephen Timms (Labour): ... As both sides are now in clear conflict, with a clear breach of a United Nations Security Council resolution that was supported by the UK, what are the implications for future UK arms sales to Israel?

Andrew Mitchell: ... Britain has long been calling for an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire, and without a return to destruction,

fighting and loss of life, as the fastest way to get the hostages out and the aid in.

That is what the resolution calls for and why the United Kingdom voted yes ...

Richard Burgon (Labour): ... We saw overnight more Israeli bombing, and more killing of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. It was right that sanctions were imposed on extremist settlers last month. If the Israeli Government continue to ignore the ruling of the UN's highest body, should our Government not be clear that severe consequences will follow, including further sanctions, until Israel respects the ceasefire resolution and international law?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I dissent from the language he is using, and instead seek, as the British Government have consistently done, to ensure there is a pause that allows aid to get in and the hostages to get out ...

Richard Foord (Liberal Democrat): States and parties to the arms trade treaty are obliged to deny arms exports if there is an overriding risk that the arms transferred could be used to commit breaches of international humanitarian law. A Dutch court ruled on 12 February that the Government of the Netherlands must stop the export of parts for the F-35 joint strike fighter to Israel. The UK Government are also thought to export parts of the F-35 under an open general export licence. Will the Minister consider that under these circumstances we should stop the arms trade with Israel ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... Britain has the strongest regulatory regime in respect of arms exports. ...

col 1407 **Stella Creasy (Labour Co-op):** ... we can only defend international law if we uphold it. He has heard across the House concerns that UK-made arms may be being used in Gaza, and he knows full well the details of the strategic licensing export criteria. He knows that man-made famine is a violation of those human rights obligations. That is why many of us are left wondering why the Government have not suspended arms sales to Israel in light of that evidence. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we publish comprehensive official statistics every quarter. That is something we will continue to do, and I have nothing to add to what I have already said about the arms regime. ... the British Government are incredibly concerned about the failure to get more food into Gaza. That is why we have been pursuing a maritime route, why yesterday the Royal Air Force dropped some 40 tonnes of food, and why we have deployed a field hospital. ...

Kenny MacAskill (Alba): ... As well as taking action on arms sales, will the UK ensure that there is no complicity with the Israeli war machine in the use of UK air bases by F-35s, or any other military co-operation with Israel as its war on Gaza continues? Secondly, will the Secretary of State ensure that the suspension of funding to UNRWA, which he recognises is the organisation best placed to deliver humanitarian aid on the ground, is lifted forthwith ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... Britain has fully funded the money for UNRWA in accordance with its commitments, and we very much hope that the position will be clarified as a result of the two reports for which we are waiting by the time any additional British money would be due.

Chi Onwurah (Labour): ... I have previously asked him to condemn the many videos circulating on social media that show Israeli soldiers filming themselves performing acts that range from the unbelievably crass, such as posing on the bikes of dead Gazan children, to the vilely violent, such as setting fire to food stores or bombing residential buildings—violent and potentially criminal. Will the Minister say whether he has seen those videos, and if so does he condemn them? ...

col 1408 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... She asks whether I have seen any such videos, and I have not. Were such videos to be genuine, and were they to portray what she describes, I am sure that everyone in the House would condemn them without qualification.

Ronnie Cowan (SNP): In today's statement the Minister said that we need to offer a

political horizon to the Palestinians, and he is asking that while those whose families, friends and neighbours have not already been killed are being bombed out of the shelters they made after being bombed out of their houses and homes. Surely only an immediate permanent ceasefire will afford the people of Palestine the opportunity to lift their eyes to an optimistic political horizon.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government have set out a clear vision, together with our partners, which we are seeking to drive forward so that when this catastrophic conflict is over ... I remind the hon. Gentleman that it was after the second intifada that progress at Oslo was made, and we must hope that that might be possible once again. ...

Debbie Abrahams (Labour): I add my voice to those of colleagues who have expressed significant and severe concerns about arms manufacturing and exports to Israel in the current context. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... I have nothing to add to what I said earlier. ...

col 1409 **Clive Efford (Labour):** Israel has widespread control of the borders of Gaza and much of the land within it. Given that is the fact of the situation on the ground, are we not then entitled to assume that the restrictions on the flow of aid into Gaza are deliberate on the part of Israel? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... I believe those restrictions can be mitigated, particularly in respect of the opening hours at various crossing points. There is also the need for more visas, some 50 of which I mentioned are pending. ...

Florence Eshalomi (Labour Co-op): ... the reality is that only 137 trucks entered Gaza yesterday, according to Oxfam. We know that pre-October it was 500 trucks a day. UNRWA is unmatched in its aid distribution. ... Does the Minister not agree that a way to mitigate this suffering, is to restore the funding to UNRWA now?

Andrew Mitchell: The funding to UNRWA from Britain has not stopped; we are paid up effectively until the end of April. ...

Allan Dorans (SNP): It is becoming increasingly apparent that Israel has no intention of complying with international law. It is refusing entry to International Criminal Court investigators; it has flat out denied the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice; it has not adhered to the legally binding orders from the ICJ advisory opinion of 26 February; and, it has ignored other UN resolutions calling for access to humanitarian aid. What else can the Government do to put pressure on Israel to adhere to international law?

Andrew Mitchell: ... we have previously assessed that Israel is committed and capable of complying with international humanitarian law, and that is kept under review. ...

col 1410 **Andy Slaughter (Labour):** ... the Government do sometimes publish legal position statements. ... Will the Minister publish such a statement setting out any breaches of international law by any parties in the Israel-Gaza war?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman, who is an enormously distinguished lawyer, is well aware that we do not disclose our internal legal advice ...

Emma Hardy (Labour): The Minister has repeatedly said that international humanitarian law must be adhered to, but those words are meaningless unless they are followed by action, so what consequences will the British Government introduce for any country found guilty of committing war crimes by the ICC, such as by the deliberate withholding of food and aid to another country?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady invites me to qualify or add to the words I have already used to answer that and similar questions. I am sorry to disappoint her, but I am not going to do so.

