



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Israel

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Updated Travel Advice: Israel

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

Updated Travel Advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

Scottish Government

Call to establish safe routes for people fleeing Gaza: letter to UK Government

Letter from the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees Emma Roddick to the UK Government Minister for Legal Migration Tom Pursglove urging the UK Government to allow more people from Gaza to come to the UK. ...

Thank you for your letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice on 3 January in which you confirmed that the UK had no current plans to establish a new Resettlement Scheme for Gazans or to evacuate people from Gaza with no connection to the UK.

It was clear from your letter that this decision would not be reviewed unless the situation changed significantly. Several months on, with over 33,000 Palestinians killed, large-scale devastation of infrastructure rendering much of Gaza inhabitable and the United Nations reporting that famine is imminent in North Gaza, I am compelled to urge in the strongest terms that the UK Government reconsiders its position, particularly with regard to Gazans

who have family in the UK and Palestinian human rights defenders. ...

I recently met with representatives of the Gaza Families Reunited campaign. ... It is hard to conceive of the extreme trauma they continue to experience on a daily basis knowing that their family members could be killed at any moment.

The group I met with stressed that they do not wish to bring their relatives to the UK permanently. Gaza remains their homeland. Instead, they are calling on the UK Government to establish a Gaza Family Scheme similar to the Ukraine Family Scheme ... The UK's existing Refugee Family Reunion scheme allows an adult refugee (or person with humanitarian protection) to be joined by their spouse or partner, and any dependent children under 18 years old, if they formed a part of the family unit before the refugee fled their country. ... Additionally, the existing Family Visa route which others are seeking to access also has limitations on dependents and includes the Immigration Health Surcharge.

The current UK rules however stipulate that people must apply in person at a Visa Application Centre where they can submit biometric data. While it is possible to apply to waive/defer biometric requirements, in practice the vast majority of these applications have been rejected. A recognised Palestinian refugee from Gaza recently won his case challenging the Home Office's refusal to decide the entry clearance applications of his wife and children under the refugee family reunion rules, on account of their inability to enrol their biometrics in Gaza. The Upper Tribunal (UT) found that the Home Office's refusal to decide these family members' entry clearance applications was a breach of their Article 8 ECHR right to respect for private and family life.

This is a major barrier that is preventing those with a legitimate connection to the UK from being allowed to travel here. It was reported this week that two people have been killed while waiting for a decision on their family reunion visa under existing routes. To help address this, I would urge that the UK government either adopts an application process that can be conducted from within Gaza, waiving the need to provide biometric data until arrival in the UK (as was undertaken for Ukrainians who were allowed to provide biometric data within six months of arrival in the UK) and subsequently facilitating individuals' transfer to a place of safety prior to onward travel to the UK; or that the UK Government facilitates the safe transfer of individuals who meet the eligibility criteria to the nearest Visa Application Centre removing the need for them to make this unsafe journey through unofficial routes.

Given the gravity of the situation however, correcting this discrepancy to enable those who are currently eligible to join their family members in the UK, will not go far enough. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Refugee Council fully support the aims of the Gaza Families Reunited campaign alongside more than 74,000 people who have signed a public petition as well as more than 75 migrants' rights organisations and law firms across the UK. The campaign calls for a scheme to be opened for relatives of all Palestinians in the UK, not just those with refugee status. This should be open to a wider cohort of immediate and extended family, including parents, children over 18, siblings and their children. ...

Since October of last year, I have received several hundred letters from people in Gaza pleading to be granted asylum in Scotland. Many of these individuals have family in Scotland and an existing connection to the UK. It has been heartbreaking to reply to these individuals saying that only the UK Government can grant visas and there are no current plans to open a scheme. When my officials have replied they have done so, not knowing if the individual will be alive to receive the response. One father wrote to me six times requesting help for his 11-year old daughter Zaina who subsequently died due to a lack of specialist food and medical support.

Acting now to provide a temporary place of sanctuary for Gazans with family in the UK will not only save lives but is fully aligned with the UK's responsibility to protect civilians and provide humanitarian assistance to those in need.

I would like also to take this opportunity to highlight the situation of Palestinian human

rights defenders. Human rights defenders in general face high levels of risk as a result of their work. As you know, such risks have now become particularly acute for those working in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I would therefore urge you to take particular account of the need to provide protection to these and other groups, including where necessary by facilitating their relocation to the UK, as part of the UK's overall response to the current crisis. ...

Creating temporary humanitarian entry channels for human rights defenders is therefore vital in securing the continued defence and promotion of human rights throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories, not just in the current crisis but for the long-term. ...