Rupa Huq (Labour): For what will soon be six months, this Government have repeatedly rejected calls for an immediate ceasefire from MPs and aid agencies, so I welcome the changed position taken at the Security Council yesterday. However, I am confused by this insistence that the Government's position has not changed. Can the Minister clarify that

he is calling for an immediate ceasefire, that the UN resolution is binding and must be implemented immediately, and that there are consequences for non-compliance? ...

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady is not right in what she says about there being a change in the Government position ... The United Kingdom has long been calling for an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire, and that is what resolution 2728 seeks to deliver.

Toby Perkins (Labour): ... the people in Gaza facing starvation, going to bed every night wondering whether it will be their last, do not have the power to bring the hostages back. The people who have the power to bring the hostages back are sitting in five-star hotels in Qatar, so it is useless to allow the aid for people in Gaza to be blocked by Israel, and for them to continue to be on the end of a bombardment, while somehow suggesting that they are masters of their own destiny. ...

col 1411 **Andrew Mitchell:** The remedy for what the hon. Gentleman so eloquently describes in his question rests with Hamas and the negotiators in Qatar. ...

Justin Madders (Labour): ... If a country took offensive action contrary to a UN resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire, I would not need to see the legal advice because that would clearly be a breach of UK arms export licences.

Andrew Mitchell: ... I can only point to the precedent to which I referred earlier ...

Margaret Greenwood (Labour): The appalling deaths of children in Gaza have brought condemnation from around the world and, of course, immense psychological trauma to their families and friends. On 27 February, I asked the Minister whether he would recognise that the killing of 12,000 children shows clear evidence of collective punishment. The Minister did not answer my question. That figure has risen with the deaths of a further 1,000 children, so will he now answer my question and recognise that the killing of 13,000 children shows clear evidence of collective punishment?

Andrew Mitchell: No, I will not do that, but I hope that the hon. Lady will join me in calling for Hamas to release all the hostages they are holding as swiftly as possible ...

Ben Lake (Plaid Cymru): ... the first delivery of UK aid by the Royal Air Force took place yesterday. Does he anticipate that future air drops will increase in frequency until such time as the barriers to the delivery of aid via land are lifted?

Andrew Mitchell: ... The key way of getting urgently needed aid into Gaza is by truck and by road, but needs must, which is why the RAF was able to deliver some 40 tonnes yesterday. If the position continues as it is, Britain expects to get aid into Gaza by sea and air as well as by land.

col 1412 **John McDonnell (Labour):** ... Does he not appreciate that we now have the Security Council resolution and the ICJ decision, which mean that any actions by a Netanyahu Government against those decisions and that judgment will actually be portrayed as war crimes? Any Government that supply arms to that regime therefore can be equally accused of war crimes, and any Member of the House supporting the Government in those actions is open to that charge as well. ...

Andrew Mitchell: The Government are second to none in seeking to uphold the rule of law ...

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op): The Armed Forces Minister has stated that Israeli military personnel have been training alongside UK armed forces. As a result, we clearly want to know what purpose that had, what operations those individuals have been involved in, whether they have impeded the delivery of aid or, indeed, have perpetrated suffering against the people of Gaza, and how that complies with international humanitarian law.

Andrew Mitchell: ... British military forces always comply with international humanitarian law and are absolutely required to do so. I am sure she will note, like me, that when it comes to the issue of targeting and military operations, just as Britain uses extensive military lawyers and legal advice in making those decisions, so too do the Israeli Government.

James Murray (Labour Co-op): We desperately need an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages and full humanitarian access in Gaza. ... Will the Minister put pressure on the Israeli Government to publish an official list and one that includes all the nutritional and medical aid that is needed?

Andrew Mitchell: ... I hope he will be pleased to see that Britain deployed a field hospital on 15 March funded by UK aid under UK-Med. As I mentioned earlier, UK and local medics will be working there and will be treating—fairly shortly, I hope—100 patients a day.

col 1413 **Jim Shannon (DUP):** ... Will he confirm what discussions have taken place and what actions have been agreed to ascertain whether there is any assistance we can provide to ensure that Israel is in a position to safely end the conflict, having achieved security for their nation and their people?

Andrew Mitchell: ... it is a central aim of Government policy to ensure that both Israel and Palestine can live safely and securely side by side behind secure borders—the implementation of the two-state solution. ...

Brendan O'Hara: On a point of order ... The Minister repeatedly said that neither has he seen, nor is he in possession of, Catherine Colonna's interim report, suggesting instead that it had only been delivered to the United Nations in New York. Could he clarify whether he or his officials are in receipt of the interim report, have seen it, have had a read-out of it, or have been made aware of its contents? If any of that is true, why has it not been delivered to the House, particularly given that this is the last sitting day before recess in this financial year? It is hugely important that the House is aware of that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr O'Hara, that is not a point of order for the Chair; it is an endeavour to extend the questions on the statement. If the Minister wishes to respond, I will allow him to do so.

Andrew Mitchell: ... My understanding is that the interim report from the former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna was received by the Secretary-General's office yesterday. It is my hope and expectation that the British Parliament representative at the United Nations in New York may be able to have sight of it today, but neither I nor officials in London have had sight of the report as things stand. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-26/debates/6B11A5F8-EA36-4959-9A2D-E1CD21729F3E/IsraelAndGaza>

UNSCR 2728, referred to above, is not yet available online, but should shortly be published at
[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728\(2024\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728(2024))

The explanation of vote referred to above by Andrew Mitchell can be read at
<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>

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

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Foreign Relations

David Linden (SNP) [19154] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment his Department has made of the potential risks of (a) existing and (b) enhanced (i) security, (ii) defence, (iii) science and (iv) technology relationships with Israel under the 2030 roadmap.

Andrew Mitchell: We enjoy a close strategic partnership with Israel on a wide range of issues. The Memorandum of Understanding we signed in 2021

demonstrated our intent to deepen and expand cooperation across our mutual priorities for our mutual benefit. The subsequent 2030 roadmap outlines how this strategic partnership will continue to serve our collective interests, deepening UK-Israel cooperation across the breadth of our relationship, including science and tech, research and development and security, health, climate and gender.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-18/19154>

The roadmap referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2030-roadmap-for-uk-israel-bilateral-relations/2030-roadmap-for-uk-israel-bilateral-relations>

The Memorandum of Understanding referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-israel-strategic-partnership-memorandum-of-understanding-2021/memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-israel-and-the-uk-foreign-commonwealth-development-office-on-the-uk-israel-s>

Import Controls: Occupied Territories

David Linden (SNP) [19153] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment her Department has made of the legality of imports from illegal Israeli settlements.

Greg Hands: The UK's position on settlements is clear: they are illegal under international law and undermine the prospect of a two-state solution.

Under the existing UK-Israel trade agreement, goods originating from illegal Israeli settlements are not entitled to tariff and trade preferences under either the agreement between the UK and Israel, nor the agreement between the UK and the Palestinian Authority.

This will not change in the upgraded FTA with Israel. The UK will not compromise on any of our longstanding positions on the Middle East Peace Process throughout this negotiation, including with respect to settlements.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-18/19153>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Arms Trade: Israel

Chi Onwurah (Labour) [19867] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what the value of arms exports to Israel was in each of the last five years.

Chi Onwurah (Labour) [19868] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what data her Department holds on the use of (a) arms and (b) non arms exports to Israel.

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>.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-21/19867>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-21/19868>

Israel: Arms Trade

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [19712] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will hold discussions with Cabinet colleagues on (a) suspending arms exports to and (b) reviewing trade agreements with Israel.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government operates a robust and thorough assessment of all licence applications against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria.

The UK's strategic partnership with Israel includes trade. As the Secretary of State

for Business and Trade told the House on 7 March, Israel remains a part of the FTA programme, negotiations continue, and she has recently discussed with the Israeli Minister of Economy our existing trading relationship as well as how Israel is managing the challenges of working on an FTA while fighting a war.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-20/19712>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

The Secretary of State's comments referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-07/debates/6421D075-8CD3-479E-BF4B-AB3EAA5FE18F/FreeTradeAgreementNegotiationsIsrael#contribution-9DFD2FEA-7FEB-426E-9869-2E4642D9348F>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Israel

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [19210] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Compliance Assessment Process has made of (a) Israel's commitment and capability to comply with International Humanitarian Law and (b) its past record of compliance with IHL.

Israel: Arms Trade

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [19211] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what is the value of the (a) 28 extant and (b) 28 pending arms export licences to Israel identified in the Change of Circumstances review in 2023.

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

The Government operates a robust and thorough assessment of licence applications against the Strategic Export Licensing 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>

That data covers export licensing decisions made to the end of June 2023. Information regarding export licensing decisions made since 1 July 2023 has not yet been published.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-18/19210>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-18/19211>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Gaza: Ceasefires

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [19711] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make it his policy to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, in the context of potential famine.

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

The UK is also doing all it can to get as much food into Gaza as possible. We recently announced that more than 2,000 tonnes of UK-funded food aid are being distributed by the World Food Programme on the ground. This is our largest delivery of aid to Gaza in this crisis. This is in addition to the 150 tonnes of aid the Government announced 13 March.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-20/19711>

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

Brendan O'Hara (SNP) [19880] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has received the interim report of the (a) UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and (b) Independent Review Group.

Andrew Mitchell: We are aware that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Catherine Colonna have now provided their interim reports to the UN Secretary-General.

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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-21/19880>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Israel and Gaza

[The Ministerial statement given in the Commons](#) was read in the Lords.

col 611 **Baroness Smith of Basildon (Labour):** ... it has been hard to be optimistic in recent weeks, as hostages remain under the control of Hamas and vast swathes of Gaza edge towards man-made preventable famine. ... Given the unimaginable suffering on both sides, it has been deeply disappointing that successive rounds of negotiations have broken up without agreement, and that the UN Security Council had previously been unable to achieve a consensus on a way forward. We therefore strongly welcome the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 2728 ...

We welcome the Government's change from abstention on other resolutions to support for this one, and recognise the significance of an abstention from the United States. We also acknowledge the Government's statement of support for Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa, who we hope the international community will do everything possible to support, and their commitment to doing what they can to ensure that this resolution is implemented in full. For this to be realised, and for the resolution to become a genuine and meaningful turning point, it means Hamas laying down its arms and releasing all the hostages, and Israel abiding by international calls to drastically scale up humanitarian aid. ...

We accept that the Government want to see the resolution, including the ceasefire, succeed, but we are also trying to understand how the world responds if that is not the case. ...

We were all appalled, rightly, by the allegations against some UNRWA staff. Nevertheless, that body is best placed to ensure that finite supplies of water, food and fuel get to where they are needed most, and as quickly as possible. Can the Minister provide any updates on the UN's work in this area and the Government's response to it? ...

col 612 The Statement also referred to yesterday's RAF aid drop over Gaza. ... Can the Minister confirm whether the Government are expecting to authorise further missions as part of an ongoing international effort to prevent catastrophic famine?

Finally, as the Minister concluded, we all recognise that the UN Security Council resolution does not guarantee peace, but its significance cannot be underestimated. It is a sign of the international community coming together, and we hope that it will be an important step towards ending the conflict and towards a lasting peace.

Lord Newby (Liberal Democrat): ... Does the Minister agree that we need something

more than a temporary ceasefire? ...

We, like everybody else, are extremely concerned about the immense, and growing, humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Latest figures from the IPC, for example, show that more than half of all Palestinians in Gaza—some 1.1 million people—have completely exhausted their food supplies ... What pressure have the UK Government put on Israel, and specifically the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories—which is run by Israel—to facilitate aid into Gaza to allow an increased flow of vehicles and supplies across the Israel-Gaza border?