To read the letter in full see

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/call-establish-safe-routes-people-fleeing-gaza-letter-uk-government/>

The letter from the UK Government referred to above is not available online.

The Upper Tribunal judgement referred to above can be read at

<https://tribunalsdecisions.service.gov.uk/utiac/jr-2024-lon-000082-jr-2024-lon-000128>

Scottish Government FoI Releases

Scottish Government Aid towards the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) in Gaza: FOI release FOI/202400397847

Information requested

1. Has all the money sent by Humza Yousaf to aid Palestine been accounted for and how was it divided up?
2. Have any amounts been misplaced either by accident or design?
3. Did the Scottish Parliament authorise these payments or was it totally controlled by First Minister Humza Yousaf?

Response

In response to the first part of your question: on 14 October 2023, the Scottish Government announced that it would provide £500,000 towards the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) flash appeal in response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. On 2 November, a further £250,000 was pledged to the same Appeal.

These two pledges were transferred in one payment of £750,000, which was transferred on 29 November 2023.

In response to the second part of your question: the entire amount of £750,000 was transferred to the UNRWA, and receipted appropriately, according to standard Scottish Government payment procedures. ...

In response to the third part of your question: these funds were approved by the Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, as per the standard process for Ministerial approving funding under the Culture, Europe and International Development portfolio. The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and the First Minister were copied for information.

To read the full release see

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400397847/>

The announcements referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/news/humanitarian-aid-funding-1/>
and

<https://www.gov.scot/news/humanitarian-aid-for-gaza/>

Donations to UNRWA for Gaza

Information requested

1. All documents (inc emails and minutes) available from the decision making process which led to mak[ing] the two individual donations (to the UNRWA).
2. Any documentation which proves UNRWA and/or Gaza are suitable recipients for any grants/donations from the International Development Fund

Response

... In the context of your first question: the two individual donations to the UNRWA were approved by Christina McKelvie, who was at the time the Minister for Culture, Europe, & International Development. In considering these donations, Ms McKelvie considered submissions written by Scottish Government officials, which contained detailed information and advice on the different options available.

In the context of your second question: you will see that these submissions [included in the second link below] include advice on the context and issues of the current increased humanitarian needs in Gaza, as well as detailed options considered for which organisations would be most appropriate to receive Scottish Government funding, including the UNRWA. ...

To read the full release see

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400396149-2/>

and

<https://tinyurl.com/59jrxus4>

United Nations

Press Statement on Humanitarian Workers and Threat of Famine in Gaza: Council President Vanessa Frazier

The members of the Security Council expressed grave concern over the Israeli air strikes that killed seven team members of the World Central Kitchen. These horrific attacks brought the number of humanitarian personnel killed in Gaza during the ongoing conflict to at least 224, more than three times as many humanitarian aid workers killed in any single conflict recorded in a single year. The members of the Security Council underlined the need for accountability for all of these incidents, and noted that Israel has announced the initial results of an investigation into the incident of 1 April 2024. They stressed the need for a full, transparent and comprehensive investigation into the incident, that is fully publicized. ...

The members of the Security Council also demanded that all parties to the conflict fully respect the protected status of humanitarian workers, facilities, and operations under international law, abide by humanitarian notification and deconfliction mechanisms, and immediately remediate any deficiencies in these mechanisms.

The members of the Security Council recognized the outstanding and admirable efforts of all humanitarian, medical and United Nations workers serving in Gaza and acknowledged the extremely difficult and dangerous conditions under which they are operating, as well as the tremendous courage they continued to demonstrate in pursuing their lifesaving mission.

The members of the Security Council reiterated their deep concern over the human toll of the conflict, the catastrophic humanitarian situation, and the threat of imminent famine in Gaza and called for the immediate lifting of all barriers to the delivery of humanitarian aid at scale to the civilian population and to the unhindered distribution of such assistance. They took note of the announcement by Israel to open the Erez crossing and allow the use of the Ashdod port for aid deliveries into Gaza, but stressed that more should be done to bring the required relief given the scale of needs in Gaza. ...

The members of the Security Council called for full respect of international law, including

international humanitarian law and international human rights law. They underlined their demands for an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan respected by all parties leading to a lasting sustainable ceasefire, and for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access to address their medical and other humanitarian needs, and for the parties to comply with their obligations under international law in relation to all persons they detain, in line with resolution 2728 (2024). ... The members of the Security Council condemned all violence and hostilities against civilians, and all acts of terrorism. ...

To read the full statement see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15658.doc.htm>

UNSCR 2728, referred to above, can be read at

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

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

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

Criminal Justice Bill

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

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

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

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

Amendment Paper

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54953/documents/4653>

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

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill>

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

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

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 7 days**

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

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