We welcome the recent sanction of four Israeli settlers who have committed human rights abuses against Palestinian communities in the West Bank, making peace harder to achieve. Will the Government go beyond this and now sanction all violent settlers, along with National Security Minister Ben-Gvir, Finance Minister Smotrich and all the violent settler movement's connected entities?

col 613 Israel has agreed to a US proposal on a prisoner-hostage exchange that would release about 700 Palestinian prisoners—among them 100 serving life sentences for killing Israelis—in exchange for the release of 40 Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. Once again, Hamas has rejected it, saying that “issues remain unresolved”. An essential step to ending this conflict is the unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. Will the Minister commit to using all his best efforts to urge the Qataris to require Hamas to release all the hostages, starting with these 40, about whom there appears to be a nascent agreement?

Earlier this month, my right honourable friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton [Ed Davey] wrote to the Foreign Secretary, asking him to write to the International Criminal Court to ask it to issue international arrest warrants for Hamas terrorists involved in planning the 7 October attacks. Can the Minister commit to doing this? ...

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: ... We are working very closely with COGAT. Earlier today, I had my regular briefing with our humanitarian co-ordinator about specific numbers. ... While there has been an improvement from the representations we have made directly to Israel—we are talking about 200-plus trucks now—there is a need to scale this up massively. Indeed, Israel itself has stated the need to flood aid into Gaza. ...

I say again very clearly: Hamas could end this now by releasing the hostages unconditionally, and we could move forward on ensuring that aid reaches the people suffering in Gaza. I have met repeatedly with several of the hostages' families. Their pain is incredible but their courage is equally so. Their advocacy for their loved ones and to bring closure to their suffering is something the Government are fully seized of.

col 614 We are also very much focused on the suffering of the Palestinians, when we see the number of people, including women and children, killed in this war. It is important that we bring this to a conclusion. ...

The noble Baroness asked about UNRWA and the update on the interim report. This is a verbal report and briefing. There has been some media reporting on it but the final report will be presented to the Secretary-General on 20 April. We have been very clear about UNRWA ... about the important role that UNRWA has played historically, not just in Gaza but in other near-neighbouring countries in providing support. Equally, the shocking reports we received which led to pausing future funding for UNRWA said that there were people involved with Hamas directly. We recognise the importance of mitigations being in place and look forward to the interim report.

We have not stopped our support, and over £100 million has now gone into Gaza. We are working with key agencies such as the World Food Programme and UNICEF to ensure that aid continues to reach Gaza. However, there is a challenge regarding the number of trucks going in. ...

The noble Baroness asked about UN Security Council Resolution 2728—it is binding. The United Kingdom's place is clear. ...

col 615 The noble Lord asked about sanctions against settlers. We did act and while I cannot comment about future policy, the Government know this and have it available as a tool. I condemn—as I have done, and do so unequivocally—the comments from Mr Smotrich and Mr Ben-Gvir in relation to the Palestinians. I assure the noble Lord that they are no way reflected by many friends and people across Israel and the citizens of Israel. We need to ensure that the only way possible of reaching a lasting sustainable peace is through that two- state solution. ...

Lord Austin of Dudley (Non-affiliated): My Lords, will the Minister confirm that aid is being admitted into Gaza by the Israelis more quickly than the UN and the other agencies can distribute it? One day last week, for example, 222 trucks were admitted but only 158 were distributed and only 86 of those by the UN, so the barrier is not Israel admitting aid into Gaza. Furthermore, can he explain to the House how it is possible for him to say that the Government support Israel's right to defend itself but then for them to threaten to withhold arms exports on which that defence may depend?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: On the noble Lord's second point, about threatening to withhold arms exports, I do not believe I have said that. On his earlier point, I am sorry, but I do not agree with him. ... British trucks with British aid have been waiting on the borders of Gaza. ... We have seen a change—an uptick, but it is a small uptick ... Let us be clear what has happened in Gaza. There is no infrastructure. The UN itself is not getting the visas it needs. ...

We have a very strong relationship with Israel. When Mr Gantz visited London, the Foreign Secretary and I made clear the importance of this issue, and Israel recognises its responsibilities. It is a democracy and it has international obligations, including adherence to international humanitarian law. ...

col 616 **Baroness Deech (Crossbench):** My Lords, does the Minister appreciate that the Security Council has turned into a completely dysfunctional organisation? It rejected a resolution a couple of days ago that would have linked the release of the hostages to a ceasefire. It turned that down. This time, the two conditions are not linked, and they are not enforceable. It is no more possible to enforce the release of hostages than it is to enforce a ceasefire against Hamas, which was not mentioned in that resolution. Will the Minister push for the Red Cross to be allowed to visit the hostages and for the hostages to be released first? Will he also note that the news we are getting from Gaza is almost totally unreliable, because so much of it comes from journalists who are controlled by or in the pocket of Hamas? Will he focus on the hostages? I am sad to say how empty is that phrase: never again.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I am sad to say that I disagree with the noble Baroness. First, of course I am focused on the hostages. ...

Secondly, I do not agree with the noble Baroness's assessment of the UN Security Council. Yes, it has been challenging but what we saw yesterday was the Security Council coming together. ... let me read from the Security Council resolution ...

It contains three provisions. The first: "Demands an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan respected by all parties leading to a ... sustainable ceasefire, and also demands the immediate and unconditional release of ... hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access". ...

Lord Swire (Conservative): I wonder if my noble friend the Minister has seen the reports that some settler groups, I think mainly in the United States, are now parcelling up bits of Gaza and selling them off. If there is any truth to these reports, what would his comments be? ...

col 617 **Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... it has been a consistent position of every Government I can remember that settlements in the West Bank and Gaza are illegal

and against international law. ...

Baroness Blower (Labour): My Lords, aid agencies have reported that the list of goods allowed by the Israeli Government into Gaza is hard to access and subject to change without warning. Can the Minister say whether any diplomatic initiatives have been taken to put pressure on the Israeli Government to publish an official list of what is allowed in, and to make sure that it covers all the clear nutrition, food and medical requirements in this situation?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I assure the noble Baroness that in all our direct interactions with Israel, we make the case for ensuring clarity on what is allowed. ... There is an immediate need for basic foods and medicines to enter Gaza, and we are making that case very clearly to Israel.

Let me say again that the United Kingdom, rightly, is a friend to many countries, including Israel. Being a friend means standing with Israel, as we did—this House stood together—when those horrific events unfolded on 7 October. ... on that day ... I made three calls to Israel. One call was to a friend of mine who is Muslim, in Israel. The second was to a friend who is Jewish, in Israel. The third was to the Christian Archbishop Hosam, in Jerusalem. Why? Because this is a common cause of our common humanity. Israel is a country which is a democracy, and we recognise it as a friend. But it is also important, on the other side of the coin, that we challenge and present constructive advocacy and bring a lasting solution to this conflict. ...

Baroness Gohir (Crossbench): My Lords, a report stated that famine was imminent. That was 10 days ago, so Gaza is experiencing famine right now. ... The Minister stated that now, the Israeli Government want to flood Gaza with aid. Are those just words? Will the Minister acknowledge that the Israeli Government are responsible for the mass starvation of Palestinians?

col 618 **Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... we are working around the clock to ensure that we make the point to Israel about humanitarian access ...

Lord Grocott (Labour): My Lords, given that we all described—quite rightly in my view—the dreadful attack in southern Israel resulting in the deaths of 1,200 people as “slaughter”, what language is left to describe the deaths in Gaza of 33,000 Palestinians, including 13,500 children and babies? ... is killing on that scale in Gaza, and the horror that is Gaza today, a proportionate response by Israel?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: ... The number of people that have been killed in Gaza is shocking. What happened on 7 October was shocking. We see innocent civilians who have been impacted, whether the hostage families or the thousands of people who have been killed in Gaza. This is a human tragedy ...

Hamas is different from Israel: we expect Israel to adhere to IHL; Hamas is a terrorist organisation. We are talking about two very different entities. ...

Lord Grade of Yarmouth (Non-affiliated): Can the Minister share with the House any information he has about the level remaining in Gaza of active, armed Hamas rocket launchers and armed terrorists, if I can use that word? ...

col 619 **Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... We have seen a continuation, from different parts, of Hamas’s capacity to launch attacks against Israel. That is why, as in the key deliverables that my noble friend the Foreign Secretary has highlighted, we need this fighting to stop. First, this resolution can achieve that. Secondly, it means we get the hostages out and aid in. Thirdly, it ensures Hamas is no longer in control or has the capacity to launch attacks against Israel. Fourthly, we can work with a reformed PA that is in control over the West Bank and Gaza towards what should ultimately be our noble goal—an attainable two-state solution. Hamas is a terrorist organisation in the UK’s view. Hamas could end this now. It could put down its weapons, give up the hostages and agree a pathway to peace. Are we at that juncture with Hamas right now? No. ...

Lord Turnberg (Labour): My Lords, I am sure the noble Lord will remember that Golda Meir said that, if the Arabs put down their arms, there would be no war, but, if Israel put down its arms, there would be no Israel. Is it not perverse to suggest that we stop providing arms to Israel, the victim of that horrendous attack, which is trying to defend itself against further similar attacks?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: ... I do not believe that I or the Foreign Secretary have suggested that. ...

The Lord Bishop of Leeds: My Lords, given that UN resolutions are not always seen through, as it were, or observed, is the Minister optimistic that this resolution will have the impact we want it to have? ...

col 620 **Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... In front of us now is an important first step in recognising that the release of hostages is necessary for a peaceful resolution. It is an important first step to ensure a ceasefire for the period of Ramadan, leading to a sustainable ceasefire and to getting aid in. ...

Baroness Helic (Conservative): ... Yesterday's passing of the UN Security Council resolution was a chink of light for the hostages and their families, and for the starved and hungry in Gaza. Yet it has already been interpreted in a different way here and in the United States. The White House spokesperson, John Kirby, said that the UN Security Council resolution is "a nonbinding resolution. So, there's no impact at all on Israel". I understand that His Majesty's Government's position is different, so can my noble friend indicate how we will overcome this difference of interpretation?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: ... We are very clear that there are two elements here: Chapter VII and Chapter VI. This was made under Chapter VI, but there is a convention that goes back to 1971 which confirms that decisions passed by the UN Security Council are binding.

Lord Walney (Crossbench): The Government will obviously not take Hamas's casualty figures at face value, so what is their own best assessment of the current number of casualties in the conflict, the ratio of combatants to civilians, and how that compares to other conflicts recently?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The noble Lord raises an important point. Of course, he will recognise that some of the numbers of Hamas combatants who have been killed by Israel are Israel's figures. When Israel talks of the numbers killed in Gaza, it also talks of a proportion, and that is why it feels it is important that it continues with its operations. We have said very clearly, particularly with the operation in Rafah on the horizon, that it is important that Israel thinks very carefully. As we have seen previously, there are ways and means of having targeted operations. One hopes that with the loss of life that we have seen and the killings we have seen in Israel and Gaza, we will see no more. When the United Kingdom Government talk of numbers and casualties, we make an independent assessment of the situation in Gaza, which is difficult because there is no access, and we also rely on information provided by agencies on the ground, including the UN.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-26/debates/587782BD-91FB-4B4D-B81F-8AF4C2C0F7D8/IsraelAndGaza>

UNSCR 2728, referred to above, is not yet available online, but should shortly be published at
[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728\(2024\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728(2024))

The IPC report referred to above can be read at
https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Gaza_Strip_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Feb_July2024_Special_Brief.pdf

Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter, referred to above, can be read at
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-6>

Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, referred to above, can be read at

UK Parliament House of Commons Liaison Committee

Work of the Prime Minister

Q46 Cat Smith (Labour): Some of the most popular e-petitions on the Government website at the moment are regarding the situation in Israel and Gaza. Following the UN Security Council's resolution to call for an immediate ceasefire, what steps will the UK Government take to ensure that that ceasefire is implemented, in terms of using economic and diplomatic levers?

The Prime Minister: We were pleased to support the resolution at the UN, because it was consistent with our position, which is for an immediate, sustained humanitarian pause that would allow for the safe release of hostages and more aid to go into Gaza, and would provide a platform for a more lasting, durable ceasefire.

We will continue to do everything we can, both asking Israel at all levels to comply with international humanitarian law to improve the provision of humanitarian aid into Gaza and continuing to call on Hamas and work with countries like Egypt and Qatar to unconditionally release the hostages.

Q47 Cat Smith: Prime Minister, does "everything we can" include looking at the situation of UK arms export licences?

The Prime Minister: We have a very robust regime in place for export licences. There are strategic export licensing criteria. We don't grant export licences where there's a clear risk that the items may be used to commit a serious violation of IHL, and that has been the long-standing case.

Q48 Cat Smith: And is that constantly under review?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I have made that point clear from the Dispatch Box previously.

Q49 Cat Smith: When we look at the situation in Gaza, more than 30,000 individuals have been killed and 74,000 wounded. When we look at children specifically, 13,000 children have been killed and 17,000 have been orphaned. Is that something that is taken into account when looking at UK arms licences?

The Prime Minister: Yes. You wouldn't expect me to comment in detail on legal assessments, but you can expect that all the things that you've talked about will be things—regardless of the export licence criteria—that are concerning. I have repeatedly said that the humanitarian situation in Gaza is awful and it is right that we do absolutely everything we can to alleviate the suffering of people.

I am pleased that just yesterday the Royal Air Force air-dropped for the first time 10 tonnes of food supplies into Gaza, working together with the Jordanians. That has brought water, rice, cooking oil, flour, canned goods and baby formula along the coastline. We have been working on that for a while; I talked about it at the Dispatch Box earlier. We want to get aid in through every route we can: land, air and sea. We have obviously done a lot by land. This is the first significant drop that we have done by air, which has been welcomed. We are working with partners to improve aid access via the maritime corridor as well, and hopefully we'll have more to say on that in the coming days and weeks. But I don't disagree: the humanitarian situation is awful and I am proud that we are doing everything we can to alleviate as much of that suffering as we can.

Q50 Cat Smith: Air drops are the least effective way of delivering aid to any environment and are often seen as being the last resort by aid agencies. The most effective route is obviously by land crossings. What representations are you making, Prime Minister, to the Israeli Government to open the Rafah crossing?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with that; of course, we agree with that. What we need

is many more trucks per day. Before 7 October, there were 400 or 500 trucks a day going in; that is what is necessary. Now there are not that many; it is a fraction—100 to 200. That is not good enough. I have made that point repeatedly to Prime Minister Netanyahu, as have our allies, and we will continue to press for more land access. That is the best way to get more aid in quickly.

But while that is not happening at the scale we would like it to, I think it is right to do extra aid via other corridors. As I said, those airdrops will still help, and the maritime corridor, when we get it up and running, will also help. But you are right that the priority is to remove all the barriers to more land aid getting into Gaza.

Q51 Cat Smith: Aid is in particularly short supply in northern Gaza; there are real issues in terms of getting supplies there. We have documented cases now of babies being born but mothers being too weak to feed them; they are dying of starvation in the first few hours of life. Is this collective punishment of people?

The Prime Minister: As I said, we would always and have consistently called on Israel to comply with all its obligations under international humanitarian law. We have already tripled the aid—or the humanitarian support—that we are putting into the region. As I said, we are doing it by every potential corridor. Also, I have raised personally with Prime Minister Netanyahu the opportunity to bring more aid in from the north through Ashdod port and then through the northern crossing at Kerem Shalom. That is something that, together with allies, we have continued to raise, because that would open up more access into the north of Gaza as well. It is something that we have also talked about with the Jordanians; again, I have discussed that with the King of Jordan himself, because if we can get aid in through the top via Kerem Shalom and Ashdod, that will be helpful too.

Q52 Cat Smith: Getting aid in is only one part of the solution here; it is also about the distribution of aid, and airdrops are often seen as being increasingly a survival of the fittest in terms of who is going to access that aid. UNRWA are absolutely unmatched in their administrative ability to distribute aid. They have an incredible track record on this. It has now been two months since the UK suspended support for UNRWA. At the time, the Secretary of State said in the House of Commons Chamber that he expected the decision to be made within two months. Given that it has been two months, do you have an update?

The Prime Minister: Yes. The first thing to say is that we are absolutely appalled by the allegations of UNRWA staff being involved in the 7 October attack. We are committed to getting aid into Gaza. Our decision to pause funding to UNRWA hasn't had any impact on our overall contribution to the humanitarian response. It is important that people know that. The UN's Office of Internal Oversight and Catherine Colonna have now provided their interim reports to the UN Secretary-General. We want to hear from UNRWA detailed undertakings about the changes in personnel and policy. We are talking consistently to allies about how to conclude all of that, because I don't disagree that UNRWA, properly functioning, does have a vital role to play in providing aid and services in Gaza. But it is right that we now reflect on the reports on governance that have been provided, and work that through with allies. That is what we are doing. Our position is consistent with, as I said, many of our closest allies.

Q53 Cat Smith: Just finally, are we expecting a decision in days or months?

The Prime Minister: I would not like to speculate. We are all keen to get more aid in as quickly as possible, and that is what we are doing; but given the appalling allegations, it is right that those are addressed seriously. ...

Q54 Stephen Crabb (Conservative): How is a ceasefire resolution that contains not a word of condemnation of Hamas, nor any conditionality around hostage release, consistent with our previous position, and the language you have previously used about Hamas being "evil" and needing to see them militarily defeated?

The Prime Minister: I can appreciate concern on that point. I can very much appreciate

that. It is close to our position; it is not a perfect replication of it—on Hamas in particular. I think, as you know, I have been unequivocal and consistent in condemning Hamas, and we will always do that.

On hostages, though, the way that I read the resolution, and the way that I think it should be read, is that it does record that the taking of hostages is obviously prohibited under international law—and it also demands the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and that was important. This is not an unconditional ceasefire. This is a temporary pause, which is consistent with our position, alongside the—in the words of the resolution—“immediate and unconditional release of all hostages”, as well as ensuring that more humanitarian access and aid can flow in. That has been, I think you would agree, my consistent position on this. That is why I and the Foreign Secretary felt that the wording was, while not perfect, close enough to our position that we should support it. I was disappointed to see some reporting last night of Hamas already saying that they are not engaging in conversations around hostage release, which tells you what the problem is.

Stephen Crabb: There is no incentive for them.

The Prime Minister: It can't be right for hostages to be held like that. It is reasonable for Israel to want to ensure its security and the safe return of its citizens, which is why we have always said that this immediate temporary humanitarian pause needs to be accompanied by the unconditional release of the hostages so that we can then get more aid in. Unfortunately, Hamas have not complied with that, and they are the ones who are responsible. We should never lose sight of that. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14571/html/>

HM Treasury

New sanctions on persons linked to Hamas-supporting media network

... The UK Government has announced a full asset freeze against two individuals suspected of providing financial support for Gaza Now – a news agency that promotes the Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist groups.

All funds and economic resources in the UK belonging to or controlled by Sultana and Ayash have been frozen. No UK person may make available funds, economic resources and financial services to them or for their benefit, or to any of the companies or organisations they own or control - either over the course of doing business with them or otherwise.

This action is the second use of the Treasury-led domestic counter terrorism sanctions regime, used to target those who it has reasonable grounds to suspect are involved in terrorist activity. Last year it [sanctioned an art dealer](#) who was suspected of abusing the UK's fine art market to run an international terrorist financing operation for Hizballah.

UK Treasury Minister Baroness Vere said: The UK and its partners are committed to cutting off funding sources to Hamas, PIJ and any others supporting terrorist activity that prevents sustainable peace in the Middle East. ...

Today's action is part of a coordinated international effort with partners in the UK and the United States to deploy financial sanctions to prevent terrorist financing, shielding the UK's financial system and ensuring our open economy is not abused.

These latest designations build on three packages imposed on Hamas and its associates with the United States, under the UK's International Counter-Terrorism sanctions regime:

- On [22 January 2024](#), five individuals and one entity involved in arranging finance for Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad were sanctioned
- On [13 December 2023](#), leaders and financiers of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad were sanctioned

- On [14 November 2023](#), four members of Hamas and two financiers were sanctioned. The UK continues to work closely with our partners to identify further opportunities to disrupt Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad's financial networks, including cutting off access to funding being used to carry out atrocities. This work is ongoing alongside that to reach a long-term political solution so that Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-sanctions-on-persons-linked-to-hamas-supporting-media-network>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Israeli Government land seizures announcement March 2024: FCDO statement

A Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) spokesperson said: The UK strongly condemns the recent Israeli Government announcement to seize 1,977 acres of Palestinian lands in the Jordan Valley.

The size of the area designated for seizure is the largest since the Oslo Accords, agreed over 30 years ago. This declaration is in addition to 652 acres of land marked for seizure by Israel on 29 February, meaning 2024 now marks an unacceptable peak in land seizures.

The UK calls on the Israeli Government to halt this seizure and all others immediately. Our policy is clear: settlements are illegal under international law and only make it harder to progress to achieving peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/israeli-government-land-seizures-announcement-march-2024-fcdo-statement>

Lord Ahmad visits Egypt for talks on getting more aid into Gaza and steps for achieving a sustainable peace

... The UK and Egypt have worked closely throughout the Gaza crisis. The UK has trebled its aid commitment to the Occupied Palestinian Territories this year, with much of the lifesaving support delivered through the airport at Al Arish and Port Said, for onward transfer into Gaza through the Rafah crossing.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for Middle East, said: On my third visit to Cairo since Hamas' terror attack on October 7, I will be discussing with Egyptian counterparts how we can make rapid and meaningful progress towards alleviating the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, as well as how to end the fighting in Gaza and achieve irreversible steps towards a two-state solution.

Egypt is a vital partner, and boosting UK-Egypt ties will enable our nations to work towards a shared goal - bringing greater stability to the region. ...

There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza, and the UK and Egypt have been vital players in the global effort to significantly increase lifesaving aid to those in need. The UK remains focused on getting more aid to those in need, by air, sea and road. Working more closely with Egypt is critical to international efforts towards achieving an immediate humanitarian pause in the fighting. ...

The UK's commitment to religious freedom will form an important part of discussions, as the Minister reflects on his experiences of Ramadan on the UK. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lord-ahmad-visits-egypt-for-talks-on-getting-more-aid-into-gaza-and-steps-for-achieving-a-sustainable-peace>

United Nations

Amid Worsening Humanitarian Situation in Gaza, ‘Settlement Activities Have Continued, Intensified’, Special Coordinator Warns Security Council Delegates Raise Concern Over Non-compliance with Organ’s Demand for Ceasefire

While the humanitarian impact of the hostilities in Gaza has been cataclysmic and is worsening daily, violence and the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continue at alarming levels, the head of United Nations peace efforts in the Middle East told the Security Council today, as delegates raised concern over non-compliance with the organ’s demand for a ceasefire.

“We need a ceasefire now, we need the release of all hostages now, the suffering must end,” stated **Tor Wennesland, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process**, commending yesterday’s adoption of resolution 2728 (2024). Presenting the Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) — which covers the period from 8 December to 18 March — he stressed that “settlement activities have continued and intensified”. ...

He reported that numerous Israeli officials called for the “voluntary migration” of Palestinians from Gaza and the re-establishment of settlements there, with a minister posting on social media that Israel should “continue to pressure them, using force, starvation ... difficult conditions”. An Israeli member of the Knesset called on his country “to occupy, to annex, to destroy all the houses in Gaza] to build ... large settlements.” On 1 February, the United States issued an Executive Order imposing sanctions on “persons undermining peace, security and stability in the West Bank”. In total, seven Israeli settlers have been sanctioned under the order. The United Kingdom, France and New Zealand also subsequently announced sanctions against settlers, he added.

Alongside daily violence in the occupied West Bank, the devastating conflict in Gaza has continued, he observed. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, from 8 December to 18 March, at least 14,549 Palestinians were killed, including approximately 4,200 women and 6,000 children, and at least 27,792 were injured. This brings the total number, since 7 October, to more than 31,790 Palestinians killed, a majority of whom are reportedly women and children. ...

“More than 1 million people in Gaza are projected to face catastrophic levels of food insecurity by the end of May, and famine in the northern part of Gaza is imminent,” he warned ...

“With our eyes on Gaza, we must not forget about the West Bank, including East Jerusalem,” said **Slovenia’s delegate**. Expressing concern that the practices and policies of the current Government of Israel appear to be unprecedentedly aligned with the goals of the Israeli settler movement, he pointed to the alarming acceleration in settler and State violence and the displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank.

In the same vein, **the speaker for Ecuador** ... opposed all unilateral measures that hamper peace. These include the construction and expansion of settlements, the confiscation of land, the “legalization” of outposts, the demolition of homes and the displacement of civilians.

Also condemning Israel’s recent declaration of 800 hectares of land in the occupied West Bank as “State lands”, **Malta’s delegate** said that illegal settlements threaten the viability of the two-State solution. ...

While recognizing Israel’s right to self-defence, **the speaker for the United Kingdom** painted an alarming picture of “unfathomable suffering” in Gaza and urged Israel to open Ashdod port and Kerem Shalom in full and issue visas to aid workers. Underscoring that Hamas must no longer be in charge of Gaza, she called for the formation of a new Palestinian Government for West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package.

The delegate for the United States reported that his country ... is working to surge

humanitarian assistance into Gaza and, while a ceasefire would be the best, most immediate way to achieve that surge, it is not the only way. ...

The representative of France emphasized that his country will never recognize the illegal annexation of territory nor the legalization of outposts. To this end, France and the European Union have initiated measures against some settlers and do not recognize Israeli sovereignty over territory that has come under Israel's administration after 5 June 1967. ...

... **the representative of the Russian Federation** said that Washington, D.C., referred to resolution 2728 (2024) as "non-binding", in other words, "there is no impact on Israel's ability to continue to go after Hamas". After the resolution's adoption, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel said that his country would not end the military operation and intended to fight "until they destroyed the Hamas movement and returned all hostages". ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15643.doc.htm>

To read Tor Wennesland's briefing, summarised above, in full see

<https://unsco.unmissions.org/security-council-briefing-situation-middle-east-report-secretary-general-implementation-un-scr-1>

UNSCR 2334, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2334\(2016\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2334(2016))

UNSCR 2728, referred to above, is not yet available online, but should shortly be published at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728\(2024\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728(2024))

To read the UK delegate's speech, summarised above, in full see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-need-to-begin-to-focus-on-how-we-chart-the-way-towards-a-sustainable-peace-without-a-return-to-fighting-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Occupied Palestinian Territory: reporting on settlements and the occupied Syrian Golan: Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

... The reporting period has seen a drastic acceleration, particularly after 7 October 2023, of long-standing trends of discrimination, oppression and violence against Palestinians, that accompany Israeli occupation and settlement expansion, bringing the West Bank to the brink of catastrophe.

The report observes that policies of the current Government of Israel appear aligned, to an unprecedented extent, with the goals of the Israeli settler movement to expand long-term control over the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and to steadily integrate this occupied territory into the State of Israel.

During the reporting period, Israel took steps to transfer administrative powers relating to settlements and land administration from the military authorities to Israeli government offices, whose primary focus is to provide services within the State of Israel. The basic premise of the law of occupation is that occupation is a temporary measure, neither causing nor implying any transfer of sovereignty. The report therefore raises serious concerns that a series of measures, including this transfer of powers to the Israeli civilian officials, could facilitate the annexation of the West Bank in violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. ...

During the reporting period, there has been a dramatic increase in the intensity, the severity and the regularity of Israeli settler violence against Palestinians, accelerating their displacement from their land, in circumstances that may amount to forcible transfer.

In the first nine months of 2023, 835 incidents of settler violence were recorded by the

United Nations – the highest on record. Then, between 7 and 31 October 2023, the United Nations recorded 203 settler attacks against Palestinians, and the Human Rights Office monitored the killing of 8 Palestinians, including one boy, all by the use of firearms by settlers. ...

The line between settler violence and State violence has further blurred, including violence with the declared intent to forcibly transfer Palestinians from their land. In cases monitored by OHCHR, settlers arrived masked, armed and sometimes wearing the uniforms of Israeli security forces. They destroyed Palestinians' tents, solar panels, water pipes and tanks, hurling insults and threatening that, if Palestinians did not leave within 24 hours, they would be killed. Furthermore, by the end of the reporting period, Israeli security forces had reportedly handed out some 8,000 weapons to "settlement defence squads" and "regional defence battalions" in the West Bank. After the 7th of October, the United Nations human rights office documented cases of settlers wearing full or partial Israeli army uniforms and carrying army rifles, harassing and attacking Palestinians, including shooting at them at point-blank range. ...

The absence of accountability for settler violence is a key factor in the ongoing coercive environment, raising continued concerns about the forcible transfer of Palestinians. The lack of accountability is furthermore a manifestation of a dual system of criminal justice that has had discriminatory effects on Palestinians. ...

Israeli authorities continued to implement eviction and demolition orders against Palestinians based on discriminatory planning policies, laws and practices, including on the grounds that properties lacked building permits. During the reporting period, Palestinian-owned structures were demolished by Israel at one of the fastest rates on record: 917 Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank, including 210 in East Jerusalem, were demolished. This resulted in the displacement of 1,015 Palestinians.

It is noteworthy that out of the 210 demolitions in East Jerusalem, 89 were self-demolitions by their owners to avoid paying fines from the Israeli authorities. This epitomizes the coercive environment that the Palestinians live in. ...

The report before us also documents the ongoing Israeli plan to double the settler population in the Syrian Golan by 2027. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/occupied-palestinian-territory-reporting-settlements-and-occupied>

TOP

Other Relevant Information

European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)

Preventing and combating racism and intolerance in and through education

<https://rm.coe.int/ecri-factsheet-on-education-24032024-en/1680af07a7>

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>

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

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

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

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

Genocide Determination Bill

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

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

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

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

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

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

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

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

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

Scottish Parliament

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

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

[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](#)